

JESUS GIVES HIS DISCIPLES A NEW COMMANDMENT AND INSTITUTES THE LORD'S SUPPER

April 1st, Thursday

Maundy Thursday

Theme: Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment and institutes the Lord's Supper.

LS. OT Exodus 12.1-8, 11-14 or Jeremiah 31.31-34
Psalm 116.1-2, 12-19
Epistle 1 Cor. 11.23-29
Gosp. John 13.1-17, 34-35 or 6.35-39, 47-51

MW Ps. 56,64 Wisdom 2.1, 12-end or John Isaiah 52.1-12

EW Ps. 23,109(om.v.6-20) Exod. 24.1-11 John 13.1-35, or 6.35-51

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you..... (John 13:34)

Maundy Thursday is probably the most liturgically dramatic of Christian celebrations. There are many symbols and rites that can be incorporated in the liturgy. Many liturgies re-enact the foot-washing ceremony (John 13:4ff), many use this day for Confirmation Service, and all will observe the day to celebrate the institution of the Lord's Supper. At the end of the liturgy, there may be the 'stripping of the altar' and draping the cross with a black cloth; the liturgical colour changes from white to black – the symbol of deep mourning. It is as though a pall of gloom descends after the solemn service, especially when the service is held in the evening.

In many ways the first part of John 13 paints this gloomy picture: Jesus knew that His hour had come; he was about to depart out of this world; Judas Iscariot was going to betray Him; Jesus knew that He was going to God etc.... There is nothing joyous about the celebration of the Feast of Passover and the supper that Jesus and His disciples were sharing. The gloom seems to descend completely when verse 30 says "*and it was night*". Yet amid this gloom comes a message that ensures continuity and faithful witness: a new commandment to love one another.

In His teachings and dealings with people, Jesus related to others in love. This characteristic feature of Jesus' life and ministry is now to be continued in the life of His disciples and to become the means by which they would be identified. This was not a sentimental, emotional feeling, but a way of

relating to others that built them up; it was not a love that smothered or forced, but a love that allowed the other person to grow, to make their own decisions, and to make a creative contribution to the community. It was only through the demonstration of such a love that the disciples could become witnesses to the gospel message: "*all will know that you are my disciples...*"

This was no longer the old commandment with a list of do's and don'ts. This was a new commandment of upbuilding, of growth, development, of continuing the mission of Jesus and of bearing witness to what love could achieve. Let not Maundy Thursday become a prelude to mourning; let it be a celebration of a new commandment which is now our responsibility to ensure continuity and witness.

Prayer: O God, help us to be faithful witnesses to your love through our love for one another. Amen.

THE VICTORY OF THE CROSS WORLD AUTISM DAY

April 2nd, Friday

Good Friday

Theme: The victory of the cross.

Good Friday Liturgy

OT Exodus 12.21-33, 40-42

Psalm 88

Epistle Hebrews 10.4-24

Gosp. John 18.1—19.42 or 19.1-37

MW Ps. 143.1-11 Lam.5.15-end John 18 or Heb.4.14-5.10

EW Ps. 40 Gen.22.1-18 John 19.31-end or Matt. 27.57end

For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. (John 18:37).

The story of Good Friday and all the events that led to the cross are too well known to repeat here. The theme given for today is *Victory – the Victory of the Cross*. Therefore let us look at the story from the point of view of the theme.

The story in John 18 seems to be leading to defeat – the trial before the Jewish authorities has gone badly; Pilate seems to be inquisitive, but not sympathetic. In the midst of this situation that does not seem to hold out much hope, Jesus' affirmation of His purpose and mission turns the situation of defeat into one of fulfillment and victory. John's gospel is affirming that the cross is not a symbol of defeat and loss, but that in the cross is actually the completion of the mission of Jesus. Therefore there is this juxtaposition of the cross as a symbol of defeat also being a symbol of glory. This is the Johannine interpretation of the cross that makes the cross symbol of victory.

In the face of overwhelming odds, physical torture, agony and certain death, Jesus does not lose sight of His mission and of the values that have undergirded His life: *to bear witness to the truth*. Good Friday affirms this victory. It is not easy to remain firm in one's faith and value system when the odds go against one. It is only those who have lost all sense of the self and in absolute submission stand for the truth who can claim victory through suffering and death.

Let Good Friday challenge us to remain firm in our faith regardless of the odds against us. Our seemingly difficult and hopeless situation will turn to victory!

Prayer: Give us the strength and courage, O God, to remain firm in our convictions and by so doing to turn human defeat into your victory. Amen.

PUTTING ON CHRIST

April 3rd, Saturday

Easter Eve

MW Ps. 30,142 Hosea 6.1-6 Romans 6.1-11

EW Ps. 116 Exod.12.40-end John 2.13-22

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his (Rom. 6:5).

When Paul wrote to the Romans, he had to explain what he understood with regard to baptism. In Romans 6, Paul closely associates baptism with freedom from sin (verses 1-4): baptism means being buried with Christ and then rising to newness of life; you are dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus (verse 11). Baptism, therefore, was much more than a symbol; it was an active participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. This early interpretation/understanding of baptism is also found in the Church of the first few centuries when Holy Saturday was the time for the baptism of new converts after the Lenten Fast; converts had to express their faith in Christ and their commitment to Christ's service. The commitment made at the time of baptism was expressed as dying and rising with Christ. This association with baptism was continued, and is still observed on Holy Saturday, as the time for the renewal of baptismal vows. This observance serves as a reminder that baptism is a commitment to Christ and to the service of Christ. This *'active remembering'* identifies us with Christ, so Christ's death and resurrection becomes our experience as well.

This view of completely identifying with Christ is both threatening and challenging. We are called to die completely (as the Greek words emphasize) to anything that separates us from Christ. There are no half or partial measures here; it is either all or nothing. This is the threatening aspect. Can we completely die to those things which are so much a part of our life, which identify us and give us our personality?

If this is the threatening aspect of baptism, it is equally the challenge. As we emerge from the waters of baptism, we share in Christ's resurrection: *newness of life*. Holy Saturday reminds us that unless we die with Christ, we cannot share in His resurrection. Let us examine again our baptismal vows and let us commit ourselves to the challenge of sharing in Christ's resurrection.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to share in your death and resurrection and that through them, we may participate with you in newness of life. Amen.

**THE LORD IS RISEN, HE IS RISEN INDEED.
ALLELUIA!**

April 4th, Sunday

Easter Day

Theme: The Lord is risen, he is risen indeed. Alleluia!

M/EW	Psalm 118	L.S.	OT	Exodus 15.1-2, 19-21
	OT	Ex. 15.1-2, 19-21	Psalm	118.1-2, 15-18, 22-23
	NT	Colossians 3.1-4	Epistle.	Colossians 3.1-4
	and/or	John 20.1-18 or	Gosp.	John 20.1-18 or
	(evening)	Luke 24.13-35		20.1-10 or
				(evening) Luke 24.13-35

Jesus came and stood among them (His disciples) and said to them, “Peace be with you” (John 20:19).

The events of Holy Week, and especially the events from Maundy Thursday onward, had left the disciples lonely and afraid; they had shut themselves in a room. Jesus entered that closed room with a message of peace. The resurrection is a breaking out of closedness (the tomb), and an empowering of the disciples with peace.

In a closed room there is fear. The claustrophobic closedness becomes overwhelming and fear seems to consume one. There seems to be no way out; one is paralyzed with fear. The resurrection celebrates the breaking out from this fear. Death has done its worst, but on the other side of death, there is nothing to fear. We often entrap ourselves with our fears; the claustrophobia is suffocating; the tomb is not just a place for the dead, it becomes our own real experience of being trapped by our fears. Jesus' resurrection brings us a message of hope and liberation – fears need no longer entrap us; we can break free.

If the resurrection sets us free, it equally empowers us with peace to face future situations. When Jesus gave His disciples Peace, he did so by showing them his hands and his side – the marks of suffering. The later history of the Church tells us that the disciples went through severe persecution and most died painful deaths under extreme circumstances. Had they not been empowered with Peace in the context of suffering, the history of the Church would certainly have been different.

Celebrate the resurrection – break free of your fears; be empowered with peace!

Prayer: May this day, O God, be a time of breaking free from our fears and of being empowered with your peace for mission in the world. Amen.

GOD WORKING IN CHRIST

April 5th, Monday

Charles Freer Andrews (Ev.) 1940

MW	Ps. 89.19-52	Exod.15.1-18	Eph.1.15-end
EW	Ps. 90	Deut.16.1-8	Mark 16.1-8

...according to the working of God's great might which God accomplished in Christ when God raised Christ from the dead...(Eph. 1:19-20).

The Greek text, and the English translation of the Revised Standard Version, has one long sentence from verse 15 to the end of the chapter, verse 23. In any language, long sentences become complicated both in construction and in meaning. This is a characteristic feature of the Epistle to the Ephesians. There are long, complicated sentences and by the end of the sentence, one is left wondering about the subject! In verse 17, God is the subject of the sentence because God is the initiator of all the action that is thereafter described. One of those actions is that God raised Christ from the dead and exalted Christ by seating Christ at God's right hand in heaven, and by placing everything under the control and authority of Christ. Finally, all things are placed under Christ's feet; Christ becomes the head of all things, including the Church; Christ becomes the fullness that fills all in all. The sentence started with God as the subject, but by the end, the focus of attention is Christ. Scholars have rightly pointed out that Ephesians is Christo-centric. Perhaps we should recognize that it is not just Ephesians which is Christo-centric, but that God also becomes Christo-centric! All that God does, including raising Christ from the dead, is centered on Christ.

The Christo-centricism of Ephesians is the basis of the Church's unity – the Church as the body of Christ. Ephesians was written at the time when the Church was in the process of formulating the various doctrines of Christ. Therefore one can understand the Christological emphasis which almost places Christ on the level of God. It is as though there is a re-discovery of the nature and on-going mission of Christ. The season of the resurrection (Easter) helps us to think again about the nature of Christ, the relationship between God, Christ and the Church, and therefore the on-going relationship between us and Christ. Let the message of the centrality of Christ in Ephesians continue with us in and beyond the Easter season.

Prayer: We thank you, O God, for your mighty works in Christ whose fullness fills all in all. Amen.

THE GIFT OF GOD

April 6th, Tuesday

MW	Ps. 92	Song of Sol.2.8-end	Eph.2.1-10
EW	Ps. 91	Isaiah 12	Luke 24.1-12

By grace you have been saved through faith; ... it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8)

It was not easy to understand God's act of salvation in terms of grace – a gift from God. The Jewish understanding was that one had always to work for salvation; there was a list of do's and don'ts which had to be observed. Therefore salvation was something that one earned; it was not a gift. Other religions also held that salvation had to be earned. It was Paul who interpreted God's act of salvation as a gift – something which could not be earned but only received as an act of grace from the giver. This passage in Ephesians traces the state of utter depravity and helplessness of the human being and therefore the extent of God's grace. In understanding how this grace is imparted as a gift, there is once again an emphasis on Christo-centricism: together with Christ, in Christ, God's grace towards us in Christ Jesus, created in Christ Jesus etc... Christ becomes the means by which God's grace becomes efficacious.

Sometimes we receive gifts that take our breath away, especially when we receive expensive gifts. Receiving a gift often humbles us when we realize the love with which it is given, the gratitude that the gift expresses. But here, God's gift of grace is an act of pure giving. It is not given to reciprocate love, or to express gratitude; grace is given through Christ to those who do not deserve it. This gift of God is not to give us a pat on the back, but qualifies us to be made alive with Christ and to sit with Christ in heavenly places. And it is ours for the taking! Let us not reject the gift of God's grace.

Prayer: We thank you, O God, for your gift of grace through your Son. Help us to receive it and live up to its expectations. Amen.

LIVING AMIDST DIFFERENCES

April 7th, Wednesday

MW	Ps. 93,95	1 Kings 17.8-end	Rom.14.1-9
EW	Ps. 94	Isaiah 25.1-9	Luke 24.36-end

..... whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's (Rom. 14: 8).

Paul is addressing one of the major issues in the early Church – the relationship between people of different backgrounds. Sometimes it is a Jew-Gentile relationship, sometimes it is the weak-strong; here it is the vegetarian-non-vegetarian relationship. Some of these issues seem petty to us today. But in the first century when Paul was writing, these were very important issues when the new community was coming into existence and needed to have their own rules and regulations. The only way to find answers to these differences is to be mindful of the other person because in the final analysis, everything belongs to the Lord.

In a multi-religious, multi-cultural context like ours, living amidst differences is second nature to us, but also becomes an issue of dispute. We are quite accustomed to holidays and loud speakers during the festivities of other religions just as they are used to our celebrations. Both, they and we, look forward to these occasions, holidays, special food, cakes and sweets preparation etc... These are moments of community building. On the other hand these celebrations are often a matter of irritation leading to communal problems. If we can see the wider picture of all of us being human beings and of all of us respecting each other, the world would be a garden like Eden. Let us do our best to break down barriers of separation. Let us realize that in the ultimate analysis it is not our differences that will matter, but whether we belong to the Lord.

Prayer: Thank you, O Lord, for differences among us; may we learn to use these creatively and to build up community. Amen.

WALKING IN LIGHT

April 8th, Thursday

MW	Ps. 96	Isaiah 26.1-19	Eph.5.1-14
EW	Ps. 97	2 Kings 4.8-37	John 21.1-14

..... now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of the light..... (Eph. 5:8).

The Epistle to the Ephesians uses an old literary formula of contrasting a list of vices with a list of virtues. Both the negatives and positives in the formula are put in the imperative: “**do not/must not/let not**” as contrasted to “**do/put on/let**”. In the passage from Ephesians, we find the same antithesis being used – **not...but instead**. As the writer comes to the end of the epistle, the emphasis shifts from doctrine and Christology to practical living and relationships – from Christian theology to Christian ethics. There are interesting inclusions in the list of vices apart from what we would normally expect to be included: *silly talk, levity, empty words, unfruitful works of darkness*. What would we do without a little gossip, without a little fun, without having a laugh at someone else, without a little adjustment here and there for our benefit? Who would have thought that these everyday, “normal” things would find their way into a list of vices? Contrast these “vices” with *thanksgiving, walking in the light, and exposing the works of darkness*.

The recipients of this letter seem to be all too human. We can see ourselves and our attitudes being reflected in the lists of vices and virtues. Perhaps the imperatives to *put off/do not/must not* are easier said than done because these are the qualities that make up our daily living. Would life become boring and insipid if there were to be only *thanksgiving* and *exposing the works of darkness*? The writer surely did not intend us to live colourless lives of boredom and austerity. But the writer surely did intend for us to approach life differently from what we did before. When we become *children of the light* of perspective must change, our attitudes and thinking must be different; we become Christo-centric as Christ is the Light.

Prayer: Jesus, let your light so shine in us that we may be your witnesses and bring glory to God in Heaven. Amen.

BUILT UP IN CHRIST

April 9th, Friday

Martyrs of Thana 1321

MW	Ps. 98,99	Isaiah 51.1-8	Col.2.1-12
EW	Ps. 100,101	Jer.31.7-14	John 21.15-end

.....live in Christ, rooted and built up in Christ and established in the faith..... (Col. 2:6-7).

We are still in the week of remembering the resurrection and being challenged by its implications. The writer talks of Christ as “*God’s mystery in whom are hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge*”, “*in Him (Christ) the fullness of God dwells*”. The writer is at pains to show that the death and resurrection of Christ bring about a complete change. The list of vices and virtues is again resorted to with contrasting features. On the one hand: empty deceit, human tradition, elemental spirits of the universe; on the other hand: fullness of the deity, buried with Christ in baptism, raised with Him through faith. The letter reflects a problem of false teachings at Colossae which was causing people to be detracted from the truth – teachings that were based on speculations and improper reasoning. The writer appeals to the readers to remain rooted in Christ and not worry about the detractions all around them.

Colossians raises for us the questions of our own response to Christ and the quality of our faith in Christ. There are often times when our faith turns into nothing more than superstition – *empty deceit, human tradition, and elemental spirits of the universe*. Often there are unnecessary theories and hypotheses that seek to answer unasked questions – *making us a prey of philosophy and deceit*. When we do not have a solid basis and understanding of our faith, it becomes easy for people to lead us astray, to put all kinds of thoughts into our heads which have no basis at all. This is the sort of religion that Marx referred to as an opium. Let our faith have a firm basis, rooted and built up in Christ.

Prayer : O God, may we look to you and you alone as the basis of our faith. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF GOD'S LOVE

April 10th, Saturday

MW	Ps. 102	Job 14.7-15	Rom.8.31-end
EW	Ps. 103	Nehemiah 9.9-15	Mark 16.9-end

.... nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:39).

The Epistle to the Romans is often referred to as Paul's theological treatise. It is not a compendium of theology and doctrine, but it does contain a very substantial treatment of some basic theological concepts. The first eight chapters treat various theological understandings; chapter 8 deals with being free from death. Paul is not talking of physical death which must come to all, sooner or later. Paul is talking of death in terms of complete separation from God – a separation in this life and that continues after physical death. This kind of separation is too terrifying to even contemplate. But the assurance that the Apostle gives is *"if God is for us, then who is against us?"* and he ends the chapter on a triumphant note of assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

We often read this portion of scripture in times of trouble or at funerals: – a message of reassurance that we need to calm ourselves. When we put the passage into the context of the week following Easter, it serves as a reminder that Christ's death and resurrection is an expression of God's love – love that reaches out to us regardless of where we are, how we are, and who we are. The passage should serve as a constant reminder of God's love for us and that there is no situation that can separate us from that love. Alleluia.

Prayer: Thank you, O God, for your love that surrounds us at all times. Amen.

JOY AND PEACE, POWER AND NEW LIFE ARE GIVEN THROUGH THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

April 11th, Sunday after Easter

Theme: Joy and peace, power and new life are given through the Resurrection of Christ.

M/EW	Psalm 114	L.S. (1st R.)	Acts 5.12-16
	1st R. Acts 5.12-16	Psalm 118.19-26	
	2nd R. Rev. 1.9-20	2nd R. Rev. 1.9-20	
	and/or John 20.19-31	Gosp. John 20.19-31	

As the Father has sent me, even so I send you (John 20:21).

The fear of the disciples turned to joy when they recognized the resurrected Jesus standing in their midst. It was the same Jesus whom they knew and whom they had seen dying; the marks on His body proved that to them. The assurance of His peace was further proof that they were not seeing a ghost or some sort of apparition. But what happens next? Where do they go from here? What does the future hold? John's gospel understands the period after the resurrection as the time of the on-going mission of Jesus. The disciples are now to go out with the same mission with which Jesus was entrusted by the Father. There is a continuity between Jesus and the disciples, and by association between Jesus and us as we continue His mission in our lives and through the Church.

The empowerment for mission comes from Jesus Himself – He sent them out and breathed on them the Holy Spirit. This theme will continue through the week by looking at various areas in which mission takes place. Today, the readings direct our thoughts to mission within the group. The disciples have been empowered, but doubts within the group have still to be cleared. Only when this happens can there be a full acknowledgement of Jesus as *"my Lord and my God"*. A personal experience of Jesus as Lord must be the first step in continuing the mission of Jesus. This personal experience of the resurrected Christ is our empowerment to reach out to others who have not seen and yet come to believe.

Prayer: O God, may we be empowered by you to continue the mission of your Son among those to whom you send us. Amen.

MISSION IN THE FACE OF PERSECUTION

April 12th, Monday

Adoniran Judson of Burma (Ev.) 1850;
Joseph Damien (Ev.) 1889

MW	Ps. 105.1-22	Num.9.15-10.12	1 Peter 1.1-12
EW	Ps. 105.23-end	Num. 10.29-11.15	1 Peter 1.13-end

...now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith...is tested by fire (1 Pet. 1: 6 & 7).

The Epistle of 1 Peter seems to have one major purpose – to provide encouragement in the face of imminent persecution. The letter could come from either the end of the life-time of Peter (A.D. 60-65) when there was State persecution under the Emperor Nero, or it could come from the early part of the 2nd century (110-115) when there was severe persecution under the Emperor Trajan. In either case, persecution is the main concern: it is mentioned four times in this brief writing. The writer gives encouragement with the promise of an early return of Christ which kept hope and faithfulness alive.

Christ is understood as the Suffering Servant from the prophetic tradition: brought out in verses 10 and 11 – “*the prophets who predicted the sufferings of Christ and subsequent glory*”. The implication of this is that because Christ suffered, His disciples and followers must also suffer. But this suffering leads to glory, just as the resurrection followed the cross.

Persecution of Christians is not a new subject; it is something that has always been a part of the Christian heritage. The very values and behaviour that characterize a Christian – values that go against the grain of normal human patterns (love and forgive instead of hating; pray for enemies instead of seeking revenge, etc...) inevitably lead to persecution. 1 Peter sees the mission of Christ's followers taking place in such a context and the exhortation is to remain faithful in the face of suffering. How many of us can exhibit this Christ-like, Christian, quality?

Prayer: O Lord, give us the strength and courage to remain faithful even when it means that we must suffer. Amen.

THE NATURE OF MISSION

April 13th, Tuesday

MW	Ps. 106.1-23	Num. 11.16-34	1 Peter 2.1-10
EW	Ps. 106.24-end	Numbers 12	1 Peter 2.11-end

..... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people (1 Pet. 2:9).

The passage talks of the qualities and nature of Christ's followers and therefore of the nature of their mission. All evil intentions must be put away; Christ's followers are the new people of God with new characteristics which must also be the characteristics of their mission. The terms that describe the people of God and their mission all come from the Jewish scriptures: chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation etc... and their mission is to “*declare the wonderful deeds*” of God. The passage serves as an exhortation to “*aliens and exiles*” (verse 11) to see to it that they “*maintain good conduct among the Gentiles*”. This brings out the nature of the mission of Christ's followers. Like the people of Israel, Christians understand themselves as aliens and exiles, but they are not thereby excused from noble conduct which is their witness to others, and therefore their mission; Christian behaviour must be such as to exhibit the excellence of the Christian way.

In this day and age, when anger, frustration, blatant injustice and corruption seem to characterize human behaviour, Christians are faced with the challenge of continuing to maintain good conduct. This raises a host of questions in terms of our everyday living: What happens to me? Why should I suffer while others prosper? Is it worthwhile? What will be my reward? etc... There are no easy answers to these difficult questions and perhaps we will never have answers this side of eternity. The only thing that the scriptures assure us of is that faithfulness will result in glory. Let us take heart from that assurance.

Prayer: Help us, O Lord, to remain faithful to you and your mission even in the face of hardships and suffering. Amen.

THE FAMILY AS A MISSION FIELD

April 14th, Wednesday

Justin Martyr (Th., Mar.) c. 165

MW Ps. 107.1-22 Num. 13.1-3,17-end 1 Peter 3.1-12
EW Ps. 107.23-end Num. 14.1-25 1 Peter 3.13-4.6

All of you have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart and a humble mind (1 Pet. 3:8).

The family is not usually thought of as an area for mission. Yet in the early centuries, family relationships were of great concern since many were 'mixed marriages' – one party being a Christian and the other coming from another religious background. Thus there was need for special care in their manner of life. The wife may be an instrument by which the husband may be influenced; the same instruction is equally applicable to the husband who is asked to be considerate and honour his wife. There has to be mutual recognition of the responsibilities and limitations of each of the partners. Finally in Christian unity there is no room for quarrels, schisms, retaliations, and divisions.

There are other New Testament passages (Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, the Pastorals etc...) that emphasize family/household relationships. This was an area of great concern for if the family was not well managed, disciplined, and if there was a lack of love among the members, then such a family, and its individual members, could not be effective witnesses to the love of God. The other passages talk of relationships between husbands and wives, between parents and children, and between householders and their domestic helpers. The Church today caters to the family through Sunday Schools, Fellowship Groups, Youth Groups etc... All of these are meant to establish the family as a witnessing Christian unit. So the family is itself a mission field from which mission spreads to others. Let us pay attention to the witness of our families.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for our families. May our families always be units witnessing to your love. Amen.

SUFFERING AS A MEANS OF MISSION AND WITNESS

April 15th, Thursday

MW Ps. 108.1-6,109(om.v.6-20) Num.14.26-end 1 Peter 4.7-end
EW Ps. 110(om.v.6),111 Num.16.1-19 1 Peter 5

Rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings.... (1 Pet. 4:13).

There is always a feeling in the New Testament of something just about to happen. The Christian always lives on the edge of the end. The qualities and characteristics of the Christian life are described and the readers are exhorted to exhibit them in their daily living – sanity, sobriety, prayerfulness, love and hospitality. Preaching and ministering – *whoever speaks... whoever renders service* – are part of the Christian mission. Such a mission will inevitably result in persecution, and therefore there is a section to encourage believers when trouble comes. It shows that even suffering becomes a means for Christian mission and witness and ends in glory.

Persecution and suffering as a means of mission and witness could lead us to a position of pacifism and fatalism – an acceptance of suffering as we cannot do anything else. Nowhere in the New Testament is such thinking supported. The Christian is always encouraged to stand for the truth, justice, kingdom values; this stand may lead to suffering since it goes against the normally accepted values of the world. But this does not mean that we go out and ask to be persecuted! In other words, persecution and suffering should not be romanticized but taken seriously and creatively used. May Christ's life which led to His suffering, be our model as we face situations of suffering and persecution.

Prayer: Thank you, O Lord, for the privilege of sharing in your sufferings; may we be faithful just as you were found faithful. Amen.

THE MISSION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

April 16th, Friday

MW	Ps. 112	Num. 16.20-40	Mark 1.1-13
EW	Ps. 113,114	Num. 16.41-17end	Mark 1.14-34

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4).

The first portrait in Mark's gospel is of John the Baptist. He is carrying out a mission within the context of the religious experience of Judaism – a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. There are two foci to John's mission –

1. to call for baptism and forgiveness of sin; and
2. to introduce Jesus as the Messiah.

John is a man who comes from the masses and who has mass appeal. When Jesus comes to John, He identifies with the masses. He is one among all the other who come to John for baptism. Yet this is what makes Jesus stand out and John recognizes this which serves as an introduction to Jesus. John plays a subservient, secondary role and he is willing to accept the role.

Mission may sometimes require us to take a back seat. The history of John the Baptist, as we know it from the gospel narratives, shows that right from his mother's womb, John took a back seat; he was always presented as a pointer to Jesus and not as a person in his own right. Such a mission involves the complete negation of oneself; not at all an easy task. Yet we must acknowledge that this is what we are called to do on many occasions – someone else takes the credit, someone else gets the praise. It takes courage to take a back seat and give someone else the importance, yet this is what the life and witness of John the Baptist teaches us and challenges us.

Prayer: O God, thank you for the faithful witness of John the Baptist. May your spirit which led him, be our guide today. Amen.

JESUS BEGINS HIS MISSION

April 17th, Saturday

MW	Ps. 116,117	Num. 20.1-21	Mark 1.35-2.12
EW	Ps. 115	Num. 20.22-21.9	Mark 2.13-end

Everyone is searching for you (Mark 1:37).

The mission of Jesus begins with people searching for Him – He is a people's messiah. There is a need to withdraw for quietness and reflection, but it is also necessary to re-enter the sphere of human concerns and needs. What follows is the healing of a leper and the healing of a paralytic – both scenes of intense involvement with people's issues. The close connection between disease and religious experience is clearly brought out in this passage from Mark's gospel. Leprosy, apart from being a medical condition that needed attention, was also regarded as a social problem – the leper was unclean and could not be part of society. The paralytic was again someone outside of normal society as he was dependent on others. The beginning of Jesus' ministry is among such people.

In curing the leper, Jesus touched him, thus taking upon Himself the socially and religiously unclean condition that was associated with leprosy. Jesus becomes one of those outside of society. In curing the paralytic, Jesus forgave his sin thus exercising a divine prerogative. In both cases, Jesus restores the persons to a full participatory role in society. He takes the outcast person, the one on the margin, and makes the person the centre of the social circle. Personal physical wholeness becomes as important as social restoration. In exercising our own mission, we need to keep in mind this comprehensive idea of mission to, and for, the whole person. Jesus brought this perspective to His mission; can we bring it to ours?

Prayer: Help us, O God, to always put people at the centre of our witness and mission. Amen.

WITNESSES TO CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

April 18th, Sunday

2nd Sunday after Easter

Theme: Witnesses to Christ's Resurrection.

M/EW	Psalm	126 L.S.	(1st R.)	Acts 3.11-18
	1st R.	Acts 3.11-18	Psalm	126
	NT	1Cor. 15.1-11	Epistle.	1 Cor. 15.1-11
	and/or	John 21.1-14	Gosp.	John 21.1-14

Notice of festival of Mark the Evangelist on 25 April

**Jesus revealed Himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias
..... (John 21:1).**

The readings today focus on the theme of the witnesses to Christ's resurrection. The Resurrection was an event that was totally extraordinary; there was constant need to 'prove' it and so the legal term of being a "witness" was used so that the issue was placed beyond doubt. In John 21, the disciples are the witnesses; Corinthians 15, a whole list of witnesses is given; in Acts 3, the healing of a lame man stands as the witness of the power of the resurrection. In all the scenes of witness to the resurrection, the persons involved are empowered for mission: from catching fish to the missionary activity of proclaiming God's love; from timidity and fear to bold proclamation of God's salvation through Jesus.

When Jesus is 'revealed' after the resurrection it is in the context of everyday activities. People were going about their work and in that process, they came face to face with the resurrected Jesus. An extraordinary event being understood, and experienced, in terms of daily life. The experience of meeting the resurrected Christ does not remove us from the world, but helps us to see our mission more clearly – a mission to, and among, people; a proclamation God's love for all people. The disciples experienced this empowerment, saints through the ages have experienced it, and we too experience it as we express it through continuing Christ's mission in the world.

Prayer: Lord, empower us for mission through the experience of being a witness to your resurrection. Amen.

MISSION: PEOPLE ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN RESTRICTIONS

April 19th, Monday

MW	Ps. 118	Num. 21.10-31	Mark 3.1-19
EW	Ps. 119.1-24	Num.21.31-22.14	Mark 3.20-end

..... " which is lawful on the sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?.... (Mark 3:4)

The setting of this scene is the synagogue and the debate on Sabbath rules and regulations. The conservative party in Judaism gave great importance to the observance of rules and regulations, especially the laws pertaining to the Sabbath. There were long lists of what one could do, and could not do, on the Sabbath and why certain things were considered acceptable and certain others were not acceptable. At the end of chapter 2, the discussion on Sabbath observance begins, and this is carried forward into chapter 3. Healing on the Sabbath would have been considered work as energy was expended. However, Jesus placed the issue in a different perspective: *whether to do good or harm, to save life or to kill*. Any of these activities was considered divine prerogative as only God could do these things on the Sabbath. By asking the question, Jesus was claiming divine prerogative thus leading to the charge of blasphemy resulting in the death penalty.

The story raises several interesting issues: crippling Sabbath restrictions, legal requirements that restrict life-giving activity, denial of productive opportunities etc... It would almost seem like a case for the Human Rights Commission! The story is beautifully constructed in that it has a internal cohesiveness that brings out a strong message. When the man's withered hand is healed, the crippling restriction of the Sabbath regulations are broken! When life-giving activity is chosen, legal requirements are over-ruled! When productive opportunities are restored in healing the man's hand, all social restrictions and inhibitions count for nothing. Mission is to place the emphasis where it really belongs and not to get bogged down with restrictions.

Prayer: Lord, help us to get our priorities right. Amen.

MISSION: TO CARRY ON REGARDLESS!

April 20th, Tuesday

MW Ps. 119.73-96 Num. 22.15-35 Mark 4.1-20
EW Ps. 119.97-120 Num. 22.36-23.12 Mark 4.21-end

A sower went out to sow...and the yield was thirtyfold, sixtyfold and a hundredfold (Mark 4:3 & 8).

The parable of the sower is well known and well loved. It is the first of the parables to be allegorically interpreted – i.e. each element in the story has a corresponding reality. Every farmer knows that some of the seeds that are scattered will fall on unproductive ground so to expect a hundredfold harvest would have caught the listeners' attention – what kind of seed would have brought such a harvest? But the elements of the parable are used to describe peoples' responses to the Word that is preached to them – responses that illustrate a wide range from rejection, partial acceptance, and full acceptance.

All through the history of the Church, the parable of the sower has been used to illustrate the failure or success of missionary activity. Not every mission has brought forth hundredfold. Many mission activities have had to be shut down as their relevance has passed. Many of our schools, colleges, hostels, hospitals etc... have had their day and we are no longer able to sustain them. Perhaps in their time they were instruments of proclaiming God's love to all, but now circumstances have changed. Let this parable be to us as an encouragement to carry on in mission and not to allow ourselves to be dissuaded by the obstinate refusal of so many to listen and circumstances that have changed. In other words, mission must go on, and mission will succeed, in spite of the opposition to it.

Prayer: Lord, give us courage and patience to continue in your mission even when the results are not encouraging. Amen.

MISSION: RESTORING THE DEMONIC

April 21st, Wednesday Anselm of Canterbury (Bp., Th.) 1109

MW Ps. 119.121-144 Num. 23.13-37 Mark 5.1-20
EW Ps. 119.145-160 Num.23.38-24.19 Mark 5.21-end

The people in the city and in the country came to see what had happened...they saw the demonic sitting with Jesus and in his right mind. (Mark 5:14 & 15)

The passage from Mark is the story of a deranged man wandering among the tombs which illustrates the meaninglessness of his world. The man runs to Jesus perhaps realizing with that rare flash of insight that Jesus was his last hope, yet uncertain of himself as he cries "*what have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?*" The story goes on to paint a picture of a man who is torn apart by the forces that destabilize him to the extent that the man can only be recognized as being controlled by forces of evil – "*legion*". Jesus heals the man by the peace and serenity that emanate from Him. Evil is removed for there is no place for it in the presence of Jesus; it is replaced by mission: "*go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you...*"

At some point of time in our lives, all of us come face to face with the demonic – the forces that destabilize us both mentally and physically to the extent that we are not recognizable. A person who is known for their easy, jovial ways may suddenly become an irritable and unpredictable person. Someone on whom we have learnt to rely may suddenly become so undependable that we barely recognize them. Mission then becomes the need to bring peace and love into the person's life – to talk, to listen, to support, to empathize with; these restore and heal the person. Evil is driven out and the person can indeed witness to how much the Lord has done. Mission to restore the demonic by removing all that inhibits the fullness of life to which we are called; we can be the instruments of that mission.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to love others even when they seem to be difficult and rude knowing that your love is reaching out to them through us. Amen.

MISSION : AT HOME AND ABROAD EARTH DAY

April 22nd, Thursday

MW	Ps. 119.161-176	Num. 25.1-13	Mark 6.1-13
EW	Ps. 121,122	Num. 27.12-end	Mark 6.14-29

He could do no mighty work there (Nazareth)...He marveled because of their unbelief.

He called to Him the twelve and sent them out two by two (Mark 6:5-6, 7).

In the earlier passages from Mark, we found that Jesus was either rejected or questioned by the religious authorities; in the first part of today's reading, in spite of the works that He has performed and His words of wisdom, the ordinary people of His home-town reject Him. Familiarity led them to think that they knew Him too well, so they are closed to recognizing who He really is. The mission at home is not a success. It is often the case that it is easy to accept the divinity of Jesus, but when the focus shifts to His 'ordinariness', there is difficulty in accepting Him – we reject the humanity that He shared with us. Our faith tells us that it is God whom we see in the face of Jesus, it is God whom we hear in the words of Jesus – not God in God's transcendence, but God as revealed in the human. If we bypass Jesus' humanity – His ordinariness – then we cannot see the God whom He reveals.

In the second part of the reading, Mark deals with the mission of the Twelve – the going out to other parts of the world. They are to take no bread, no bag for carrying supplies, no money, no spare clothes. All they have and all they need is their faith in the one who is sending them out. Mark captures the essence of the mission which Jesus shared with the Twelve – a mission that is absolutely open and vulnerable. Mission can only be successful if the missionary is totally reliant on the resources of the one who sends them into the mission field. The two models of mission are placed before us; which one do we choose?

We should also include that mission is not just to people, mission is also to nature. Today is celebrated as EARTH day with an emphasis on the resources that the earth provides for our nourishment and sustenance. Scientists tell us that we have exploited the earth's natural resources and introduced

pollutants to the extent that our own existence is threatened. Let us include the care and concern for the environment as part of our mission.

Prayer: Thank you, O God, for mission at home and abroad for we are mindful of your presence with us. May we also be concerned with the natural resources that you have given to us; may we be good stewards of your creation. Amen.

MISSION: THE DISCIPLES RETURN AND FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

April 23rd, Friday

MW	Ps. 123,124,125	Num. 32.1-15	Mark 6.30-44
EW	Ps. 126,127,128	Num. 32.16-33	Mark 6.45-end

The Apostles returned and told Him all that they had done and taught. Give them something to eat. (Mark 6:30, 37)

The disciples return from the mission that they had sent on. Since they had been *sent* then they are referred to as *apostles* – the one who has been sent with a mission. Later, the word ‘apostle’ becomes the technical name for an office in the Church so that it can refer only to the Twelve. The Apostles are held accountable for their work and must make a report. It is necessary for them to analyze and assess their work; it is a teaching session – a time to build up their understanding of something that is absolutely central to their understanding of mission. This leads directly to the feeding of the five thousand, so that the two parts of our reading (Mark 6:30-34 and 6:35-44) must have a common link in holding them together in this sequence, we must understand this important point that Mark is making. The disciples have just returned from a mission that has individual implications; they must now learn that mission has its social dimensions and responsibilities. Resources within the community must be used for community benefit.

The Greek text indicates that Jesus did not just “give” the broken bread to His disciples to distribute, but that He “continued to give” to His disciples. They have to keep coming back to Him each time to receive from Him again and again what is needed to feed the people. The lesson for us is that we do have the resources – however inadequate – to carry out God’s mission if only we consecrate them by offering them to Christ.

We must not only give an account of what has been accomplished in mission, we must also be accountable for the gifts in the community that we dedicate to God’s mission.

Prayer: O Lord, may we always be accountable to you for the gifts that you give us for use in the community. Amen.

MISSION : UNDERSTANDING TRADITION

April 24th, Saturday

MW	Ps. 129,130	Deut. 1.3-4&4.1-14	Mark 7.1-23
EW	Ps. 131,133,134	Deut. 4.15-31	Mark 7.24-end

Why do Your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders....? (Mark 7:5)

The passage highlights the essential difference between the religious attitude which seems to have been prevalent among many of the Jewish sects, especially those who insisted on observing the traditions handed down to them whether they understood those traditions or not. Jesus’ reply indicates that human traditions must be assessed according to how well they give expression to the commandments of God. When this basic principle is lost sight of, then foundational principles simply dissolve into archaic traditions that are ritually observed, but really have no relevance/significance. Mark places the onus where it should be: it is from within, from the human heart, that tradition must be practiced and not in external observances. This equally applies to what does and what does not defile a person. It is not the external observances that lead to defilement, but that which comes out from within a person.

We know how hard it is to change our ways of behaving, especially ways in which we have been trained since childhood, and more especially when practices have been inculcated as having been commanded by God. Clearly it matters how we behave and what shapes our behaviour. It is obvious that we are conditioned in many ways by our circumstances. Let us put these into a correct perspective in the observance of tradition. Let us learn the lesson that tradition is a powerful means of mission when it is an instrument not of external ostentation, but when it proceeds from an inner humility for protecting life, promoting dignity and when it contributes to personal and community growth.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for the traditions that we have inherited and the richness that they bring to life. May we use them for your glory. Amen.

THANKSGIVING FOR THE MINISTRY OF MARK

April 25th, Sunday

3rd Sunday after Easter

Theme: Thanksgiving for the ministry of Mark and for the Gospel which he wrote.

M/EW	Psalm	96	L.S.	1st R.	Proverbs 15.28-33
	OT.	Proverbs 15.28-33		Psalm	17.6-9, 15
	NT	1 Peter 5.5-14		Epistle	1 Peter 5.5-14
	and/or	Luke 12.4-12		Gosp.	Luke 12.4-1

Notice of festival of Joseph the Carpenter on 1 May

....do not fear those who kill the body..... (Luke 12:4).

It is interesting that the Gospel lectionary readings for the past few days have been from Mark's Gospel during the month when we celebrate the Feast of Mark the Evangelist.

The tradition of the Church has it that John Mark was closely associated with Jesus and the disciples. He was a nephew of Peter and lived in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). It may have been that the Last Supper was celebrated in the upper room of John Mark's house. Mark's gospel refers to a young man who witnessed the scene in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:51-52) and tradition holds that this is a reference to Mark. Later the Pauline mission includes John Mark (Acts 12:25, 13:5), however he left the group before the end of the missionary journey (Acts 13:13) which marked the fall-out between Paul and John Mark, so that at a later time when he wanted to join Paul again, Paul refused to take him (Acts 15:37-40). The later tradition associates John Mark with his uncle Peter. The Gospel of Mark is traditionally held to be the memoirs of Peter written down by John Mark in Rome. After the death of Peter, Mark seems to again have been associated with the Pauline mission (II Timothy 4:11). The later tradition of the Church has it that Mark went to Alexandria – the University City of Egypt – as a missionary. In the time of persecution, Mark was asked to renounce his faith, and when he did not do so he was chained to horses and dragged through the streets of Alexandria, then thrown into prison. The next day, and the day after that, he was again dragged through the streets of Alexandria. When he died, he was buried in Alexandria; several centuries later his body was exhumed and buried in Venice where a Cathedral to his name was erected.

Mark certainly epitomizes the passage from Luke that there are those who

can kill the body by the most cruel and painful means yet they are not to be feared as they cannot touch the spirit. The story of John Mark challenges us to be faithful to our Lord even through the most extreme suffering and painful death.

Prayer: O God, thank you for the martyrs of our faith that leave us with shining examples of faithfulness to you. May we learn from their lives that we bear witness to you through suffering. Amen.

NO SIGN AND YET ALL THE NEEDED SIGNS

April 26th, Monday

Imadud-Din (Conv., Ev.) bap.1866

MW Ps. 136(om.v.17-22) Deut. 4.32-43 Mark 8.1-21
EW Ps. 137(om.v.7-9),138 Deut. 4.44-47&5.1-15 Mark 8.22-9.1

Truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation..... Do you not yet understand? (Mark 8:12, 21).

The second Markan feeding miracle-story demonstrates Jesus' compassion for the crowd. Scholars point out that there are a number of indications in the story – technical details – which make it clear that the crowd consists of Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans, Galileans etc.... ; they came from a great distance and had been with Jesus for three days. Food was scarce, but Jesus takes the initiative again and meets human need. This is the second time that this has happened, so the demand of the Pharisees for a sign becomes difficult to understand, and even more difficult to understand is the discussion among the disciples concerning bread. In response to the Pharisees' demand, Jesus "*sighed deeply*"; in response to the discussion among the disciples, Jesus shows a tinge of anger, "*do you not yet understand?*" One can almost hear Jesus say, "how much more do you want me to do before you can understand?" The implication is that what had been done was sufficient to bring about a proper understanding of Jesus and His response to human need.

One commentator remarks that the common factor that held that group together was their "socially deprived condition. They were faceless and unorganized... The distribution of bread was done after thankful affirmation of God's care without discrimination." Another commentator interprets the passage as referring to the Eucharist: as in the previous feeding miracle-story, "Jesus continues to give food to His disciples. It is their privilege and duty to distribute it to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews." There were no privileged groups; the people's need was met and they all shared the same source of bread without discrimination. Today, if we look for the signs of Jesus' presence, it is given to us in the breaking of the bread – we who are many partake of the one loaf.

Prayer: Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more, feed me till I want no more. Amen.

THE TRANSFIGURATION

April 27th, Tuesday

MW Ps. 139 Deut. 5.16-end Mark 9.2-13
EW Ps. 140(om.v.9-10),141 Deut. 6.1-15 Mark 9.14-29

After six days Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain...He was transfigured before them... (Mark 9:2)

The story of the Transfiguration is the expression of one of those great moments of theological insight into who Jesus is and God's plan of salvation. It is a story rich in symbolism and highly dramatized. The gospel were not written to answer our modern interest in establishing exact historical data. The story is told to illustrate a deep religious experience which was only fully understandable after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The full importance of Israel's religious traditions, the Law and the Prophets, the whole concept of suffering as a means of salvation and as a pointer to the Messiah – all of these themes are bound together in this scene. The disciples were not simply dumbfounded at the experience, they must have found it difficult to find words that would express their feelings. Peter's emotions rightly describe the scene: "*he did not know what to say*". It was hardly necessary to give a command for silence in one sense, yet it was necessary in the sense that a wrong interpretation of the scene/experience would send out a message contrary to the mission of Jesus.

The passage seems to reflect a major point of discussion both in the early Church, and an unsettled on-going debate even now: the relationship between suffering, death, and resurrection. The portrait of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah helps in understanding the relationship and is used by New Testament writers to explain how Jesus' vicarious suffering and death led to both his glorification and our salvation. The Feast of the Transfiguration is celebration on 6 August; this is also the date for the anniversary of the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945 which brought an end to World War II. The after effects of that bomb completely transformed human existence. We still find it hard to put the whole experience into words; we are only haunted by the images of disfiguration and suffering. Let our experience of the transfiguration be one which enriches life and leads to wholeness.

Prayer: Lord, may we too enjoy the experience of your transfiguration and learn the lessons that you teach us through this experience. Amen.

THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM

April 28th, Wednesday

MW Ps. 142,143(omt.vs 12) Deut. 6.16-end Mark9.30-end
EW Ps. 144 Deut. 7.1-11 Mark 10.1-16

If any one would be first, they must be last of all and servant of all (Mark 9:35).

The first section of the Gospel passage (verses 30-32) repeats Jesus' prediction of His suffering and death. In Mark's Gospel the predictions of Jesus' passion start from chapter 8 in the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi (8:27ff). And as before, the disciples fail to understand Jesus. In 8:34-37 the disciples were asked to deny themselves and take up their cross to follow Jesus. Here they are told that if they want to be first, they must become the servants of all – they must become the last. Jesus uses the example of a child to illustrate His point. The child is not yet at an age of religious or cultural significance, nevertheless the child must be received in love and respect; the disciples must see themselves and their mission as being to those of least significance. The struggles for a position of power and authority – an all too human story – must be judged by the criteria of service to those of least importance.

An interesting word is used here – *diakonos* – translated as servant. The servant is in relation not to the needy, but to the Master. The disciple is to be like Jesus – verse 37 – a servant of the one who sent Him. Thus the *diakonos* is the one who faithfully carries out the commission given by God. In this case, it is service to those who are deliberately ignored, put aside, oppressed by forces that are more powerful either in religious or social settings. A stern warning is issued that anyone placing an obstacle in the path of these “least” people, do so at their own risk of being excluded from the Kingdom. When we serve the least in the Kingdom, we also become peacemakers. These two foci of mission cannot be divorced. We have the example of Mother Teresa – service to the poorest of the poor and a recipient of the Noble Peace Prize! Let us recognize that we are servants of the servants of the servant Lord.

Prayer: O Lord, help us to serve the least in Your Kingdom realizing that in so doing we are serving you. Amen.

WEALTH AS AN OBSTACLE TO DISCIPLESHIP

April 29th, Thursday

MW Ps. 145 Deut. 7.12-end Mark10.17-31
EW Ps. 146 Deut. 8 Mark 10.32-45

How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the Kingdom of God (Mark 10:23).

The passage speaks of a young man seeking a meaningful life. The basic Jewish Law was set before him as the means of life, but the young man had observed all these and had still not found satisfaction. Jesus suggested that the solution lay not in observing the letter of the Law, but in getting to the spirit of the Law; the young man had to become like Jesus – empty of power and status – becoming poor and serving the poor. The young man has to turn away disappointed. He is too attached to his possessions and not willing to let go control of what gives him position, power and prestige. Mark is warning his readers of the danger of wealth as an obstacle to discipleship.

Wealth, not necessarily only hard cash, but anything which brings power, position, authority, anything that gives the impression of self-reliance closes one to reliance on God; the person is blocked off from the concerns that are all around with which God is concerned and among which Jesus had His ministry. It would seem that religion and religious expression were the prerogative of the materially wealthy people; here the gospel teaching is that wealth itself is a block to participating in the mission of Jesus. If attachment to material possessions can hold a person back, “*who then can be saved?*” The need to find security in material possessions held this young man back from following Jesus; he was possessed by his possessions and lacked the freedom to part with them. How do we handle the issues of wealth, position and power? Are they obstacles to our service or do we use them in the service of people?

Prayer: Thank you, O God, for the wealth with which you have blessed us. May it never become for us an obstacle in the service of your people. Amen.

JESUS HAILED AS MESSIAH

April 30th, Friday

MW Ps. 147,148 Deut. 12.1-12 Mark 10.46-11.11
EW Ps. 149,150 Deut. 12.29-13.5 Mark 11.12-26

**Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
(Mark 11:9).**

The day's gospel reading begins with the story of the healing of Blind Bartimaeus. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth who was passing by, he appealed to him as "*Son of David*" – an acknowledgement of Jesus' messianic status. Jesus healed his eyes and sent him on his way, but the man followed Jesus. In faith Bartimaeus had asked for his blindness to be removed; now with sight he follows Jesus. Bartimaeus' eyes had been opened not only physically, but also with deep insight into the person of Jesus.. The recognition of Jesus as Messiah is supported by the following section when Jesus enters Jerusalem and is hailed as King by the crowd. The scene is charged with excitement and messianic expectation. Jesus is hailed not by the religious authorities or the political power of that time – he is hailed by the common people who recognize in Him that God is in solidarity with them, just as God was in solidarity with their ancestors in Egypt, and just as God had given David, a common shepherd boy, the throne of Israel. Jesus was hailed as the common person's Messiah who came on a donkey, the humblest of work animals rather than on a conquering steed.

It is interesting that the reflections for this month which began with Jesus as the Messiah through the events of Maundy Thursday, Friday, and Easter, come to an end with Mark's account of the Passion Week and the acknowledgement of Jesus as the Messiah. We seem to have come a full circle in the Gospel story. Jesus is the one who fulfils the prophecies of the expected Messiah, but in a way that is totally unexpected and in a way that transcends everything ever imagined of the Messiah. He is the Messiah by the people, for the people, of the people. Let our eyes not be blind to the Messiah, but let them be open to see Jesus at work in and among people so that we too can hail "*He who comes in the name of the Lord.*"

Prayer: O God, help us to recognize you at work in and through your people and give us the courage to join you among them. Amen.

LABORARE EST ORARE

LABOUR DAY

May 1st, Saturday

**Joseph the Carpenter (Labour Day)
Dhanjibhai Naroji (Conv., Ev.), bap. 1839**

**Theme: Thanksgiving for Joseph, the craftsman of Nazareth
and spouse of Mary.**

M/EW	Psalm 19	L.S.	OT	Genesis 1.26-2.3
	OT	Genesis 1.26-2.3	Psalm 112.1-6	
	NT	Col. 3.12-17, 23-24	Epistle	Col. 3.14 15,17,23,24
	and/or	Matthew 13.53-58	Gosp.	Matthew 13.53-58
				2Thessalonian 3:1-10

We gave you this command, 'Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.' (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

The title above which is in Latin means 'Work is Worship'. For too many of us work is a drudgery - something we just got to do in order to earn our salary. But for those who find job satisfaction in their work, their work makes them sing praises to God. Organised workers use Labour Day to press forward their demands - higher pay and less work! They usually find that they cannot have cordial relationships with their employers or bosses. This is not right. It affects production, and ultimately harms the interests of the workers. Jesus must have learnt his carpenter's trade from his father, and he must have been pretty good at it. When he refers to yoke in Matthew 11:30 it probably meant that he made such good yokes that the bullocks did not find any strain in pulling their load. We need to develop a 'Work culture'. That is not the same thing as being 'workoholics' which adversely affects our health and family life. Too much of anything is bad; even work.

Prayer: We thank you, O Lord, for the work you have given us to do. We remember countless others who are unemployed and longing for a job. May we find job satisfaction in the work we do, and instead of complaining, may we give our best. Amen.