

SAVING GRACE

May 2nd. Sunday

4 Sunday after Easter

Athanasius of Alexandria (Bp., Th.) 373

Theme: Our redemption is completed through life in union with Christ

| | | | | |
|------|----------|---------------|--------|------------------|
| M/EW | Psalm 96 | L.S. | 1st R. | Acts 14.21-27 |
| | 1st R. | Acts 14.21-27 | Psalm | 96.1-4,7,9,12-13 |
| | NT | Rev. 21.22-27 | 2nd R. | Rev. 21.22-27 |
| | and/or | John 15.1-11 | Gosp. | John 15.1-11 |

Notice of festival of John the Evangelist on 6 May

“Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.” (Mk 5:19)

Jesus performed many miracles including those of healing the sick, casting out of demons, and even raising dead people to life. He never expected any hefty fee or costly present for his gracious act of healing the sick. A simple ‘Thank you’ would have been good enough for him. But all too often he did not get even that! (Read the response of ten lepers who were healed by Jesus in Luke 17:11-19. 90% of those healed did not thank him.) In today’s Gospel reading we are told about a very dangerous demon-possessed man - a terror to the whole countryside - who was healed by Jesus. The healed man was so grateful that he wanted to be with Jesus to serve him all his life. Jesus must have appreciated the grateful response of the healed demoniac. He may have liked to have such a man in his band of disciples. But Jesus showed greater faith in him by asking him to be his witness among his own people. “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you” (Mk 5:19).

I have read of some orphans who were raised up by some kindly souls, given good education, and were doing well in life. When asked how they could repay their benefactors the response was, “Take care of another orphan, and bring him/her up well in life. That’s about all.”

Surely, Christ expects a similar response from those who have experienced his saving grace and eternal life. He wants them to be witnesses so that others also can share the same blessings they did. Is that such a difficult task? Dr. D.T.Niles of Sri Lanka used to say, ‘Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where he would get alms, food and clothing.’ True evangelism is telling others how much the Lord has done for us.

Prayer: Forgive us, O Christ, that so often we have not been grateful to you for the blessings you have given us. We have not thanked you for the many gifts of life you gave us. Help us, O Lord, to show our gratitude by telling others about you. Amen.

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ANSWERING WITH A COUNTER QUESTION

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

May 3rd, Monday

Philip & James (Apostles)

| | | | |
|----|--------|-----------------|------------------|
| MW | Ps. 9 | Deut. 13.6-14.2 | Mark 11.27-12.12 |
| EW | Ps. 10 | Deut. 14.22-end | Mark 12.13-27 |

“By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?” (Matt.22:21)

Today’s Gospel reading reminds me of a similar incident recorded in Mark 3:20-30 where Jesus’ accusers accused him of possessing Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons. They refused to see the truth though it was so plain and open. Instead they persisted in their own wrong prejudices, and this is what Jesus termed as sin against the Holy Spirit for which there was no forgiveness. In today’s Gospel reading we find that Jesus’ accusers were not happy with the various miracles that Jesus did. And so they directly ask Him the question, “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?” (Matt.22:21) Our Lord could have given them a straightforward answer, but they would not have accepted it. So Jesus asked them a counter question, “Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? After thinking it over among themselves their final answer was, “We do not know.” What a convenient escapist answer! Don’t we ourselves use this strategy sometimes?

Another example of Jesus’ asking a counter question to his detractors can be found in Mark 12:13-17. They began by praising Jesus for his straightforwardness, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” Should Jesus answer in the affirmative plainly, he could be accused of siding with the foreign rule, and thus lose the sympathy of the common people. On the other hand, if he had said, “no”, then he could be reported to the political authorities and arrested for working against the then government. Jesus’ answer was a masterpiece which silenced them for the time being at least. But it made their resolve of getting rid of this ‘upstart’ all the more stronger.

We are to be good Christians, no doubt; but surely we are not supposed to be stupid Christians! Let us pray that God may give us wisdom and understanding so that we do not fall into traps laid for us by others.

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for the gifts you have given us - mind to think, heart to love, and strength to do your will. By your grace we shall do what is right, and silence our critics. Amen.

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WORTH OF OUR OFFERING

May 4th, Tuesday

Monica, mother of Augustine (387)

MW Ps. 11(om.vs.6),12 Deut.15.1-18 Mark 12.28-end
EW Ps. 13,15 Deut.16.1-17 Mark 13.1-13

“Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury.” (Mark 12:43)

Jesus often had very hard words to say about rich people. In the sermon on the Mount, he said, “You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matt. 6:24). To his disciples he once said, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:24-25). That sounds a sweeping assertion. But surely Jesus had friends among the rich. His ministry was supported by many influential women who gave generous donations to support his work (See Luke 8:3). The tomb in which Jesus was buried after his crucifixion belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, a rich person. Basically Jesus was against our running after money as if that was the only thing that mattered. He wanted us to have our priorities right, and so he said, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matt.6:33).

Our churches also need money for their running expenses. That is why stewardship campaigns are carried out so often. Far more important is how do we use this money given by devotees? Are we transparent in our accountability? Do we give from our surpluses or do we make our giving according to a principle. Do we give a fixed amount, or do we give according to the changes in our income? Sacrificial giving is what Jesus commends. That is why the worth of widow’s offering was more in God’s sight (may not be in our sight). Who are we trying to please, anyway? God or our pastor, our pastorate committee, or any other? May we give out of gratitude for what God has done for us! He did not spare His Son so that we could be saved. Giving ourselves to God will automatically result in a corresponding outflow from our pocket for God’s work.

Prayer: O loving God, we thank you that you sent your only beloved Son into the world to be our Saviour and the saviour of all mankind. May we as his disciples carry forward His activity, and offer you our resources and talents for your service. Amen.

KEEP AWAKE! BE ALERT!

May 5th, Wednesday

MW Ps. 16 Deut.16.18-20&17.8end Mark 13.14-end
EW Ps. 17 Deut.18.1-2&9-end Mark 14.1-11

“False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be alert; I have already told you everything.” (Mark 13:22-23)

Predictions regarding the second coming of Christ have been there in plenty! But more often than not the gullible believers have been led astray by eloquent orators who profess to preach the biblical truth. It is hard to distinguish who speaks God’s message, and who just speaks out his/her own mind. Let us never idolise any preacher however influential and eloquent. But let us test everything according to the mind of Christ as revealed in the New Testament.

Humanity does crave for a saviour. It finds itself in an awful situation spiritually. It is so easy to fall prey to any ism or ideology that seems to strike a chord in our mind. Warned Jesus, “False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be alert; I have already told you everything” (Mark 13:22-23).

If we are the elect, it does not mean that we shall be spared of this temptation. We may have to face it, and by God’s grace we shall emerge victorious.

Prayer: O Lord, instil your nature in us. Help us not to fall a prey to those who would like to capture our attention so that they can rule us. May your protecting arm be around us all the time. Amen.

“LORD, WHAT ABOUT HIM?”

6th May, Thursday

John, Apostle & Evangelist

Theme: Thanksgiving for John, the beloved disciple, and for his insight into the mystery of Christ.

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|--------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| M/EW | Psalm 27 | L.S. | OT | Exodus 33.18-23 |
| | OT | Exodus 33.18-23 | Psalm | 92.1-2, 12-15 |
| | NT | 1 John 1.1-4 | Epistle | 1 John 1.1-4 |
| and/or | John 21.20-25 | Gosp. | John 21.20-25 | |

“LORD, What about him?” (John 21:21)

“LORD, WHAT ABOUT HIM?” (John 21:21) Whenever we are tempted to ask a question as Peter did, “What about him/her? it does not really show our concern for the person referred to. It is just our curiosity that prompts us to ask such a question. Worse, it may be our jealousy! Somehow, we do not want anyone to supplant us since we consider ourselves as specially favoured by the Master.

I am reminded about an incident when someone asked the pastor, “Pastor, where did Cain get his wife?” The wise pastor replied, “Son, don’t you be concerned about others’ wives. That will not lead you to a better relationship with God.” One meaningful spiritual has these words: ‘It’s me Lord; it’s me Lord, standing in the need of prayer. Not my mother, not my father. But it’s me, oh, Lord! standing in the need of prayer.’

Prayer: O Lord Jesus, we thank you for the life and witness of your Apostle John, who has revealed to us several mysteries in the Gospel that bears his name. May we be as close to you as he was so that we can understand your mind better, and serve you with greater understanding and our fellow human beings with greater compassion. Amen.

“EVEN THOUGH I MUST DIE WITH YOU, I WILL NOT DENY YOU.”

May 7th, Friday

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|----|-----------------------|----------------|---------------|
| MW | Ps. 19 | Deut. 19 | Mark 14.12-31 |
| EW | Ps. 20,21(om.vs.8-12) | Deut.21.10-end | Mark 14.32-52 |

“Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” (Mark 14:31)

The Apostle Peter, in spite of his impetuosity, is really a lovable character. It is quite another thing that he failed to live up to his assertion, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” His love for the Master was so great that he was ready to do anything for him. The words of Peter sprang out of his heart spontaneously, and not after a careful thought. Should an occasion arise when Peter must take his side along with Jesus, he probably would have done what he said he would do. In fact, tradition has it that he willingly chose a martyr’s death on a cross, except that he requested to be hung upside down since he did not consider himself to be worthy to be in the same position as Jesus. What really was his undoing was a simple assertion by a servant girl who said to him, “You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.” Peter simply said, “I do not know what you are talking about.” He got away with that. Next time when he was again confronted with the question, he became more bold, and swore that he had no connection with Jesus of Nazareth. Very often a person’s undoing is not some great trial, but some small thing which later assumes gigantic proportion.

How do people become drunkards or drug addicts? The writer of Proverbs says, ‘Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder. Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind utter perverse things’ (Prov.23:31-32). An evil habit is hard to break; it is better not to start it at all.

**Prayer: ‘Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin,
Each victory will help you some other to win.
Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdue,
Look ever to Jesus, He will carry you through!
Amen.**

ARE YOU THE MESSIAH, THE SON OF THE BLESSED ONE?

May 8th, Saturday

| | | | |
|----|-----------|-----------------------|----------------|
| MW | Ps. 22 | Deut.22.1-8&23.19-end | Mark 14.53-end |
| EW | Ps. 23,24 | Deut.24.6-end | Mark 15.1-20 |

Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus said, “I am; and ‘you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,’ and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven’” (Mark 14: 61-62).

It was not often that Jesus gave a direct answer to his detractors. But this one was an exception. He was talking to the high priest who was conducting his hearing in a trial, and Jesus was expected to speak the truth. He did. But that did not have the kind of effect on the high priest which we might expect. Instead of accepting it, and professing faith in the Messiah, the high priest thought Jesus’ answer as a confirmation of his guilt. As far as anyone in history is concerned no one had made such tall claims as Jesus did. Only two conclusions are possible - either Jesus was totally mistaken (‘a mad man’), or he was what he claimed to be. Many in our country have a high respect for Jesus, and accept him as an exemplary Guru, but they stop at that. Having faith in him as a Messiah or as a Saviour is totally out of question for them. It means that they haven’t really faced the truth regarding who Jesus was and is, nor responded to it one way or the other in a responsible way. Are we, who claim to be followers of Christ, very different from them? Is our faith in Jesus Christ real? Have we really accepted Him as our personal saviour and placed our trust in him? That is the test of our faith.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for giving us your Word in the pages of the Holy Bible, and for the living Word in the person of your Son Jesus Christ. May our lives be guided by your Word so that we can offer consolation to those in need, and can fight false teachings which some persons might preach for their own ends. May we be true disciples of Christ and not just be ‘nominal Christians’. May our faith be visible to the world in the kind of lives we lead! Amen.

GOODBYE WITH AN ADVANTAGE MOTHERS’ DAY

May 9th, Sunday

5 Sunday after Easter

Theme: The Spirit of love and truth is promised to the Church.

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|------|----------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|
| M/EW | Psalm 67 | L.S. | 1st R. | Acts 15.22-31 |
| | 1st R. | Acts 15.22-31 | Psalm 67 | |
| | NT | Rev. 22.1-5 | 2nd R. | Rev. 22.1-5 |
| | and/or | John 15.26-16.7 | Gosp. | John 15.26-16.7 |

Notice of festival of Ascension on 13 May

Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you ask me, “where are you going?” Because I have said these things you are filled with grief (John 16: 5-6)

Goodbyes are hard for all of us. Jesus’ disciples also felt grief (Jn. 16:6) when they came to know that their Master would not be with them for long. But what they didn’t know is the advantage that would be theirs if Jesus would go away (Jn. 16:7-8); for only then would he send the Holy Spirit, from the Father (Jn. 15:26).

Jesus like a loving and caring parent would never leave his disciples as spiritual orphans and so promised us the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would support the disciples, especially in times of difficulty, by coming alongside to help. He would guide them and give evidence of the truth about Jesus (Jn. 15:26) so that the disciples would grow spiritually and live out the life and teaching of Jesus in the world; an example seen in the Council at Jerusalem when the first Christians made a decision in mutual love with the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28). The world would be hostile towards them but they were to be strong in the truth (Jn. 16:1-4).

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be given to the church and it was fulfilled on Pentecost. The Spirit is given to the church so that the church will give evidence about Jesus in the world (Jn. 15:27) until the time when God would make all things new (Rev. 22:3-5).

This day we observe as Mother’s Day when we honour our mothers for who they are to us. Let us seek a deeper experience of God, our heavenly Father whose love is also like that of a caring mother by the ever-abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: O Jesus, thank you for being with us always and everywhere and you made this possible by going away physically so as to be with us in Spirit. Amen.

HE SAVED OTHERS; HE CANNOT SAVE HIMSELF!

May 10th, Monday

| | | | |
|----|-----------|---------------------|-----------------|
| MW | Ps. 28,29 | Deut. 25.1-10,13-16 | Mark 15.21-39 |
| EW | Ps. 31 | Deut.26.1-11 | Mark 15.40-16.8 |

“In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.”(Mark 15:31-32)

Although the above words were uttered by the highest religious authorities in Jesus' day, yet they contain a profound truth. Jesus did save others. Jesus explained his mission in these words, “For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life, as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). When the Temple soldiers came to arrest Jesus, and someone from his disciples' band took out a sword and chopped off an ear of the slave of the high priest, this was Jesus' reaction, “Put your sword back into its place...Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:52-53). If Jesus had willed it, he could easily have saved himself by appealing to his heavenly Father. But he refrained from doing so. Why? “How then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?” (Matt.26:54) Jesus was very happy when at Caesarea Philippi; Peter said about Jesus, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matt.16:16). Jesus promised him, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” Then Jesus went on to predict about His death and resurrection. This was unacceptable to Peter, who said, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” Jesus' instant reaction was, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things” (Matt.16:22-23). If Jesus had decided to save himself, he could not have saved others. His very purpose of being in the world was to save the whole humankind from the clutches of sin and the Devil. He deliberately chose the way of the cross to achieve that end. In order to save us all, Jesus had to offer his life as a sacrifice on the cross. The assertion of the chief priests and scribes that they would believe in Jesus if he came down from the cross is pure humbug.

Says Matthew Henry in his commentary, ‘They challenged him to come down from the cross, if he could, vs. 32. Let them but see that and they would believe; whereas they would not believe, when he gave them a more convincing sign than that, when he came up from the grave. ‘

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, that I may never doubt your saving ability. Help me to overcome my unbelief, and strengthen my faith in you. Amen.

THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

May 11th, Tuesday

Martyrs of Delhi (1857)

Krishna Mohan Bannerjea (Conv. Educ.), bap. 1832

MW Ps. 30,32 Isaiah 6.1-9 Col.1.9-20

EW Ps. 33 Ezek.1.3-6,22,26-end Col.2.16-3.4

'For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood, of his cross.' (Col.1:19-20)

Paul in his inimitable way states the truth that we considered yesterday regarding the mission of Jesus to be the reconciler. Paul does not limit Jesus' mission just to the humankind. He talks about the whole universe. He says that in Jesus 'all things hold together'. The world is cosmos precisely because of this fact; otherwise, it would have been chaos.

Nowadays, we are very conscious of environmental issues, which is good. Jesus gives meaning to the whole world of nature. All life forms are included in the divine reconciling activity of the Son. The vision that Isaiah saw states, 'The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The nursing child shall play over the whole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea' (Isaiah 11:6-9).

The above is not an impossible utopian dream. A truly harmonious universe can become a reality if we strive to unite it in Jesus the Christ, who can hold all things together. As believers we, too, are agents of the kingdom of God. In the strength and wisdom that our Lord supplies we shall be able to do our part and participate in the universal mission of the Lord.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for accepting us in your beloved Son, our Saviour. Give us the grace to participate in His mission of reconciling the whole world to you. Amen.

WHY DO YOU SUBMIT TO REGULATIONS?

May 12th, Wednesday

Ascension Eve

MW Ps. 97 Zech.14.1,4-9 Luke 22.63-end

EW Ps. 15,110.1-14 2 Kings 2.1-12 Matt.28.16-end

But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God (Luke 22:69).

The purpose of having regulations is to benefit one and all concerned. Traffic rules are there to help smooth flow of traffic. Flouting them can cause traffic jams, and a lot of delay to get to your destination. But insisting on the literal meaning of regulations, and not considering their purpose will be counter productive. The religious leaders of Jesus' day had strict rules of tithing and keeping of the Sabbath, and so Jesus had to break certain regulations in teaching that "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Once he deliberately healed a man with a withered hand, asking, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?" (Luke 6:9).

Rules for religious observances have to be looked at in the context of their purpose. Some rules may be directly in conflict with the teaching of the Bible, and so they need to be discarded. This is what Paul was referring to in Colossians. Rules about new moons or Sabbaths, self-abasement and worship of angels (or canonized saints), visions, etc. are inconsistent with the following of Jesus Christ who is the head of the church. He is the one who nourishes the church with his life - the same way that a branch derives its nourishment by being part of the vine. *ROTI, KAPADA AUR MAKAAAN* (Food, clothing, shelter) are basic human needs, but they should never supplant the spiritual craving God has implanted in us. The baptized believer is supposed to be dead to sin, and lives a new life in Christ. Hence it is necessary, says Paul, 'to seek things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.' The promise for us is, 'When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory' (Col.3:4).

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, that you have freed us from the clutches of the Law, and giving us a new life guided by the Holy Spirit. May people see in us the true image of your divine Son, whom we seek to follow. Amen. O Lord, we acknowledge that you are our King, and have lordship over our lives. Amen.

“I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE END OF THE AGE”

May 13th, Thursday

Ascension Day

Theme: The Son of Man is exalted to the right hand of God.

| | | | | |
|------|--------|----------------------|--------|-------------------------|
| M/EW | Psalm | 21.1-6,13 L.S. | 1st R. | Acts 1.1-11 or |
| | OT | Daniel 7.9-10, 13-14 | OT | Daniel 7.9-10, 13-14 |
| | NT | Acts 1.1-11 | | Psalm 21.1-6,13 |
| | and/or | Matt. 28.16-20 | | Epistle Eph. 1.15-23 or |
| | | | | 2nd R. Acts 1.1-11 |
| | | | | Gosp. Matt. 28.16-20 or |
| | | | | Luke 24.44-53 |

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” (Matt.28:18-20)

It is a pity that one of the major Christian festivals, the Ascension of our Lord, falls on a weekday (Thursday) and so does not get the kind of attention that it deserves. The disciples of Jesus were delighted when they met the risen Lord for 40 days after Easter, and they probably thought that this might continue indefinitely. So an event like his Ascension was necessary to teach them that their Lord would be present with them in a new and more intimate way than before. People believe that heaven is above and hell is below. And so Jesus' ascension was to convey to the disciples that he had gone to heaven where he had been given absolute authority over the whole universe. Jesus the Master expected his disciples to obey him, and follow his teaching. And so the last Commission that he gave them reads, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matt.28:18-20). A truly stupendous and difficult task! But the disciples were not to be disheartened because Christ promised them, “And remember, I am with you always; to the end of the age.” In his strength and with his guidance we shall succeed.

Here is a thought from St. Augustine which is very meaningful: ‘And he departed from our sight, that we might return to our heart and there find him; for he departed, and behold, he is here!’

Prayer: O Lord, we acknowledge that you are our King, and has lordship over our lives. Help us to obey you completely, and fulfil the task you have entrusted to us. Amen.

A KINGDOM AND PRIESTS SERVING OUR GOD

May 14th, Friday

MW Ps. 38 Deut.26.12-end Revelation 5.1-10
EW Ps. 39 Deut.29.1,10-end Hebrews 10.11-22

“You are worthy... for you were slaughtered, and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.” (Revelation 5:9-10)

The book of Revelation is a difficult book to understand as it is written in a form known as apocalyptic writing. It uses imagery, but its meaning is only known to those who understand it. One thing, however, is very clear, viz. that Jesus Christ, referred to as the Lamb worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals, is in a unique position of authority because of the sacrifice he offered of himself on a cross on that first Good Friday. Through that sacrifice he has ransomed for God saints (you and me) from every tribe and language and people and nation - no limit set. The purpose is also clearly spelt out. These saints are to be a kingdom and priests serving God. What a high calling for each one of us! It will lead us to reign on earth!

I had often wondered why Israel was called to be ‘a chosen nation’. Not for its own sake, but for the sake of the whole humankind. The promise to Abraham was, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” (Genesis 12:2). The church as the ‘new Israel’ has a similar role to play. It has to reach out to the whole universe, and be a blessing to one and all.

The church as has been well said as the only society or institution which exists for the sake of non-members.

**Prayer: Make me a blessing,
Make me a blessing.
Out of my life may Jesus shine.
Make me a blessing,
O Saviour, I pray;
Make me a blessing to someone today. Amen.**

HE CHOSE US IN CHRIST BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD

May 15th, Saturday

MW Ps. 40 Deut.30.1-14 Eph.1.1-14
EW Ps. 41 Deut.30.15-end & 31.9-13 Eph.1.15-end

‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.’ (Eph.1:3-4)

How blessed we are to have been chosen by God not on the spur of the moment, but thoughtfully before the foundation of the world! Our birth into this world is not an accident, but a deliberate act of God, and he has planned an eternal and blessed destiny for each one of us. He did this because his essential nature is LOVE, a kind of love referred to in the New Testament as ‘agape’, and more fully explained by Paul in the 13th chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians.

In today’s world marriages do not seem to last for very long. Broken homes breed misfits in society. The greatest blessing children can have is to have parents who love them and each other with all their heart, mind and soul. An ideal couple is not one which has never faced problems in their marital relationship, but one which has learnt to overcome these problems with courage and understanding. We are called to be a ‘holy people, blameless before God in love.’ That is the kind of evangelism we are expected to carry on. We do not need big advertisement posters. Emulating Christlike life and his love is more than enough. ‘May my life be like a mirror showing a reflection of Christ just as I see my reflection in a mirror!’ wrote the great Marathi poet, Rev. Narayan Waman Tilak.

**Prayer: Into my heart, into my heart, Come into my heart, Lord
Jesus, Come in today, come in to stay,
Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.
Out of my life, out of my life,
Shine out of my life, Lord Jesus.
Shine out today, shine out always,
Shine out of my life, Lord Jesus. Amen.**

“THAT THEY MAY BE ONE AS WE ARE ONE.”

May 16th, Sunday

6 Sunday after Easter

Theme: We are created to know God and abide in him.

| | | | | | |
|------|--------|-------------------|--------|-------------------|--------------|
| M/EW | Psalm | 84 | L.S. | 1st R.. | Acts 18.1-11 |
| | 1st R. | Acts 18.1-11 | | Psalm | 84.8-12 |
| | NI | Revelation 21.1-7 | 2nd R. | Revelation 21.1-7 | |
| | and/or | John 17.20-26 | Gosp. | John 17.20-26 | |

Notice of the festival of Pentecost on 23 May

“That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (Mark 6:4)

This verse in St. John’s Gospel has been one of the most inspiring verses for the church union movement. Divisions in the church are a scandal to the world, and they do not promote the cause of evangelism. Unity of the church is directly related to the proclamation of the Gospel. It is significant that the Church of North India chose ‘UNITY, WITNESS and SERVICE’ as its prime mottos. Effective witness and service can only follow if there is unity within the church. In the early centuries, people pointed out to the disciples of Christ, saying, “Look at these Christians, how they love one another!” Would the same be true today? Unlikely. There are fights over positions, money, properties and so on. It looks that we need a modern day St. Paul to chide the believers as he did to the people of his time, ‘When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints?’ (Read 1 Cor. 6:1-6)

Paul reminds the Corinthians that before their conversion they practised all types of sin. But he reminds them, ‘you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God’ (1 Cor.6:11)

Are we like Corinthians before their conversion or after their conversion?
May we experience true conversion within our heart!

**Prayer: We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord (2)
And we pray that our unity may one day be restored.
And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yes, they’ll know we are Christians by our love. Amen.**

“BE STRONG AND BOLD... I WILL BE WITH YOU”

May 17th, Monday

| | | | |
|----|-----------|------------------|--------------|
| MW | Ps. 45 | Deut.31.14-29 | Eph.2.1-10 |
| EW | Ps. 46,47 | Deut.31.30-32.21 | Eph.2.11-end |

‘Then the LORD commissioned Joshua, son of Nun and said, “Be strong and bold, for you shall bring the Israelites into the land that I promised them; I will be with you.” (Deut.31:23)

This is a very comforting promise for one who has been entrusted with a big responsibility. He/she may feel quite unequal to the task, and doubt his/her abilities to perform it. That may be a right assessment of one’s own talents and abilities. But here we are asked to do the job in the strength that God supplies. He advises us to be strong and bold, and not be afraid, because He will be with us. Joshua must have felt himself to be too small when he thought of Moses, the great leader, who wonderfully brought the Israelites out of Egypt to lead them into the Promised Land. Slavery was now behind them, and a new bright future awaited them. Could Joshua really be the new leader who would be capable of leading this big crowd into the promised land? He himself may not have thought so. Even Moses had reservations when he met the LORD at the burning bush on the holy Mount, and he pointed out that he did not possess the gift of the gab to confront Pharaoh. But God set aside his objections and chose him to be the political deliverer of the Israelites. His job, however, was not complete, and so it was left to his successor, Joshua the son of Nun, to complete it and lead the Israelites into the Promised Land.

When God chooses us from any ministry, he does not leave us in the lurch, but is with us to help us carry out the task. By human strength we can never do the task assigned to us, and if we attempt it, our work will be shoddy to say the least. Even when the risen Jesus Christ gave his last commission to his disciples to ‘go and make disciples of all nations’ he was emphatic in telling them, “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt.28:20).

Prayer: Remember, Lord, what Thou hast wrought in us, and not what we deserve; and as Thou hast called us for Thy service, make us worthy of our calling. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

MINISTRY TO THE GENTILES

May 18th, Tuesday

MW Ps. 48 Deut.32.22-44 Eph.3.1-13
EW Ps. 49 Deut.32.45-end & 34 Eph.3.14-end

‘Surely you have already heard of the commission of God’s grace that was given to me for you.....’ (Eph.3:2)

Saul, the persecutor of Christians, became Paul the missionary after he had an encounter with the risen Lord Jesus (Read Acts 9:1-18; 26:1-18). But he did not join the band of apostles in Jerusalem, but preferred to work independently. He also followed an unbeaten path of preaching the Gospel to the non-Jews. What a success he had! Even the Church Council which met in Jerusalem (see Acts 15), had to take note of the great work that had been accomplished through the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. Peter had been granted a vision at Joppa before he went to visit Cornelius in response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. He saw there how the Roman centurion and his family were given the gift of the Holy Spirit even before they had been baptised. So he baptised them. Later he told his colleagues in Jerusalem about this, and insisted that this was the work of God and not a notion on his part. The Jerusalem Council accepted this as well as the report of Paul’s missionary work. Though Peter was the first one to have baptised a non-Jew, it was left to Paul to carry on evangelism among ‘the Gentiles’. About this Paul writes, ‘when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Baarnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.’ (Gal.2:7-9)

No one had appointed Sadhu Sundar Singh to do the work he did, but the results made the church take note of it. It often is the case. There are many who start off working independently, but are accepted when their work is seen to be the work of God. Never let us decry those who work without official sanction of the ecclesiastical authorities.

Prayer: O Lord, help us to be responsive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and to follow wherever He leads. May we not be jealous when we see some upstart doing the work that we were supposed to do. Amen.

[150]

UNITY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

May 19th, Wednesday

MW Ps. 50 Judges 1.1-21 Eph.4.1-16
EW Ps. 51 Judges 1.22-2.5 Eph.4.17-5.2

‘I...beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called...bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’ (Eph. 4:1-3)

What is the greatest need of the church today? Surely we shall not be far off the mark when we say that ‘Christian unity’ is our greatest need. But unity does not necessarily mean ‘uniformity’. There can be diversity in unity. Factions within the church are a great stumbling-block in the cause of evangelism. Many a Hindu, who were inspired by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, refrained from accepting baptism because they did not know which church to join. The caste system has been a bane in Hinduism. Similarly, the denominational system is a bane in Christianity.

The leaders who spearheaded the movement for church union in India have been conscious of the evils of denominationalism, and so worked relentlessly to bring the various churches together. We must be thankful that the Church of North India is a product of this effort. The symbolic Inauguration ceremony held in the grounds of All Saints’ Cathedral, Nagpur on 29th November 1970 was a great landmark in the movement for church unity. The work is not over yet. We are to be not just a united church but a uniting church. Accepting the grace God has given to all, we must be humble enough to accept this and not insist on our own ways or understanding. ‘*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all*’ (Eph.4:4-6).

“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their work, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” so prayed Jesus (John 17:20-21).

Prayer: O Lord, may we work for unity. May we be peace-makers rather than breakers of church unity! Let the world see in us the working of your Holy Spirit who keeps us together. Amen.

[151]

NOW IN THE LORD YOU ARE LIGHT

May 20th, Thursday

| | | | |
|----|-------------------|----------------|--------------|
| MW | Ps. 52 | Judges 2.6-end | Eph.5.3-20 |
| EW | Ps. 53,54(om.v.5) | Judges 3.1-11 | Eph.5.21-end |

'For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord.' (Eph.5:8-10)

The metaphor of light is often used in the New Testament. It stands in opposition to darkness and evil. Jesus said about himself, "I am the light of the world" (John 9:5). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus told his disciples, "You are the light of the world... let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" Matthew 5:14, 16). St. Paul combines two metaphors in the verses quoted above. He talks about light, and also about fruit of the light (comparing light to a tree). In John's Gospel 15th chapter, we are told about Christ being the 'true vine', and we as branches of the vine. These branches are expected to bear fruit. They can only do so if the sap of the vine flows through them. Said Jesus, "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Paul asks us to find out what is pleasing to the Lord, and to refrain from 'unfruitful works of darkness. When we bear fruit or give light to others we bring glory to our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the purpose of our discipleship.

It is so easy to revert to our previous ways if we are not continually in Christ, the true Vine. The Israelites often rebelled against Moses though he was the one who liberated them from Egyptian slavery. Instead of remembering the great works shown to them by God, they thought of the comfort and food they enjoyed in Egypt. Though Christ has saved us from the clutches of sin and the Devil, yet it does not mean that we shall for ever be faithful to the Lord. Satan does not give up so easily. St. Peter gives this timely warning, "Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith" (1 Peter 5:8-9).

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for giving us the privilege to be the light of the world. That light is not our own, but You are the source of that light. Help us to dwell continually in you so that we may bear fruit worthy of a disciple of yours. Amen.

PRACTICAL RELATIONSHIPS

May 21st, Friday

| | | | |
|----|---------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| MW | Ps. 55(om.vs.15,23) | Judges 4.1-16,23-24 | Eph.6.1-9 |
| EW | Ps. 56 | Judges 5.1-18 | Eph.6.10-end |

'Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but, bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ.; not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. Render service with enthusiasm.' (Eph.6: 4-7)

You may have heard many a sermon on the duty to obey our parents and to take care of them when they are old and feeble. But it is equally important that parents do their duty towards their children, which is not confined to provide them food, clothing and shelter. It is also to provide them good education by example. Children must be treated as persons in their own right; they are not to be spanked and caned at the whim of the father or mother. Punishment is to be undertaken in view of correction, and not to give vent to the anger of a parent. Fathers particularly are asked not to provoke children to anger. That will lead to unfortunate results in the long run. A child needs the love and understanding of the father as well as that of the mother. How many of us who are fathers are able to give time to our children? Or are we too busy just with our job to make as much money as possible? The best gift you can give your child is your time - to help him do his homework or play with him. One of the most pleasant memories I have of my father is that of the two of us playing carrom or Chinese checkers.

In terms of our job, Paul lays down the principle of doing it - not just as a routine matter; but doing it with enthusiasm from the heart considering it as a service to our Lord. Such attitude is bound to give you happiness and also promotion.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for our parents and for our children. Help us to fulfil our duties towards them lovingly and with understanding. Thank you also for the employment we have. We remember thousands of people who are unemployed and are looking for a job. Help us to do our job well, as a service that we offer you. Amen.

EXHORTATION TO FEARLESS CONFESSION

May 22nd, Saturday

Pentecost Eve

| | | | |
|----|--------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| MW | Ps. 145 | Isaiah 32.11-18 | Luke 12.4-12 |
| EW | Ps. 68(om.v.21-23) | Isaiah 44.1-5 | John 7.32-39 |

“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? yet not one of them is forgotten in God’s sight... Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:6-7)

Though we live in a ‘secular’ country, which does not favour any particular religious group, yet we find that very often Christians, churches are targetted by extremist groups. What happened in Orissa a year ago or more cannot be easily forgotten. The ghastly incident of an Australian missionary, Graham Staines, being burnt with his two sons in his jeep has shocked the world. Many a servants of God has to be prepared to face hardships and persecution. Loving is hard work. It involves commitment and sacrifice. This applies not just to family members, but also when loving God involves suffering for His cause. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, who suffered and died so that we could be saved. We are expected to exhibit the same kind of love in recognition that we are precious in God’s sight, and with the knowledge that our future here and hereafter is safe in His hands.

The early church history is full of courageous examples of how the believers were subjected to immense torture, yet they did not renounce their faith. “I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8). After all we are of more value than many sparrows since we have been created in the image of God. The Holy Spirit is always with us. “When they (your opponents) bring you before the synagogues, the rulers, and the authorities, do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say” (Luke 12:11-12).

Prayer: O Lord, help us to stand firm in our faith knowing that we are precious in your sight. Let us not be afraid of those who can only do us bodily harm, but cannot break our spirit since You are our strength. Amen.

POWER FROM HEAVEN

May 23rd, Sunday

Pentecost

Theme: The gift of the Holy Spirit.

| | | | | |
|------|-----------|---------------|---------|--------------------------|
| M/EW | Psalm 139 | L. S. | 1st R. | Acts 2.1-11 or |
| | OT | Isaiah 44.1-5 | OT | Isaiah 44.1-5 |
| | NT | Acts 2.1-11 | Psalm | 139.1-4,7-8,11-12, 23-24 |
| | and/or | John 20.19-23 | Epistle | 1 Cor. 12, 1-13or |
| | | | 2nd R. | Acts 2.1-11 |
| | | | Gosp. | John 20.19-23 |

He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22)

Today we commemorate one of the greatest and most powerful events that took place in history. It is the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit upon all humanity. Leviticus 23 describes the various feasts that the Jews were commanded to observe. Of these, the festival of the Passover signifies the death of Christ as the Lamb of God, festival of First fruits signifies the resurrection of Christ and the festival of Weeks is the foretelling of the promise of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost, as the name suggests, is 50 days after the Passover.

We have an account of the first Pentecost in Acts 2 and we notice that the disciples had a supernatural experience of the power of the Spirit flooding their beings such as they never had before. The Greek word for power is *dunamis* from which we also get the word dynamite. Such was the power that they experienced.

The Holy Spirit is an integral part of the Triune Godhead and was present before the creation with a distinct personality. He is a living person and is therefore referred to as “He”. Jesus referred to Him as our Comforter and Advocate (*parakletos*) in John 16:7. He is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. Jesus also said that the only sin that cannot be forgiven is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit empowers all believers with diverse gifts and it is expected of us that we use these God-given talents and opportunities for the glory of God. On the first Pentecost we read that when Peter an ordinary fisherman spoke, 3000 people became believers in one day. That was possible only because of the Spirit’s empowerment.

Prayer: Let us re-commit our lives to God today and ask God for a fresh anointing in our lives. Let us resolve to not be so entangled with traditions and customs that we loose sight of our calling and commitment. Amen.

“BROTHERS, WHAT SHOULD WE DO?”

May 24th, Monday Charles & John Wesley (Ev.) 1788, 1791

MW Ps. 65 Gen. 11.1-9 Acts 2.37-end
EW Ps. 666,67 Prov.2 or Wis.1.1-7 1 Cor. 2.6-end

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” (Acts 2:37)

It is not often that our preaching results in the listeners asking us the pertinent question: “Brothers, what should we do?” They know that there is a void in their life, and that something has to be done to get them started on the right way. People are not as unresponsive as we think they are, but they may not have the confidence of asking us the question, “Brothers, what should we do?” Either they may think that we may not have the proper answer or that they feel that we just are not cut out to meet their real need. Peter’s preaching on the day of Pentecost won 3,000 converts. They were baptised as advised by Peter, and the converts’ lifestyle afterward went a drastic change. ‘They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42). All those four ingredients were necessary for them to grow in their new-found faith in Jesus Christ. It also resulted in a practical application where their common life was based on sharing and not grabbing. I wish that the same was true of our churches today! When that happens, not only do we praise God but also have ‘the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved (2:47). There are several churches which emphasise church plantation and church growth, but hardly anyone of them follows the New Testament pattern. True, it is not easy. But Christian life was never supposed to be easy. If we were to follow faithfully the leading of the Holy Spirit in our day, we shall reap an harvest that is hundredfold or more!

Prayer: Lord, when people ask us the question, “Brothers, what should we do?” help us to give them true and practical answers that come from our heart. Only then we shall be effective and successful. Amen.

JESUS’ BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION

May 25th, Tuesday

MW Ps. 68(om.v.21-23) Ezek. 37.15-end or Matt. 3.13-4.1R
Wisdom 7.15-8.1
EW Ps. 69(om.v.22-28) Exod. 33.17-end or 1Cor. 12.12-27
Wisdom 9

‘Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.’ (Matt.4:1)

Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist was an important event in his life. It was a confirmation to him and to others that he indeed was God’s ‘Son, the Beloved’ and that he had a special mission to fulfil. He must have known all that had happened at the time of his birth in Bethlehem. His mother, Mary would have told him about all the miraculous signs that occurred then.

But a testing time was not far away. Immediately after his baptism Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. It seems to be Satan’s character to test the righteous. In the book of Job we read, ‘One day, the heavenly beings came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the Lord, “From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it.” The Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil.” Then Satan answered the Lord, “Does Job fear God for nothing?” (He appears to have taken the role of Narad muni of Indian mythology.) So various ways were devised to test the character of Job. He lost his possessions, his relatives and even his own health. But Job emerged from this testing unscathed. Jesus’ case was a little different. He had no earthly possessions or many relatives. His job was just to fulfil the Mission his heavenly Father had assigned him. How to do that was the big question. Should he follow the expectations of people of being their political saviour? Should he use worldly means to achieve spiritual ends. ‘Just worship me... follow my methods...and I will give you all the kingdoms of the world.’ Jesus did not believe that the end justified the means. The means also have to be right. He had to follow the model of the ‘suffering Servant’ of Isaiah 53. Even Peter and the other apostles did not see eye to eye with Jesus on this issue. We all like to avoid pain and suffering. Thank God that Jesus did not flinch from it, and chose to offer his life as a sacrifice on a cross to save mankind.

Prayer: Help us, O Lord, when we are tempted (tested). Do not test us beyond our capacity. Amen.

THE REJECTION OF JESUS AT NAZARETH

May 26th, Wednesday Augustine of Canterbury (Bp., Ev.), 604

MW Ps. 70(om.v.12) Num11.16-17,24-29 Luke 4.16-30
EW Ps. 71 Isaiah 61 1 Cor. 12.27-13 end

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour..' (Luke 4:18-19)

During the election times various political parties issue their manifestos. what they will do if returned to power. Many of the promises made to the electorate are generally forgotten once the elections are over. It is good to have manifestos so that the party can check how much or how little they have achieved. In terms of an individual's life, he/she too, will benefit if he/she has a set goal for his/her life. Jesus also had his manifesto which is quoted above. He mentioned it right at the beginning of his ministry, and in his home town at that. He continued to fulfil his mission during his three-year old ministry. The Gospels record only a few of the miracles he wrought to help the needy, and some of the parables he taught. Luke is careful to record even the words of Jesus which enraged the Nazareth audience. He touched on a sore nerve stating that non-Jews were somehow better than Jews. Would he say the same regarding non-Christians *vis a vis* Christians today? Quite possibly. Will we be humbled then, or will we take offence at his relegating us to the second place?

The Church of North India at one of its Synod meetings defined the priorities it had to fulfil in the next triennium. The Nazareth manifesto is also the church's manifesto. The church must examine its work by the yardstick provided there. It may fall far short of the expectations, but at least it should try sincerely. To try and fail is better than not to try at all. We may find the task too big to handle in our own strength and with the resources we have. Why not derive strength and resources from One who provides us all? Will God deny these to us if we ask sincerely in faith?

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for the Mission you gave your beloved Son, and also to us as His followers. May we fulfill our task in the strength and resources that you supply us! Amen.

“REJOICE, THAT YOUR NAMES ARE WRITTEN IN HEAVEN.”

May 27th, Thursday John Calvin of Geneva (Th.) 1564

MW Ps. 72 Exodus 35.30—36.1 Luke 10.17-24
EW Ps. 73 Isaiah 30.19-26 1 Cor. 14.1-12

The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” (Luke 10: 17)

It is only Luke who records the sending out by Jesus of 72 of his followers for a mission of preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God and for healing the sick and afflicted in various manners. Though the apostles were the closest band of Jesus' disciples, yet he had many more who were given a responsible job. These seventy two disciples went out to do the job, and did it so well that they themselves were satisfied. When they reported back to the Master, they joyfully said, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” They too must have driven out demons from some who had physical and psychological disorders. They were careful to say that whatever miracles happened was because of the name of Jesus. The power of God flowed from Jesus through them to the patients. The disciples were not the source of power; they were just the channels.

That is a fact we ministers must always keep in mind. We are just servants carrying out the bidding of the Master. We have the authority and the power which derives from him - let us use it for the good of all.

**Prayer: Make me a channel of Your peace,
Where there is hatred let me bring Your love;
Where there is injury, Your pardon, Lord;
And where there's doubt, true faith in You.**

**O Master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love with all my soul. Amen.**

PERSEVERENCE IN PRAYER

May 28th, Friday

| | | | |
|----|--------|-------------------|----------------|
| MW | Ps. 74 | 1 Kings 19.15-end | Luke 11.5-13 |
| EW | Ps. 75 | Num. 27.15-end | 2 Cor. 1.15-22 |

“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.” (Luke 11:9)

There is no religion in the world where there is no room for prayer or communication with God. Worship is more comprehensive than prayer. In prayer we may just keep asking God for this or that, but in worship we praise and thank him for who he is, and what he has done. Our focus is on the nature of God the Almighty, the Creator, Sustainer of the whole universe including you and me. And all this has a purpose. The God revealed in the Bible is a God who loves and cares, who is righteous, and who desires our fellowship. Genesis tells us about human beings made in the image of God - not the actual physical form, but having the capacity to think and love, to respond to the love of God, who has planned for us an eternal destiny.

Prayers or petitions are not ruled out. Usually we turn to God in times of stress or calamity. A prayer of faith is powerful, says St. James. Jesus tells us that the all-knowing God already knows what our needs are, and he gives us what is in our best interest, and not necessarily what we may desire. There are four responses to prayer: 1) Yes. 2) No. 3) Not yet. 4) something better is in store for you. Just trust me, says God. Human parents give to their children not whatever they may ask, but what is good for them. If we did, that would be pampering them, and spoiling them. Should we not believe that our heavenly Father knows much better than we ourselves do what we should have or not. “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13) But we must keep on praying for ourselves, our loved ones and friends, and the whole society. Praying means also doing something about it. Says James, ‘If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?’ (James 2:15-16)

Prayer: Lord, we often do not know how to pray or what to ask. We may ask selfishly. Teach us, Lord, how to pray aright, and give us the grace to act when we pray for someone. Amen.

MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

May 29th, Saturday

| | | | |
|----|--------|---------------|-----------------|
| MW | Ps. 76 | Jer. 31.31-34 | 2 Cor. 3.1-6 |
| EW | Ps. 77 | Num. 6.22-end | 2 Cor. 13.11-14 |

‘The days are surely coming’ says the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’” (Jer.31: 31,33)

The Corinthian church had many faults. They had internal divisions, jealousy and quarreling. The kind of immoral behaviour that was tolerated by them drew a strong condemnation from Paul (Read 1 Cor.5:9-12). In spite of this he writes in 2 Corinthians, ‘You are our letter.. and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts’ ((3:2-3). This is a letter that others read, and draw their conclusions about our Christian faith. What a tremendous responsibility! Many a time Paul makes a comparison between the Law and the Spirit. In this he is following the example of his Master because Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

Many a religious teacher tells about do’s and don’ts. We think that following those instructions is good enough as far as fulfilling our religious duty is concerned. What God requires of us is full transparency in all that we do or say. Our faith should be a lived-out of faith, and not just a professed-faith. Says St. Paul in Romans 3:13-15: ‘For it is not hearers of the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified. When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness.’

Paul claims to be a minister of the New Covenant ‘not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life’ (3:6). May we not emulate his example?

Prayer: O Lord God, we thank you for the New Covenant you have given us; for writing your Law in our hearts. May we obey it faithfully. Amen.

A MYSTERY TO BE EXPERIENCED

May 30th, Sunday Sunday after Pentecost : Trinity Sunday

Theme: God the Holy Trinity.

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| M/EW | Psalm 93 | L.S. | OT | 1 Kings 8.22-29 |
| | OT | 1 Kings 8.22-29 | Psalm 93 | |
| | NT | Romans 8.1-11 | Epistle. | Romans 8.1-11 |
| | and/or | John 14. 8-17 | Gosp. | John 14. 8-17 |

“Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but, the Father who dwells in me, does his works.” (John 14:10)

From the beginning of the church calendar until now, i.e. Advent to Pentecost, we have journeyed in faith to understand how and why the Father gave the Son and the Son gave the Spirit. With this is revealed the mystery of God as one Divine Being with three personal disclosures that correspond to who he is really like. Trinity Sunday reminds us of the truth that God is Triune with each person in the Godhead as distinct yet of one substance.

This is a mystery that cannot be sufficiently explained nor fully understood. We may attempt to by looking at patterns of threeness in the world such as water in three forms; ice, liquid and vapour or an egg having the yoke, white and shell. But any comparisons fall short of seeing how God personally reveals this mystery to us through the Scripture.

God acts in history as Almighty to Israel (1 Kgs. 8:23,27), comes into the world in human flesh as Jesus of Nazareth (Jn. 14:8-9) and descends on the church as the Spirit at Pentecost bringing a new quality of life to all who believe (Rom. 8:1-4). In this way God transforms the world by his grace working out his purpose to bring fallen humanity back to him.

The mystery of the Trinity is revealed to us personally when we experience God as Father in Jesus Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit. This is truly to be experienced and not merely to be understood. If we have, then we are ready to look forward to the remaining of the church calendar when we look at how our lives must reveal this truth to others.

Prayer: Thank you, O my Father, for giving us your Son and leaving your Spirit till your work on earth is done. Amen.

ARE YOU WILLING?

May 31st, Monday

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| MW | Ps. 78.41-55 | Judges 5.19-end | Acts 1.1-14 |
| EW | Ps. 78.56-72 | Judges 6.1-24 | Matt.1.18-2.12 |

“The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valour.” (Judges 6:12)

The Israelites did evil in God’s sight and so the Lord delivered them into the oppressive hand of the Midianites. But after a period of seven years God had mercy on them. Gideon was an unlikely candidate to be called by God. When God called him, he was hiding from the Midianites. He gave excuses and had a very low self-esteem. We see similar situations when Moses, Saul, Jeremiah and others were called to be leaders. They all gave excuses and probably felt that God had made a mistake by selecting them for challenging tasks.

But God makes no mistakes. He called Gideon “a mighty man of valour”. He assured Moses, “I will certainly be with you”. He told Jeremiah, “I have put My words in your mouth.” We see our deficiencies but God seeks our potential. Jesus told Simon, “You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas” (which is translated *a stone*). God transformed Moses’ shepherd’s staff into a lethal serpent and David’s sling into a mighty weapon.

God calls us today and empowers us with His Holy Spirit. A bunch of twelve very ordinary and unwilling disciples responded to His call and turned the world upside down. To us is now given all the authority from God and a mandate to make disciples of all nations, baptize and teach. How do we respond to this call? Do we give excuses or are we willing to submit ourselves into His hands by faith?

Prayer: Loving Father, we offer our lives to you. May You empower us with Your Spirit so that we are transformed and become agents of transformation. Amen.