



St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church
Heliopolis, Egypt



**Commentary on
the Gospel of St. Mark**

***An Exegetical Study
of the Gospel according to
St. Mark***

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**His Holiness Pope Tawadros II
118th Pope of Alexandria
and
Patriarch of the See of St. Mark**

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INTRODUCTION

(I) The gospel's author

This gospel was authored by St. Mark, who was among Christ's seventy apostles. He was born in Cyrene, Libya, to Jewish parents, Mary and Aristopolus. His Roman name, "*Marcos*" means "hammer", and his Hebrew name "*John*" means "God is tender". Mark was Barnabas' cousin, his father was Peter's cousin, and his mother was among the "Marys".

Mark and his parents immigrated to Palestine, after pagans had plundered their home. They lived in the house where the "*upper room*" was located - that room was the first Christian Church, where the Holy Spirit descended, and where Christ and His disciples celebrated the Passover and the holy Eucharist. It is believed that Mark was the man "*carrying a pitcher of water,*" (Mark 14:13 - 16 and Luke 22:10 - 13) whom the two disciples had followed to find the place where they would celebrate the Passover, and he was the man who "*left the linen cloth and fled...naked.*" (Mark 14:52)

(II) The author's symbol

St. Mark's symbol is the lion, due to his most famous miracle, namely, killing the lion in the wilderness of Jordan. There are also other possible reasons:

- Scholars compare Mark's description of John the Baptist "*The voice of one who cries in the wilderness....*" (Mark 1:1) to a roaring lion.
- Some Church forefathers interpret Revelation 4:7, "*The first living creature was like a lion...*" to refer to St. Mark.
- The lion symbolizes the resurrection of Christ the King.

Some scholars associate St. Mark with the lion of Revelation 5:5

"*.....Behold, the lion of the tribe of Judah....*"

(III) St. Mark's evangelism

St. Mark evangelized alongside St. Peter in Jerusalem and Judea.

Subsequently, he accompanied Sts. Paul and Barnabas on their first journey to Antioch, then with Barnabas to Cyprus. He went, by himself, to the Pentapolis, and onwards to Egypt, travelling from the oases to Upper Egypt and to eastern Alexandria. In Alexandria, he anointed Anianus as bishop, as well as three priests and seven deacons. He returned to the Pentapolis and from there to Rome, where Sts. Peter and Paul were martyred, in 64 A.D. Finally, he returned to Alexandria where he was martyred.

(IV) Approximate time when the gospel was written

St. Mark penned his gospel around 65 A.D. - after St. Matthew's.

(V) The location where the gospel was written

The gospel was most likely written in Rome.

(VI) Main features of St. Mark's gospel

- a- The gospel presents the powerful Christ; it was written to Gentiles most likely, Roman converts.
- b- It is brief - being the shortest of the four gospels.
- c- It speaks clearly of Christ's deeds, miracles, and authority.
- d- It does not contain many quotations from the Old Testament; whenever a Jewish custom is mentioned, it is explained for the Gentile audience's benefit.
- e- The gospel's expressions are brief, yet accurate.
- f- St. Mark's gospel uniquely mentions two miracles: healing of the deaf blind person (Mark 7:31 - 37), and opening the eyes of the blind man of Bethsaida (Mark 8:22 - 26). It also mentions the parable of scattering seed on the ground (Mark 4:26 - 29).
- g- The gospel presents the triumphant, vanquishing, Saviour, and the almighty Christ, humanity's servant.

(VII) The gospel's sections

- a- Beginning of Christ's ministry (1:1 - 13)
- b- Christ's service in Galilee (1:14 - 6:30).
- c- Christ's withdrawal from Galilee (6:31 - 9:50).
- d- Christ's service in Perea "*the region of Judea by the other side of the Jordan*" (10).
- e- Christ's service in Jerusalem (11 - 13).
- f- Christ's Passion and Resurrection (14 - 16).



Chapter 1

Christ starts His ministry

(I) John the Baptist and Christ's baptism (vs. 1 - 11)

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2 As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You."

3 "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.' "

4 John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

5 Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

7 And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.

8 I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

9 It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

10 And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.

11 Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."" (Mark 1:1 - 11)

V. 1:

Both Sts. Matthew and Luke referred to some events related to Christ's human birth; St. John referred to the Divine birth of the Son from the Father. St. Mark, on the other hand, adopted a direct approach: his first words proclaimed that his gospel is the annunciation of Jesus Christ the Son of God. He focused on the start of Christ's ministry, without mentioning any preceding events.

"Jesus" means *"God saves"* or *"Yahweh is salvation."* Transliteration from Hebrew or Aramaic, the name is *"Yeshua"*. The English spelling of the Hebrew *"Yeshua"* is *"Joshua"*. However, when translated from Hebrew into Greek, the original language of the New Testament, *"Yeshua"* becomes *"Iesous"*. In English *"Iesous"* becomes *"Jesus"*. That was the name of our incarnate Lord.

"Christ" means *"the anointed one"* which comes from the Greek *"Christos"*. In the Greek Septuagint, *"Christos"* was used to translate the Hebrew *"Messiah,"* which means *"the one who is anointed"*.

Christ was designated for humanity's salvation and its renewal through redemption on the Cross.

"The Son of God" This is Christ's Divine name - proof of the Divinity of the Word, the Son of God.

Vs. 2 & 3:

"As it is written" - St. Mark is referring to Old Testament prophecies given in Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. Those prophecies referred to John the Baptist as the forerunner for Christ the Saviour, preparing souls for receiving Him. During the Roman era, distinguished personages had to be preceded by forerunners heralding their advent. Analogously, the corrupt world was unprepared for receiving Christ; therefore, God sent John to rebuke, and to warn of the necessity of repentance - thus paving the way for Christ.

"I send My messenger" - This is the expression that Malachi used in his prophecy about John the Baptist.

"The voice of one crying" - That was Isaiah's expression referring to John the Baptist. He was crying about evil, and to evil-doers for repentance.

Vs. 4 & 5:

John's task consisted of calling people to repentance, and calling them to renounce evil. Customarily, Jews circumcized Gentiles converting to Judaism. John changed that custom; he used baptism as a sign and seal for penitents (water symbolized washing and purifying). People responded positively to the call to repentance and came to John in droves to be baptized.

V. 6:

"Camel's hair" - This was a rough, cheap attire used by the poor. Prophets, such as Elijah, used it. It is symbolic of austerity while renouncing the love of money and its attending pleasures.

"A leather belt" - Again, this is similar to Elijah (2 Kings 1:8); it was a wide leather belt worn around the waist, symbolic of struggle and serious work.

"He ate locusts and wild honey" - Locusts are well-known wild, flying, gnawing insects, whose consumption was not prohibited by Jewish law (see Leviticus 11:22). Honey could be found in rock crevices in the wilderness. From the symbolic viewpoint, it may be surmized that locusts were akin to Jews fallen, like insects, in sin, while repentance transforms them to sweet honey pleasing to Christ.

Vs. 7 & 8:

In addition to his powerful call to repentance, John preached and foretold the advent of Christ. Humbly, he emphasized the difference between himself and Christ. He portrayed himself as the slave who bends down to undo his master's sandals' straps. Consequently, our Lord raised John's hand to place it on Christ's head for His baptism. This is a lesson for all of us: humility is the virtue which exalts a person before God. Furthermore, John did not neglect mentioning the difference between the baptism of water - symbolizing purification, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit - founded on Christ.

+ My dear friend, we must never miss the opportunity of learning the following from John's character:

First: He renounced the world's comfort, to inhabit the forbidding wilderness, which symbolizes evil, in order to vanquish evil by his call to repentance.

Second: He was austere in food, drink and attire; consequently, God granted him peace, power and courage - all of which were foreign to the world.

Third: Despite his bold, powerful, words, and despite his unflinching rebuke of evil and evil-doers, the multitudes followed him. Therefore, cling to the truth fearlessly, regardless of the extent of the surrounding evil. It is God Who is working in you - not your own prowess.

Vs. 9 - 11:

At the time that God had determined, Christ went to John by the River Jordan to be baptized on behalf of the sinful humanity - Christ was in no need of repentance or purification.

"Nazareth of Galilee" - Situated in the northern region of Judea, that is where Christ spent all His life, after the return from Egypt, and up till the beginning of His ministry.

"Coming up from the water" - This accentuates the fact that Christ went into the water, then came out of it. That is why baptism in the Coptic Orthodox Church involves full immersion into the water - not merely sprinkling water over the person's head. The expression **"coming up"** refers to being resurrected from sin through baptism.

"He saw the heavens parting" - That was a declaration from heaven, accompanying Christ's baptism, which constituted a clear proclamation, to humanity, of the dogma of the Holy Trinity. Hence, the incarnate Son was coming out of the water, as the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove manifested Himself, and the Father proclaimed His eternal relationship with His Son, and that His Son is the source of His pleasure due to His redemption of mankind. For this reason, the Coptic Orthodox Church considers Theophany to be among the Lord's major feasts. **"Theophany"** is the Divine designation meaning **"Feast of the Divine Manifestation"**, since it was a manifestation of the Holy Trinity.

(II) The wilderness temptation - Christ starts His ministry (vs. 12 - 15)

"Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness.

13 And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him.

14 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."" (Mark 1:12 - 15)

Vs. 12 & 13:

By proceeding to the wilderness, the Lord indicates clearly that a person baptized into Christianity is led by the Spirit. Thus, the Lord proceeded to the wilderness of temptations, in order to teach believers that a spiritual lifestyle is not devoid of temptations. It is incumbent on us to vanquish Satan through Christ, following Christ's example. Despite the existence of beasts - symbolizing demons in their number and types of wars they wage on believers - the Lord's angels serve and protect His struggling children whom He indwells. Hence, the Church is enveloped within God's care and protection which, in turn, shields and comforts us throughout our hardships. It should be noted that St. Mark does not mention details of the spiritual warfare during the forty days. However, in Chapter 4 of each of Matthew's and Luke's gospel, details are given concerning three kinds of warfare, as examples of the warfare that Christ had faced.

Vs. 14 & 15:

"Now after John was put in prison" - This means, "after John the Baptist had been imprisoned by Herod." John had been consistently resisting Herod's wickedness, and rebuking him for it. Following John's imprisonment, Christ started His ministry in Galilee (Nazareth and Capernaum) in Judea's northern region; that was where Christ's upbringing took place. He did not start with Jerusalem in order to avoid confrontations with Herod or the chief priests.

"The time is fulfilled" - This means that the time had come for fulfillment of the prophecies about His incarnation and redemption of mankind (see Genesis 49:10 and Daniel 9:24).

"And the kingdom of God is at hand" - This represents the beginning of the call for salvation, and the clear manifestation of God's glory. Christ came after having been awaited for a long time. It is thus incumbent on mankind to declare acceptance of this calling through repentance and belief on Christ's evangelism.

+ My Lord, God and Saviour, You continue to call me "Your son" to inherit the kingdom of life - Your condition is my steadfastness in a life of repentance.

I entreat You, dear Lord, grant me a penitent heart, steadfast in that repentance, since I do not wish to lose my inheritance....

(III) Calling some disciples - exorcizing the possessed of Capernaum (vs. 16 - 28)

"And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen.

17 Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men."

18 They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

19 When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets.

20 And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.

21 Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught.

22 And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

23 Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out,

24 saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are--the Holy One of God!"

25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!"

26 And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him.

27 Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him."

28 And immediately His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee." (Mark 1:16 - 28)

Vs. 16 - 18:

"The Sea of Galilee" - This is also called *"Lake Tiberias"* or *"Lake Gennesaret."* It represented the eastern border of the Galilean region.

"Simon and Andrew" - Both were fishermen; put differently, they were simple folks, since God does not desire to attribute success of the ministry to people's prowess. Rather, success of the ministry is due to God's action through simple, humble, servants.

Their names bear characteristics qualifying a person to serve God. Hence, *"Simon"* means *"one who hears"* or *"one who hears the Lord."* The name *"Andrew"* means *"man"* or *"manly"* which could be extrapolated to mean *"manliness and spiritual sincerity in the service."*

"Follow Me" - Christ called them to follow Him and to liken themselves unto all His attributes. A faithful and effective servant allows Christ to lead all his life's activities - thus, he takes from Christ first, then delivers to others.

"They immediately left their nets" - They responded promptly to Christ's calling, abandoning everything that would have impeded their following Christ. Such a response implies:

- faith in Christ,
- loving Christ, and
- willingness to abandon everything for Christ's sake.

Vs. 19 & 20:

A similar situation is repeated with James and John. As was the case with Simon and Andrew, they left everything and followed Christ. The statement ***"they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants"***

implies that they were sufficiently rich to hire servants to help them in their fishing trade. The name *"James"* means *"supplant"* or *"replace"* and the name *"John"* means *"God is gracious"* or *"God is merciful."*

+ *My dear friend, do you not feel ashamed when you contemplate those who left everything, having **"chosen that good part?"** (see Luke 10:42)*

What have we abandoned in this world for God's sake? Let us start with the least, and God is capable of compensating us with more.

Vs. 21 & 22:

Capernaum, situated by the sea, was among Galilee's largest towns. The synagogue was the assembly place for Jews to worship, pray, and read some prophecies plus sections of Moses' Pentateuch. Synagogues abounded in all Jewish towns, but there was only one temple in Jerusalem for offering sacrifices.

"He entered the synagogue and taught" - This means that He read some scriptural passages, interpreted them, and delivered sermons. His teaching was novel and authoritative - it affected His audience spiritually, quite unlike the scribes who, in those days, were tasked with teaching and preaching to the people.

"The scribes" - They followed in the footsteps of Ezra, who was the most famous transcriber of the holy books, after the return, to Jerusalem, of some of the Jews from captivity. He authored the Old Testament Book of Ezra.

Vs. 23 - 25:

A man possessed by a demon was among the audience in the synagogue. He could not bear Christ's words, and He recognized Christ's holy Person. He thus cried, ***"I know who You are--the Holy One of God!"*** Hence, *"Your hand alone has the authority to destroy us!"*

"But Jesus rebuked him" - Christ commanded the demon to be silent and to leave that person. This demonstrates our Lord Christ's absolute authority over all demons and the kingdom of evil. This also shows that Christ rejects any testimony from Satan - even if correct. Light and darkness cannot coexist.

Vs. 26 - 28:

As a final desperate attempt, Satan casts the possessed man unconscious on the ground. But he had no choice other than obeying Christ and being exorcized. Exorcizing that demon had a significant effect on the multitude - everyone was amazed, saying, **"What is this? What new doctrine is this?"** Furthermore, they were astonished at Christ's completely novel teaching style. Finally, they were astonished at His authority over evil spirits - again, that was something they had never witnessed before then: they saw a demon being exorcized by one word from Christ's lips.

Naturally, such an event had significant repercussions. The news spread far and wide - not only in Capernaum, but also in all the Galilean villages and the surrounding regions.

(IV) Curing Peter's mother-in-law - evangelizing in the Galilean towns (vs. 29 - 39)

"Now as soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

30 But Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and they told Him about her at once.

31 So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her. And she served them.

32 At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed.

33 And the whole city was gathered together at the door.

34 Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him.

35 Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.

36 And Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him.

37 When they found Him, they said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You."

38 But He said to them, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth."

39 And He was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons." (Mark 1:29 - 39)

V. 29:

"The house of Simon and Andrew" - Christ left the synagogue and proceeded, with the four disciples, to the house of Simon and his brother Andrew, in Capernaum. Some believe that Christ resided in Simon Peter's house whenever He was in Capernaum.

Vs. 30 & 31:

"Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever" - Simon's mother-in-law resided in Simon's house; she was seriously ill. When they told Christ about her condition, He was moved with compassion, and He **"came and took her by the hand and lifted her up."** In this regard, St. Luke says, **"So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them."** (Luke 4:39)

+ *My dear friend, this incident teaches us two principles:*

1. *We should ask Christ not only for our own ailments, but also for the afflictions of others, as Simon's household did for his mother-in-law, and as our Church rites teach us to pray for the sick.*
2. *Upon being healed, Peter's mother-in-law served everyone in acknowledgment of their favour. Thus, thanksgiving to God must be in deed - not only in words.*

Vs. 32 - 34:

"At evening, when the sun had set" - The intent here is to observe the commandment of the Sabbath, by not travelling during that day - the Sabbath ended at sunset. They assembled around the house seeking cures for their afflictions, or simply hoping to witness healing miracles. Many were healed, and many demons were exorcized.

"He did not allow the demons to speak" - Christ did that consistently, since He rejected any testimony from Satan concerning Him (see verse 25).

V. 35:

"A long while before daylight.....a solitary place" - This refers to Sunday at dawn, before anyone had awakened. The purpose of the solitary place is to avoid being seen or heard by anyone.

+ *Christ teaches us, setting before us an example for solitary prayer, where a person is in seclusion with God - speaking to Him and enjoying fellowship with Him.*

My friend, since the sinless Christ prayed, how much more are we in need of standing in God's presence, seeking solace, being laden with sins and anxieties...?

Vs. 36 - 38:

Christ was absent when the disciples woke up. They searched for Him, found Him, and advised Him that many people were seeking him (in Capernaum). Christ, though, would not allow any impediments, since He descended from heaven to evangelize and proclaim the kingdom. Thus, He told the disciples that it was imperative to proceed to the surrounding villages to complete His work.

+ We learn an important lesson from Christ: we must not permit any preoccupations to distract us from our spiritual goals. Impediments abound; dearly beloved, do not let them divert your focus from your spiritual work or your eternity.

V. 39:

Initially, Christ was permitted to enter the Galilean Jewish synagogues. In subsequent visits, though, priests' and Jewish elders' allegations prohibited His evangelizing and teaching in the synagogues. It should be noted that belief on Christ, following acceptance of His teaching in the synagogues, permitted exorcizing of demons. Faith always precedes cure.

(V) Healing the leper (vs. 40 - 45)

"Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, "If You are willing, You can make me clean."

41 Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed."

42 As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.

43 And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once,

44 and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

45 However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places; and they came to Him from every direction."

(Mark 1:40 - 45)

V. 40:

A leper came and humbly worshipped Christ. Despite his hope and need for a cure, he taught us an important lesson, namely, how to ask God for anything: he knelt down to Christ saying, *"If You are willing, You can make me clean."* This translates to: *"Thy will be done."*

+ *Despite our trust in God's ability to answer all our requests, we should consistently place Christ's will above our needs - since only He knows what is right, and what is best for us.*

Vs. 41 & 42:

"Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him..." - St. Mark accentuates to us the extent of Christ's compassion for His creation. Although one word would have been sufficient to heal the leper, Christ ***"touched him."*** That man had been deprived from this feeling, because the law prohibited touching a leper, who was considered "unclean." The man had forgotten the meaning of being touched tenderly and, ***"As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed."***

+ *This teaches us that, whenever we feel an aversion towards a certain person, we should recall Christ compassion towards the leper, and His compassion towards us - sinners.*

Vs. 43 & 44:

"And He strictly warned him" - This does not mean that Christ rebuked him - Christ was compassionate towards him. Rather, Christ obliged him to renounce the sin which caused his illness, and obliged him to proceed to the priest who would, in accordance with the law, declare him cured, and accept the sacrifices stipulated in the law.

It should be noted here that, although the man was fully cured, Christ respected God's law, including the priest's role, given in Leviticus 13:14, namely, upon a leper being healed, he had to be examined by the priest, and he had to offer a thanksgiving sacrifice in the temple.

Analogously, we may project this concept onto the Sacrament of Penance. When we come to Christ, worshipping humbly and confessing our sins, He says, *"You are absolved, but proceed and show yourself to the priest, and offer, there, the sacrifice of your confession."*

"See that you say nothing to anyone" - Christ was instructing him not to boast of being cured, claiming that it was due to his righteousness. Rather, he should remain humble.

+ *My dear brother, let us conceal God's dealings with us, shrouding them in strict confidence, thus guarding ourselves against pride and immodesty. Our guide in this respect should be our spiritual father.*

V. 45:

However, the man was so overwhelmed with joy, that he ***"went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter..."*** Our Lord Christ's fame thus spread in all the surrounding regions. The throngs prevented Christ's entry, and He remained on the outskirts to permit His encounter with everyone.

Chapter 2

Healing the paralytic - Matthew's calling - confrontations with the scribes and Pharisees

(I) The miracle of healing the paralytic (vs. 1 - 12)

"And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house.

2 Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them.

3 Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men.

4 And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.

5 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."

6 And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts,

7 "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

8 But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts?"

9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'?

10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"--He said to the paralytic,

11 I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

12 Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!" (Mark 2:1 - 12)

Vs. 1 & 2:

While evangelizing in Galilee, Christ took Capernaum as His headquarters. He would leave the town and evangelize in neighbouring villages - then return. It is believed by some, that the house mentioned in these verses was St. Peter's. The house became too crowded due to Christ's presence therein - there was no room for more people. Instead of resting for a while after several days' absence, Christ taught the multitude inside the house.

+ *My Lord, for the sake of granting us peace through Your words, Your teaching and Your redemption, You knew no rest throughout Your journey of incarnation. Teach us to labour for others' benefit, tearing down the barriers of our selfishness. Teach us to seize every opportunity for speaking about You to others.*

Vs. 3 & 4:

"A paralytic" - This is a paralyzed person.

"Carried by four men" - This implies that his entire body was paralysed. Interestingly, one can speculate on the *"four men"* who carried him; they may be assumed to symbolize the four gospels, bearing the sinner, the *"paralytic,"* to Christ. They may also be assumed to represent the Church through whose interceding prayers, sinners are borne to repentance. The thronging crowd impeded their attempt to reach Christ; therefore, they went up on the house's roof (which, possibly, was layered with wooden boards and tree branches), broke through it, and lowered down the bed (likely, using ropes) on which the paralytic was lying, right before Christ.

V. 5:

Christ admired their *"faith,"* as well as their strenuous effort - which required both patience and hard work. Then, *"He said to the paralytic, "Son (which means that Christ restored the man's sonship), your sins are forgiven you.""* Thus, Christ granted him his spiritual, ahead of his physical, cure. It is worth noting that in the case of the paralytic of Bethesda (see John 5:5 - 9), Christ granted the physical healing first, since the man was at once desperate and wretched.

+ *This teaches us that due to His love for us, God treats each and every one of us in accordance with our specific needs.*

Vs. 6 & 7:

The scribes were tasked with teaching Jewish law; those of them who were present in the house condemned Christ of blasphemy, for having told the paralytic *"your sins are forgiven you."*

"Blasphemies" - The universal definition of blasphemy is *"any utterance or deed that insults, disrespects, or mocks God or anything sacred (such as God's law.)"* The scribes reasoned that God, and God alone, can forgive sins. Therefore, they considered that Christ had blasphemed by feigning deity.

Vs. 8 & 9:

"Jesus perceived in His Spirit" - This means that Jesus knew through His Divinity - through His omniscience, He surprised them by revealing their thoughts. He asked them a rhetorical question (not expecting an answer):

"Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'?" Christ simply wanted to proclaim that He, and He alone, had the authority to cure both spiritual and physical afflictions - hence, to forgive sins and to heal incurable diseases.

Vs. 10 - 12:

Forgiveness of sins constitutes an intangible, spiritual deed. Consequently, it is conceivable to doubt whether forgiveness has occurred, or the "forgiver" is merely a blaspheming deceiver, who cannot prove his authority. For this reason, our Lord ordered the paralytic to rise up, take up his bed and return to his home - that was the action which the scribes had assumed was more difficult! Therefore Christ, not only performed the healing miracle, but He also presented the scribes with practical proof of His authority to forgive sins. *"Immediately he arose"* - This means that he rose up promptly, without anybody's help, and walked out of the house. Everyone within and without the house marvelled. They praised God and glorified His holy name, confessing that they had neither seen nor heard anything like that, ever, before.

+ *We will never cease seeing the four friends - they are the perfect example of selfless service, and sacrifice for others.*

My friend, your church service may be irregular; but, at the very least, do you take care to bring your household to Christ? Or, do you bring Christ to them through words, deeds, prayers, or reading the holy Bible with them?

Dearly beloved, be vigilant: failing to plant Christ within them, will lead to the world sowing in them its poisons.

(II) Matthew's (Levi's) calling - Matthew's feast (vs. 13 - 17)

13 Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them.

14 As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him.

15 Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi's house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him.

16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?"

17 When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Mark 2:13 - 17)

Vs. 13 & 14:

Following that miracle, Christ exited the house, and *"went out again by the sea,"* fleeing people's praise. When the multitudes followed Him, He resumed his teaching. As He walked along, He encountered St. Matthew who, like many other Jews, had two names, one of them being *"Levi the son of Alphaeus."* He was seated at the tax office, where he collected taxes, harshly, from the Jews. The entire Jewish nation hated tax collectors (publicans) for two reasons: they were harsh, and they worked for the benefit of the Roman colonizers. Matthew responded positively immediately to Christ's calling: he left what he was doing and, *"arose and followed Him."* + *My God, how great is Your heart! You call the sinners and publicans to enjoy life with You and to serve Your all-holy name. The difference is the extent of our own preparedness to abandon whatever hinders us from being with, and from serving, You. Grant, Dear Lord, that we assign for You a time and place, and abandon the "tax office."*

Vs. 15 - 17:

Matthew's amazement and disbelief at the Lord's calling, prompted him to prepare a feast in his home, to which he invited his friends, publicans and others, so that they may become acquainted with Christ. The *"scribes and Pharisees,"* though, who had been in the process of criticizing Christ, were annoyed by that gathering. Therefore, they turned to the Lord's disciples and remarked, *"How is it that He (your Teacher) eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners (with such unclean people)?"*

Our Lord, on the other hand, having heard this remark, responded, emphasizing the following spiritual facts:

1. Christ, and Christ alone, is the healing Physician for all our spiritual afflictions - our sins.
2. God does not hate sinners. Rather, He is prepared to talk to them for the purpose of saving their souls.
3. Those who sense their spiritual ailments, are the ones who receive the cure, repentance and forgiveness. On the other hand, the proud who feel they know best, will not derive any benefit from Christ.

(III) Christ's responses to the Pharisees' argumentations (vs. 18 - 28)

18 The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"

19 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast.

20 But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from

them, and then they will fast in those days.

21 No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse.

22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins."

23 Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain.

24 And the Pharisees said to Him, "Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

25 But He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him:

26 how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat, except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?"

27 And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

28 Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath." (Mark 2:18 - 28)

V. 18:

While John's disciples were driven by spiritual zeal, the Pharisees were motivated by indignation. Both groups observed the Jewish fasts, and both questioned Christ, either reproachfully or confrontationally, about the reason for Christ's disciples' failure to observe the fasts. Subsequent verses (19 - 22) explain Christ's response through three similitudes: the wedding, the cloth, and the wineskins - each with a specific aim (see also Matthew 9:14 - 17).

Vs. 19 & 20:

The wedding: Christ did not negate the idea of fasting; rather, He explained that it was a means for presence with Him in His wedding. Being the Groom amidst His disciples during His incarnation, obviated the need for fasting during the wedding. However, following His ascension, it would be incumbent on them to fast.

V. 21:

The cloth: Through this similitude, Christ intended to accentuate the difference between the literal, superficial, application of Jewish laws - hence, "*an old garment*" - and spiritual fasts, hence, "*unshrunk cloth.*" The latter refers to the new heart. It is impossible for both to co-exist, since "*the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse.*"

V. 22:

The wineskins: This third similitude means that new observances require a new spiritual nature. It is impossible for someone who had spent their entire life practising superficial fasting, to either understand or tolerate the requirements of spiritual fasting.

"New wine" - This refers to the new spiritual observances.

"Old wineskins" - This is in reference to a person prior to his renewed nature.

"New wineskins" - This refers to the new spiritual nature acquired through baptism and the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, storing new wine, which expands with time, in old, already expanded, wineskins, will result in the wineskins' ruin, and spillage of the wine.

From the symbolic standpoint, we can say that those three similitudes refer to the New Testament's effect on the Old Testament: a renewed life through the Christian Faith.

+ *Dearly beloved, to sum up, let us conduct a self-examination, by asking ourselves a specific question: How do we fast and how do we pray? God requires spiritual fasting, prayer and worship - rather than practising them through habits or customs. In the Old Testament, fasting constituted deprivation of the body; in the New Testament, it is liberation of the spirit. Have you examined yourself accordingly and answered??*

Vs. 23 & 24:

The Pharisees challenged the disciples with a new issue. As the disciples walked through the fields, they plucked the heads of grain to eat the grain and satisfy their hunger. Despite the fact that Jewish law permitted such action for any hungry person passing through a field (see Leviticus 19:10), and despite the fact that the process of eating on the Sabbath was not prohibited, the Pharisees criticized the act of plucking the heads of grain. They considered it "work" that should not be done on the Sabbath.

Vs. 25 & 26:

Our Lord noticed that the Pharisees were lurking to ensnare the disciples. He thus introduced His response by a rebuke: *"Have you never read...."* Put differently, *"How can you possibly feign to be knowledgeable, when you do not know the scriptures??"* He then reminded them of what David and his men had done (see 1 Samuel 21:1 - 6) when, due to their extreme hunger during their flight from Saul, they entered the tabernacle and ate of the showbread (holy bread), which only priests were permitted to eat.

V. 27:

At this point, Christ emphasized the essence of His teaching: when God commanded observance of the Sabbath, the "Sabbath" was not the target - rather, the intent was man's rest during the Sabbath. Which of the two, then, is more significant to God - the day, or man?? In this way, Christ corrected their narrow-minded interpretation and practice of God's commandments, without appreciating God's intent.

V. 28:

In this verse, Christ boldly and clearly proclaims Himself as God, Lord of the Sabbath, and Creator of time.....The Pharisees failed to understand what He meant.

"The Son of Man" - Our Lord Christ used this expression frequently, referring to Himself, and to His incarnation and humanity.

Chapter 3

Healing the man with the withered hand - choosing the disciples - resistance by some

(I) Healing the man with the withered hand (vs. 1 - 6)

"And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand.

2 So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him.

3 And He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Step forward."

4 Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent.

5 And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.

6 Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him." (Mark 3:1 - 6)

Vs. 1 & 2:

This synagogue was in one of Galilee's towns, in which evangelizing continued. As was His wont, our Lord entered the synagogue to teach. A man with a withered hand (his right hand, according to Luke 6:6) was among the audience. Everybody watched Christ closely, especially His enemies, to see if He would heal that man on the Sabbath, thus "contravening" the law; they would then complain about His having performed that miracle!!

Vs. 3 & 4:

Christ told the man to *"Step forward."* Likely, either to induce empathetic feelings of mercy and pity towards him from the attendees, or to enable everyone to witness God's work (or both).

"Is it lawful on the Sabbath" - Christ was fully aware of His enemies' lying in wait for Him; for this reason, and prior to curing the man, He asked them a question both to embarrass them and to rebuke them for their hardness of heart, namely, whether it was lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil. Everyone was dumbfounded, not knowing what to say....

V. 5:

They failed to answer Christ because of the hardness of their hearts which, in turn, accentuated their wickedness, thus provoking the Lord's holy anger.

Christ then ordered the man to stretch forth his hand - which he did, and he was healed instantly.

It should be noted that Christ was angered by the heart's hardness; not only was His anger devoid of evil, but it was also mixed with sorrow for the sinners - Christ did not intend to harm any of them through His anger.

+ *Instead of being angry, try to find solutions; do not make matters worse and disillusion people.*

V. 6:

"The Herodians" - That was a Jewish political party affiliated with Herod the Great, and loyal to the Roman emperor; they aspired to rule. Much enmity existed between them and the Pharisees. Nevertheless, they joined forces against Christ aiming to rid themselves of Him - though, with different motives. The object of their plotting reveals their hearts' wickedness.

+ *Customarily, the right hand symbolizes man's power. Sin, though, reduces power to weakness, rendering us in a state of paralysis and impotence. Therefore, instruct me, O Lord, to stretch forth my hand and liberate myself from the shackles of weakness. Then, through Your all-holy name, my shame and weakness will be transformed to pride, power and triumph.*

(II) The multitudes follow Christ - Christ heals many (vs. 7 - 12)

7 But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him, and from Judea

8 and Jerusalem and Idumea and beyond the Jordan; and those from Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they heard how many things He was doing, came to Him.

9 So He told His disciples that a small boat should be kept ready for Him because of the multitude, lest they should crush Him.

10 For He healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about Him to touch Him.

11 And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, "You are the Son of God."

12 But He sternly warned them that they should not make Him known.

Vs. 7 & 8:

As an indication of Christ's ubiquitous spread of fame due to His miracles and teaching, St. Mark states that Christ's followers came from all regions; hence:

"Galilee"

That was the northern area where Christ evangelized.

"Judea"

That was the southern region, whose capital was Jerusalem.

"Jerusalem"

This implies that Christ's followers came also from the the religious capital, not merely the surrounding villages.

"Idumea"

This is the Greek name for "Edom" which is the land where Esau had settled - situated in the southernmost part of the land.

"Beyond the Jordan"

This is in reference to the region east of the River Jordan.

"Tyre and Sidon"

Those were beyond Judea - this means that Christ's followers included Gentiles besides Jews.

Christ's followers were driven by different motives: some were curious, others sought a cure from their afflictions, some were eager to hear His aphorisms, some desired to know the truth and, finally, some sought reasons for complaints against Him.

Vs. 9 & 10:

As the crowds increased, and the sick thronged trying to touch Christ seeking to be cured, the Lord told His disciples to prepare a small boat for Him, ***"because of the multitude, lest they should crush Him."*** Furthermore, the boat made it easier for Him address the multitude, as He did on other occasions.

Vs. 11 & 12:

The demon-possessed submitted to Christ, and as the evil spirits were exorcized, they screamed at His Divine authority. Christ, on the other hand, forbade them to utter His name, since He rejected the wicked's testimony.

(III) Choosing the twelve disciples (vs. 13 - 19)

13 And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him.

14 Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach,

15 and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons:

16 Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter;

17 James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, "Sons of Thunder";

18 Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananite;

19 and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. And they went into a house.

Vs. 13 - 15:

(This section should be read in conjunction with the interpretations of Matthew 10:1 - 4 and Luke 6:13).

St. Luke clarifies, in Luke 6:13, that our Lord Christ spent the night preceding His selection of His disciples, in prayer. This teaches us that choosing servants is a significant responsibility, which should only be undertaken following prayers seeking God's guidance.

"And called to Him those He Himself wanted" - This accentuates the fact that calling a servant constitutes a Divine calling, which is not in accordance with any human intent. God chooses His servants through His Church and its prayers.

"Then He appointed twelve" - Out of a large number of followers, our Lord selected twelve disciples, **"that they might be with Him,"** accompanying Him constantly. They would learn from Him, observe Him, and witness to the entire world through evangelizing.

"And to have power" - Christ directly granted them the power to heal the sick and to exorcize demons. He even granted them the authority to forgive sins, as mentioned in John 20:23.

Vs. 16 & 17:

Our Lord changed the names of some of His disciples, as He had done antecedently in the Old Testament - hence, "Abram and Sarai" became "Abraham and Sarah" (see Genesis 17:5 & 15). A person's name could bear significance throughout his life, since some names may be indicative of a person's role in the service. Thus, "Simon" became "Peter" which means the "rock of faith." Also, the Lord gave James the son of Zebedee, and John, the name "Boanerges," which is Aramaic for "sons of thunder," reflecting spiritual strength akin to celestials'.

Vs. 18 & 19:

The following are the names of the rest of the disciples and their meanings:

"Andrew" He was a fisherman like his brother Peter. His name means "manly" - possibly "strong, brave, or warrior."

"Philip" He was born in Bethsaida. He is not the deacon mentioned in Acts 6:5. His name, derived from Greek, means "friend, or lover."

"Bartholomew" He, like many other Jews, had a second name "Nathanael." His name, derived from Aramaic, means "son of furrows, or son of Ptolemy." The Hebrew name "Nathanael" is derived from Greek, meaning "gift of God."

"Matthew" His name initially was Levi. His name derived from Hebrew means "gift of God."

"Thomas" His name, derived from Aramaic, means "twin, or look-alike." He was known for being inquisitive, and a doubter.

"James the son of Alphaeus" He authored the catholic epistle of James. He is also known as "James the Less (Mark 15:40)." He is designated as "James the son of Alphaeus" to differentiate him from James the son of Zebedee the elder. His name means "supplanter, or one who follows."

"Thaddaeus" He was the brother of James the Less. He was also known as "Labbaeus" or "Judas not Iscariot." His name means "courageous heart."

"Simon the Cananite" He was also known as "Simon the Zealot." The word "Cananite" means "Zealot" when interpreted in Greek. Prior to his discipleship, he had belonged to a Jewish political group called "the Zealots."

"Judas Iscariot" His name is of Greek origin meaning "praised." "Iscariot" means that he hailed from the village of Kerioth.

"Who also betrayed Him" - It is indeed amazing, that God would select a person who, eventually, deviates from the honour Divinely bestowed upon him, and ends in perdition!

+ *My dear brother, let us shun vain boastfulness; never say "God has chosen me thus my salvation is assured." Although God, through His grace, has called us to sonship through baptism, it is incumbent on us to remain steadfast, and to resist the world's lusts and love of money, which led that disciple to perdition.*

"And they went into a house" - Although the Bible did not mention whose house it was, likely, it could have been Peter's.

(IV) The Jews' blasphemies and Christ's response (vs. 20 - 30)

20 Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread.

21 But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind."

22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebub," and, "By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons."

23 So He called them to Himself and said to them in parables: "How can Satan cast out Satan?"

24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.

25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

26 And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end.

27 No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house.

28 "Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter;

***29 but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation"--
30 because they said, "He has an unclean spirit."***

Vs. 20 & 21:

Once inside the house, the crowds around Christ were so intense, and the disciples were so preoccupied with organization, that there was no chance to consider food. Some of Christ's relatives came from Nazareth to Capernaum, to be close to Him; they had heard rumours about Him, and thought His approach was an extremist's - even the closest people to Christ appreciated the truth about Him after some time. In this regard, we recall Christ's assertion, that Satan is capable of raising enemies for a person from his own household (Matthew 10:36).

V. 22:

The scribes, whose task was transcribing and teaching the scriptures, came from Jerusalem, the center of worship, in order to level novel accusations against Christ, namely, that He performed miracles through the power of the demons' ruler. That was because they were incapable of denying the Lord's miracles, and the Lord's power and authority over everything. They were akin to people whose thoughts had plummeted from heavenly heights to terrestrial filth.

"Beelzebub" - This is one of Satan's titles and means "Lord of the flies." The title **"ruler of the demons"** was ascribed to Beelzebub since that demon was the most significant idol in paganism. Beelzebub also bears the label "ruler of unclean spirits" which possess some people.

Vs. 23 - 26:

These four verses convey one idea, namely, our Lord Christ's proof that the allegations against Him were false. He used examples that simple-minded people could understand - thus mitigating potential confusion or perplexity arising from the priests' arguments.

"So He called them to Himself and said to them" - Christ pointed out the impossibility of one demon exorcizing another. There is a single demons' kingdom governed by one system - how, then, could it split, with one part resisting the other?? Analogously, a household cannot survive, if schisms developed therein. Therefore, Satan cunningly preserves his kingdom, knowing that his kingdom's demise is assured, if he resisted his own..

V. 27:

Christ resumes His discussion, clarifying the gross incorrectness of their allegation, that He was Satan's accomplice. Through His unlimited power, He broke into Satan's powerful kingdom, binding him outside, in order to liberate people from his authority. How, then, could He possibly resort to the "*ruler of the demons*" to exorcize demons?!

V. 28 & 29:

Our Lord transitions to another point, namely, His response to the scribes clarifying the extent of evil's depth to which they had sunk, and the punishment incurred through such evil (see the interpretation of Matthew 12:31 & 32). He said that God would forgive, through repentance, any sin or transgression committed by man. However, blasphemies against the Holy Spirit, Who propels man to repentance, will remain eternally unforgiven; thus, the scribes were destined to eternal perdition, due to their rejection of the very Spirit of God, and their refusal to repent.

V. 30:

Naturally, Christ is supported by the Holy Spirit, since the Bible tells us, "*Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness*" (Mark 1:12) and, "*Jesus was led up by the Spirit.*" (Matthew 4:1 and Luke 4:1) Consequently, by alleging that Christ was possessed by an unclean spirit, the scribes had implicitly rejected God and the action of repentance, they had blasphemed against the Holy Spirit, and they had sealed their fate of eternal perdition (see verse 29).

(V) The spiritual relationship (vs. 31 - 35)

31 Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him.

32 And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You."

33 But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?"

34 And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!"

35 For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

Vs. 31 & 32:

The holy virgin St. Mary had arrived from Galilee accompanied by our Lord's biological cousins. It should be noted that, in the Levant as well as in Upper Egypt, people were/are accustomed to refer to first cousins as "brothers."

The house was so crowded that St. Mary and her companions were unable to enter. Thus, they sent Christ a verbal message, via some of the attendees standing closer to Him, that they wanted to see Him.

Vs. 33 - 35:

In these verses, our Lord Christ shifts our focus from limited biological relationships, on the one hand, to unlimited spiritual relationships, on the other. In His response, Christ, naturally, had no intention of neglecting His biological relatives - hence, His clear, often-quoted two Old (and New) Testament commandments: "***Honor your father and your mother***" (Exodus 20:12 and Ephesians 6:2), and "***You shall love your neighbor as yourself***" (Leviticus 19:18 and James 2:8). We should also remember His instruction to St. John the beloved, to take care of St. Mary, Christ's mother, as they stood at the foot of the Cross.

The intended message here, is that a lifestyle of obedience to God and His commandments, breeds spiritual relationships among church members, which exceed biological relationships, and which render us true relatives of God. Furthermore, it is believed that, in this regard, St. John Chrysostom said: "*By evangelizing, a person becomes a mother to Christ, since evangelizing gives birth to the Lord in the hearts of listeners.*"

+ *Dear God, great indeed is the grace You have bestowed on me, by pointing to me, saying, "Behold, My brother!" Grant that I always sit beneath Your feet, as they did in that day, to learn and grow in Your knowledge, and to struggle with all my might, to fulfill Your will, and to live through Your commandments, in order to become worthy of the title You attributed to me....*

Chapter 4

Parable of the sower - the mustard seed - the storm at sea

(I) Parable of the sower (vs. 1 - 20)

"And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea.

2 Then He taught them many things by parables, and said to them in His teaching:

3 "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow.

4 And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it.

5 Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth.

6 But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away.

7 And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop.

8 But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."

9 And He said to them, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

10 But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable.

11 And He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables,

12 so that 'Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them.' "

13 And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"

14 The sower sows the word.

15 And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown.

When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.

16 These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness;

17 and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble.

18 Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word,

19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

20 But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."'' (Mark 4:1 - 20)

(It should be noted that brevity is applied here, since this parable was explained in Matthew 13:1 - 23)

Vs. 1 & 2:

"By the sea" - The "sea" is the Sea of Galilee - Christ taught by the sea several times. He used one of the fishing boats for that purpose, whenever the multitudes swelled in size - He would sit in the boat teaching, facing the multitude. The boat amidst the salty sea is analogous to the Church amidst the turbulent world, and ever-thirsty people who drink its bitterness - the Church is our source of knowledge, solace and deliverance.

"He taught them many things by parables" - Christ used parables frequently to teach. Sometimes, He also taught directly, as was the case in the Sermon on the Mount. In the current case, He used a parable to illustrate, and facilitate understanding, of His meaning, in a fashion compatible with the multitude's surroundings and intellectual level.

Vs. 3 & 4:

The *"sower"* is God. Analogously, the *"sower"* is every honest servant, whom God commissions to spread (sow) His word.

"Went out" - This refers to His descent and incarnation, in order to evangelize (sow His seeds) and redeem mankind. *"As he sowed....some seed fell by the wayside (and produced no crop).....the birds of the air came and devoured it."*

It should be noted that our Lord's explanation of this parable to His disciples is given in verses 14 - 20.

Vs. 5 & 6:

Some other seeds fell on rocky terrain. The roots were incapable of penetrating the stony ground where they did not have much earth. The plant sprang up rapidly, and was scorched by the sun, since the roots had neither water nor nutrition.

Vs. 7 & 8:

Other seeds fell on ground which, although fertile, was overgrown with bad weeds and thorns, which deprived the roots of air and sunshine, causing them to wither and die.

Finally, some seeds *"fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred."*

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Our Lord used this expression several times. It is intended to alert the audience to heed, understand, and meditate on, the words they were hearing - not only in the literal, but also in the more profound, spiritual, sense.

+ *Dear God, You took great care to ensure that Your words affected each person and yielded the desired fruit. For this reason, You addressed each person at their level of comprehension. But....what should I do? Why do I not talk to others about You, and why do I not relay Your message to them, given that Your words impart joy and solace - leading to eternal life??*

+ *Grant, Dear Lord, that I speak Your words instead of mine, and that Your wisdom takes precedence over my understanding. Solace would thus be mine as well as others'.*

Vs. 10 & 11:

After the multitude's dispersal and, being alone with Christ, the twelve, along with a few other followers asked Him about the parable's meaning. He was pleased at their desire to fathom the parable's spiritual meaning.

"To you it has been given" - God bestows upon His faithful servants grace and a special talent to understand the subtle spiritual and symbolic meanings; having been satiated with them, they would explain them to others in accordance with their respective levels of comprehension.

V. 12:

Here, our Lord is reminding His disciples of Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 6:9 & 10), concerning the people's rejection of the prophet's teaching. Put differently, some people who hear and see neither believe nor understand; in fact, many reject and resist, thus sentencing themselves to unworthiness of forgiveness of their sins.

Vs. 13 & 14:

Christ started explaining the parable, pointing out that it was simpler than others. He said that God is the Sower, Who sows His word in the hearts of humans, and Who is capable of changing the nature of those willing to submit to such a change.

V. 15:

"The wayside" - This refers to the haughty. Usually, roads (waysides by fields) are higher in elevation than surrounding fields, with no separating walls; such roads' surfaces are hardened by the constant passage of pedestrians. This is analogous to those who permit evil thoughts to dominate them, thus hardening their hearts, leading to rejection of the word of God. They become easy prey for Satan who seizes the word, and renders it fruitless.

+ *Dear God, grant that I become a lowly field, rather than a proud road - since Your word knows solely a humble heart, where it can be fruitful.*

Vs. 16 & 17:

"Stony ground" - This refers to unploughed terrain, covered by a thin layer of soil, concealing hard rock underneath; it is similar to hypocritical hearts, feigning mercy, while harbouring cruelty. This could also refer to idolatry - hence worshipping stone idols. The plough, which breaks up the earth preparing it for planting, could symbolize the Cross, which tempers hearts, preparing them for accepting the word of God. Even if unprepared hearts were initially receptive to the word of God, that initial elation would be short-lived, and they would never withstand temptations, hardships or persecution.

Vs. 18 & 19:

"Thorns" - They refer to worldly anxieties and vain material preoccupations, which breed worries, and choke the word of God. Wealth may also lead to conceit. St. Clement of Alexandria said, in this context, *"Wealth should not be blamed - rather, its abuse."*

V. 20:

The *"good ground"* refers to those who heed the word of God, and apply it, yielding fruit proportional in abundance to each person's capabilities. It represents low-lying land (humble), well-ploughed (tempered by the Cross), exposed to the sun (being constantly in Christ's presence), and watered (by the Holy Spirit and Christ's revered blood.)

This parable imparts the following impressions:

1. The word of God is available to all. The extent of positive response, or rejection, is entirely up to each person.
2. There are various levels of satiation and meditation on the word of God (the disciples). There is also a level of acceptance and understanding (the multitude). All levels are acceptable.

3. It is worth noting that there were three types of "bad" ground as well as three levels of "good" ground (Matthew 25:1 - 13 also mentions five "foolish" and five "wise" virgins.) This means that God's grace and calling are the same for all. However, *dearly beloved, what is your reaction??*

(II) The call to evangelize (vs. 21 - 25)

"Also He said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand?"

22 For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light.

23 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

24 Then He said to them, "Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given.

25 For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.'" (Mark 4:21 - 25)

V. 21:

Having explained the parable to His disciples, Christ asked them a rhetorical question, aiming to stimulate seriousness in their evangelism.

"Is a lamp brought" - The *"lamp"* refers to Christ's words, interpretations and teaching, which enlightened the disciples' minds and hearts. As they had become enlightened, it was incumbent on them to enlighten the hearts of others, using the same words. We are also tasked with discharging this responsibility; we should not be diverted by the world's preoccupations, symbolized by the *"basket,"* which hide the word of God. Equally, we should not succumb to laziness, lying down, and neglecting God's work. We are obliged to raise God's word *"on a lampstand"* in order to illuminate the whole world with Christ's teaching.

The *"lampstand"* also symbolizes the Church, shining as a beacon amidst the world's gloom - the Church is responsible for spreading Christ's teaching. Church spires confirm this meaning.

Vs. 22 & 23:

Christ meant *"Everything I explained to you in private, concerning the kingdom's mysteries, must not be concealed - rather, it is your responsibility to proclaim and teach it."* Our Lord considered that issue to be sufficiently important to warrant repeating what He had told the multitudes (see verse 9), namely, *"If anyone has (or, "He who has") ears to hear, let him hear."*

Vs. 24 & 25:

Christ asked His disciples to understand the following fact: *"God deals justly with respect to His servants' love and toil."*

Put differently, those who labour for the sake of evangelizing and spreading the kingdom, will be amply rewarded, and God will grant them might on earth to persevere in their work. On the other hand, those who shun work, will be deprived even of their natural talents which they had not utilized on earth - and they will be punished in eternity for their shortcomings.

(III) Parables of the crops and the mustard seed (vs. 26 - 34)

"And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground,

27 and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how.

28 For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head.

29 But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

30 Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it?

31 It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth;

32 but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade."

33 And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it.

34 But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples." (Mark 4:26 - 34)

V. 26:

"The kingdom of God" - There is a difference between the two expressions *"The kingdom of God"* and *"The kingdom of heaven."* The latter refers to eternity, and the aftermath of Christ's Second Coming. The former consists of two elements:

1. Faith's spread throughout the world, and God's reign over people's hearts.

2. God's work within us for the sake of faith's growth within us (see Chapter 1:14 & 15).

"A man" - This refers to Christ Himself, or to the faithful servant who transmits the words of Christ.

"Seed" - This refers to God's words, teachings and commandments.

"The ground" - This refers to mankind in general or to a person's heart.

V. 27:

"The seed should sprout and grow" - This is a clear reference to the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in people. The Holy Spirit is responsible for the spiritual growth in the life of each one of us. Thus, the seed grows in the heart, and the person responds to it.

"He himself does not know how" - Naturally, this clause applies to the servant, who planted God's word in people's hearts, since the responsibility for growth and bearing fruit is God's - not the servant's. In this respect, St. Paul said: **"So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase."** (1 Corinthians 3:7)

V. 28:

"For the earth yields crops by itself" - This refers to man's new nature after baptism: hence, it is responsive to God's work and tends to do good. Our Lord Christ clarifies that spiritual growth in a person's life is gradual - it is neither radical nor instantaneous. It starts as a simple plant (a **"blade"**) - hence, during the early stages of repentance. Then it develops into a **"head"** (good deeds) and, finally, it becomes **"full grain,"** namely, a firm, ripe, fruit. At that point, it becomes a source of spiritual nourishment for others.

V. 29:

"But when the grain ripens" - This refers to the spread of the kingdom of God in people's hearts.

"The sickle" - This is a sharp farming implement used in harvesting.

The overall meaning:

In the fullness of time, and at the end of the age, God will send His reaper angels (Matthew 13:39) to harvest that fruit. People will be transported to heaven and will be held accountable for their deeds.

+ *My Dear God, render me "good ground," receptive to Your words, and submissive to Your Holy Spirit. I do desire to grow, and I have nothing but Your action in my life which I sorely need. Edify Your words within me, let my heart be dominated by Your love, strengthen my desire to serve You, and make me worthy of Your heavenly kingdom at Your Second Coming.*

V. 30:

Our Lord posed another question, not eliciting a response, rather, accentuating His care to make us understand factual faith principles, using simple examples, suitable for human comprehension.

Vs. 31 & 32:

Our Lord's current and previous discourses represent a continuum - hence, growth of God's work in a person's life, starting as a small "*mustard seed*" (the smallest among seeds), until, through God's care, it becomes a great tree with countless branches, symbolizing various spiritual virtues, offering refuge and comfort to souls having no recourse.

+ Is not this a precise depiction of God's Church, that appears weak in the world's view? However, it is an oasis of solace to all the weary and lost souls of this world....My dear brother, till when will you remain estranged from your Church? Come hither, and take refuge, you will then find rest, water, pasture and, above all, your Christ eagerly waiting to foster your growth.

Vs. 33 & 34:

Our Lord's teaching in similitudes and parables was proportional to His audience's ability to absorb and understand. However, "*He explained all things to His disciples*" privately.

(IV) The storm at sea (vs. 35 - 41)

"On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side."

36 Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him.

37 And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling.

38 But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

39 Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.

40 But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"

41 And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"" (Mark 4:35 - 41)

Vs. 35 & 36:

On the day that Christ spoke the parables mentioned above, He asked His disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee, over to the eastern side of the Jordan. Accordingly, the disciples dismissed the multitude, and took the Lord, without any preparations, "*in the boat as He was.*" The boat symbolizes the Church, that consistently embodies Christ, surrounded by His disciples - hence, the Church's fathers and servants.

Vs. 37 & 38:

Contrary winds started blowing - symbolizing the trials and adversities to which the Church and souls are exposed in the world. The high waves buffeting the boat refer to worldly lusts with which Satan tries to fill the soul. Throughout this entire experience, Christ never abandoned His boat (the Church), rather, He was testing its servants' faith during the hardship. Their weakness was thus revealed coupled with their hasty resorting to Him. Therefore, "*they awoke Him,*" and reproached Him for neglecting them - instead of humbly asking Him to save them, trusting His power.

V. 39:

"He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea..." - Christ spoke to the wind and sea with the authority of a Master addressing His slaves. He ordered them to *"be still;"* a great calm ensued instantaneously.

V. 40 & 41:

Christ rebuked His disciples not only for their lack of faith when faced with hardships, but also for their improper way of addressing Him. Great fear filled their hearts after the calm, and they wondered amongst themselves about Christ's nature. They also acquired a new spiritual experience about Christ's ability - such that even the wind, sea and nature obey Him.

+ *We learn much from this miracle:*

- 1. Christ's presence within the Church does not prevent trials or persecutions.*
- 2. The general purpose of hardships is testing our faith, and our trust in God's work.*
- 3. God permits trials to befall us, so that we may learn our weaknesses, resort to Him, and let Him deliver and support us.*
- 4. Regardless of our closeness to our heavenly Father, we must never bypass respect for His holy and awesome name, and His fear in our hearts.*

Chapter 5

Healing the possessed - healing the woman with the flow of blood - raising Jairus' daughter

(I) Healing the possessed of the Gadarenes (vs. 1 - 20)

"Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes.

2 And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,

3 who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains,

4 because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him.

5 And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.

6 When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him.

7 And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me."

8 For He said to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!"

9 Then He asked him, "What is your name?" And he answered, saying, "My name is Legion; for we are many."

10 Also he begged Him earnestly that He would not send them out of the country.

11 Now a large herd of swine was feeding there near the mountains.

12 So all the demons begged Him, saying, "Send us to the swine, that we may enter them."

13 And at once Jesus gave them permission. Then the unclean spirits went out and entered the swine (there were about two thousand); and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and drowned in the sea.

14 So those who fed the swine fled, and they told it in the city and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that had happened.

15 Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid.

16 And those who saw it told them how it happened to him who had been demon-possessed, and about the swine.

17 Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region.

18 And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him.

19 However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you,

and how He has had compassion on you."

20 And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled." (Mark 5:1 - 20)

Vs. 1 & 2:

An explanation of this miracle is given in Matthew 8:28 - 34. The following should be noted:

1. ***"The country of the Gadarenes"*** - Situated east of the Jordan, it was also known by the name "country of Girgesenes." It was a commercial hub, occupied mainly by Greeks.
2. ***"A man with an unclean spirit"*** - Upon the Lord's arrival to the eastern shores of the Sea of Galilee, He was met by two possessed men, who lived in the graveyard. St. Mark mentioned one of them - likely, the most violent. St. Mark also noted that a demon fully controlled that man's actions.

Vs. 3 - 5:

"Who had his dwelling among the tombs" - A link is noted, between Satan and ***"the tombs."*** Satan is consistently associated with death and uncleanness - his kingdom's trademarks. These verses also address Satan's power and authority over that man's soul - to the extent that no one was capable of liberating that soul from Satan's clutches, and no one could subjugate the demon.

"And always, day and night" - This is a depiction of the constant state of torment to which the soul is subjected, by yielding to lusts, thereby submitting to Satan's authority. Rather than experiencing any reprieve, it augments its torture through sin (***"stones."***)

Vs. 6 & 7:

Despite his significant affliction, the man rushed towards Christ, ***"and worshipped Him."*** At that point the demon cried confessing Christ's Divinity, and the truth that He was the Son of God. The demon also confessed Christ's absolute authority in tormenting him eternally.

Vs. 8 & 9:

Christ ordered the demon to leave the man. He asked the demon for his name - not because He did not know it, rather, to reveal to us the extent of the demon's cruelty in possessing a person's soul. Simultaneously, Christ demonstrated His power over Satan's entire kingdom of demons, regardless of their number.

Vs. 10 - 12:

"He begged Him earnestly" - Despite Satan's admission to Christ's authority over him, he was too pride to admit defeat; for this reason he asked Christ ***"that He would not send them out of the country."*** In other words, the demons asked to remain in that region. On the other hand, Satan knew that Christ would most certainly exorcize him; therefore, he asked to be permitted to enter the herd of swine (according to Mosaic law, swine were unclean animals).

V. 13:

"Jesus gave them permission" - This accentuates the fact that, no matter how strong Satan may be, he is incapable of doing anything without God's permission.

Why did Christ grant the demons permission??

We may indeed wonder, why did Christ permit them to enter the swine herd, numbering about two thousand, causing them all to perish in the sea?? Christ did that by way of chastisement of the swine owners, who raised swine, defying God's commandment - they sold them at low prices, thus tempting people to buy them. Therefore, Christ's sentencing was just - He punished those who had contravened the law and offended people.

Vs. 14 - 17:

The terrified herdsman who had been minding the swine rushed to the owners and informed everyone about what had transpired. People from the entire region went out to see for themselves and verify the story. Upon arrival at the place where Christ was, they beheld the man, who had been possessed, in a form they had never seen previously: he was calm, seated, and sane. Those who witnessed, told the story to those who had not. The swine owners, though, for whom the swine were more valuable than humans, and who were quite sore at the loss of their herd, asked the Lord to leave their region!

Vs. 18 - 20:

In recognition of the great favour our Lord rendered him, as well as in sincere reflection of his desire, the man who had just been healed wished to follow Christ and accompany Him on the boat. Our Lord, though, prevented him, and charged him with two tasks:

a- proceed to his household so that they may rejoice in his safe return, and

b- witness for God and His work in curing him.

The man complied with Christ's instructions and informed everyone of what Christ had done for him.

"Decapolis" - Those were the ten towns in the region east of the Sea of Galilee - the Gadarenes was one of them. See also the interpretation of Matthew 4:24 & 25.

+ That man teaches us a significant lesson, namely, we must consistently submit to God's will, rather than insisting on our own judgment. We certainly may present our wishes to our heavenly Father - but the choice must be His. The man had a blessed desire, namely, being with Christ - but Christ charged him with another service - which he accepted joyfully, serving earnestly. May this be a lesson to us: let our lives be led by the wisdom and choices of our God - rather than by our perceptions.

(II) The encounter with Jairus - healing the woman with the flow of blood (vs. 21 - 34)

"Now when Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered to Him; and He was by the sea.

22 And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet

23 and begged Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live."

24 So Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him.

25 Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years,

26 and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse.

27 When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment.

28 For she said, "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well."

29 Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction.

30 And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My clothes?"

31 But His disciples said to Him, "You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?' "

32 And He looked around to see her who had done this thing.

33 But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth.

34 And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction."'" (Mark 5:21 - 34)

V. 21:

"The other side" - That was the western side of the sea, where Christ had returned after healing the demon-possessed. As usual the multitudes either followed Him, or had been awaiting His arrival.

Vs. 22 - 24:

"One of the rulers of the synagogue" - He was one of the Jewish elders, highly positioned, both religiously and socially. The name *"Jairus"* may mean either *"he enlightens"* or *"God enlightens."* He represents the Jew enlightened by the law - hence, he believed on Christ and *"fell at His feet."*

"Begged Him earnestly" - His impassioned plea to Christ reveals not only the gravity of his daughter's condition, but also his fatherhood's tenderness, coupled with his ardent desire for her cure. All his hopes and desires were couched in Christ's visit to his daughter, and were expressed in his polite entreatment of, and approach to, Christ - hence, he worshipped Christ and implored Him saying, *"Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live."*

Having seen the man's emotions, Christ accompanied him and, as usual, was followed by the multitude.

+ *My Dear God, I reiterate Jairus' plea to You.... "Come and lay Your hands" upon me, to purify me from my sins, to heal my afflictions, and to liberate me from materialism and love of the world....*

My dear brother, may Jairus' plea become a prayer on your lips - whenever you feel weak, weary or depressed, cry to Him, "Come to me, Dear Lord!"

Vs. 25 & 26:

On His way to Jairus' house, Christ encountered a woman who had had a flow of blood for twelve years (see Matthew 9:20). In his introduction to the miracle, St. Mark gives details of her case.

"Twelve years" - She had had her fill of physical and psychological suffering. Having a flow of blood had branded her as "unclean" - therefore, she could not access the temple to practise religious rites. Physically, the body would be in a very weakened condition indeed, having bled for twelve years!

"Physicians.....she had spent.....grew worse" - St. Mark completes his presentation of her state - hence, she was desperate, having been examined by physicians and having tried several medications, and she was impoverished, having spent all her money, while experiencing a deteriorating condition. In a nutshell, her suffering had increased, and neither money nor medication could cure her. Analogously, humans, despite all their capabilities, are impotent without Christ the Saviour.

Vs. 27 & 28:

"When she heard" - She was like many others who had heard of Christ and witnessed His healing miracles. She was not merely motivated by her desperate need for a cure, rather, her faith propelled her; hence, she said within herself, **"If I only touch His clothes"** - which is an expression of simple faith. This also reveals her respect of the law's stipulations, namely, not to touch anybody because of her uncleanness. Thus, she decided to touch only Christ's garment.

V. 29:

Upon touching Christ's garment, she was healed - instantaneously. She felt a novel, amazing, power flowing through her body.

+ *My dear brother, are you not wondering with me, as to how that woman was cured without even asking?? It was due to her humble, simple faith which, these days, many have lost!! Her sense of unworthiness motivated her to approach Christ's back, feeling too shameful to ask....Her faith propelled her to brave the crowds - despite her frail body. Thus, she received what she wanted. Dear God, grant me her virtues: faith....humility...patience.....perseverance....*

Vs. 30 - 32:

"Power had gone out" - That was an indication that Christ was fully aware of what had happened. *"Gone out"* means that the authority to heal, and granting that authority, were Christ's - not merely His garments.

+ *My dear brother, our Church harbours the firmly-ingrained custom of venerating saints' bodies and relics. Our churches keep many of our saints' relics; congregants touch them, seeking their intercessions for healing, or for blessings.*

We respond to anyone resisting such a custom by saying that Christ's garments bore all His power; similarly, saints' relics bear the power of God - the healer in all cases is our omnipotent God. Nevertheless, He bestows honour upon the names of His children - the saints.

"Who touched My clothes?" - Of course, our Lord knew who had touched His clothes. However, His question aimed to:

a- proclaim the faith of the humble woman, and

b- proclaim the miracle to the multitude.

The disciples, on the other hand, failing to understand Christ's intent, asked Him in amazement, *"You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?' "*

Christ, though, continued to *"look around to see her,"* giving her a chance to come forward.

Vs. 33 & 34:

The woman understood perfectly that she was the object of Christ's remarks. Despite her likely feelings of fear, confusion and being self-conscious of her human weakness, rather than attempting to flee, she came forward and confessed. Christ's response was comforting - removing all anxiety. He praised her faith, He told her that her faith cured her, He blessed her, and He sent her away in peace.

+ *My Lord Jesus, grant me the courage which that woman had, so that I may approach You and receive a permanent cure from my sins.*

(III) Raising Jairus' daughter (vs. 35 - 43)

"While He was still speaking, some came from the ruler of the synagogue's house who said, 'Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?'"

36 As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, He said to the ruler of the synagogue, 'Do not be afraid; only believe.'

37 And He permitted no one to follow Him except Peter, James, and John the brother of James.

38 Then He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and saw a tumult and those who wept and wailed loudly.

39 When He came in, He said to them, 'Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping.'

40 And they ridiculed Him. But when He had put them all outside, He took the father and the mother of the child, and those who were with Him, and entered where the child was lying.

41 Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, "Talitha, cumi," which is translated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise."

42 Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement.

43 But He commanded them strictly that no one should know it, and said that something should be given her to eat." (Mark 5:35 - 43)

Vs. 35 & 36:

Having ended the narrative of healing the woman with the flow of blood, St. Mark takes us back to the story of Jairus' sick daughter. On his way home, Jairus was met with members of his household who had come to inform him of his daughter's death, and that it was pointless for Christ to accompany Jairus. No one imagined that Christ had authority over death. However, Christ intervened and comforted Jairus saying, **"Do not be afraid; only believe."** Thus, He handed him the only weapon for vanquishing fear: faith.

V. 37:

"And He permitted no one" - The multitude followed Christ till Jairus' house. However, He allowed only three of His disciples to enter with Him - Peter, James and John. Those were the three who accompanied Him on the Mount of Transfiguration (see Chapter 9) as well as in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Vs. 38 - 40:

As expected under such circumstances - especially given that the girl was very young - weeping and wailing were particularly pronounced. Christ surprised everyone with a question, and a fact, which amazed them all.

"Why make this commotion and weep?" - That was a strange question indeed in such a situation - was it possible to do anything at all other than weep??

"The child is not dead, but sleeping" - That was an unbelievable fact! Death was clear, real, and witnessed by all present. Is it possible to confuse sleep with death??

"And they ridiculed Him" - It would seem that they made fun of Christ's remarks. They were confident that the child had died. Our Lord, on the other hand, entered the child's room accompanied by her parents and His three disciples.

V. 41:

Christ held the girl's hand and ordered her to rise - from the dead. He, alone, had/has authority over death. The clause "***Talitha, cumi,***" was a common Syriac expression, which St. Mark took care to reiterate verbatim; it means "***Little girl, I say to you, arise.***"

Vs. 42 & 43:

"Immediately the girl arose and walked" - This means that the girl's regained her full, healthy, strength - without the need for "rehabilitation" or "convalescence". Hence, resurrection and cure were fulfilled. Everyone was astounded - what they had just witnessed surpassed any human comprehension. ***"But He commanded them strictly that no one should know it"*** - Such news is impossible to conceal. St. Matthew says: ***"And the report of this went out into all that land."*** (Matthew 9:26) Christ made that request, likely, to avoid potential envious hostilities against Him from the elders, or to ensure that belief on Him was based on conviction, rather than on witnessing miracles. To confirm further that the girl's recovery was real and complete, not imaginary, Christ ordered ***"something should be given to her to eat."***

+ *Christ's entry into Jairus' house transformed grief into joy; He continues to stand at our hearts' door. We continue to desire that He raise all those who had died through sin, replacing the hearts' grief with rejoicing.*

Dearly beloved, open your heart's door for Him. Talk to Him, and tell Him of your need for His healing touch to raise you whole - through repentance - and to grant that you partake of His true body and blood, thus proclaiming your cure and resurrection.

Chapter 6

Christ's evangelism - the disciples' evangelism - John the Baptist's beheading - the miracle of feeding the multitude - the miracle of walking on water

(I) Christ's evangelism in His hometown (vs. 1 - 6)

"Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him.

2 And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, "Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands!"

3 Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" And they were offended at Him.

4 But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house."

5 Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.

6 And He marveled because of their unbelief. Then He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching." (Mark 6:1 - 6)

V. 1:

"Then He went out from there" - This means that He went out from Capernaum, west of the sea and the River Jordan.

"And came to His own country" - This means that He arrived at Nazareth - in the north. That was where our Lord had spent His childhood and youth - up till the beginning of His ministry.

Vs. 2 & 3:

"The Sabbath.....the synagogue" - The Sabbath was the day dedicated to worship. Whereas Jewish residents of Jerusalem worshipped in the temple, residents in other towns and cities worshipped in local synagogues built expressly for worship, including interpretation of the scriptures. Sacrifices, though, were offered solely in the temple.

"And many hearing Him were astonished" - Here, St. Mark points out the extent of astonishment of Christ's audience, at His teaching: it was new, powerful and effective. They were equally amazed, wondering about the secret behind His wisdom and His miraculous healing powers.

"Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary....the brother of....are not His sisters...." - Carpentry was Christ's, rather simple, occupation prior to His ministry. Mention is also made of His mother, brothers, and sisters - who were labelled as such, since it was customary to consider "cousins" as brothers and sisters; those were the children of St. Mary's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas.

"And they were offended at Him" - This means that there were disagreements concerning the Person of Christ. They were offended because they had heard of Him, and they knew His parents plus details of His upbringing, yet they mocked His deeds and reputation.

V. 4:

"A prophet is not without honor" - Christ used a well-known metaphor to the Jews. It means that a person could be honored and welcomed away from his homeland, more so than in his home, where his own relatives mock him.

Vs. 5 & 6:

"He could do no mighty work here...." - This does not mean in any way that Christ was incapable of doing anything - God forbid! Rather, it means that their unbelief deprived them of the Lord's deeds - with the exception of a few whom the Lord healed due to their faith. Christ, though, did not allow their repudiation to hinder His ministry; He continued to teach in the neighbouring villages.

+ *Dearly beloved - here is an important piece of advice: unbelief constitutes an impediment to God's work in our life. Pride prevents us from experiencing our humble God.*

(II) The disciples' evangelism (vs. 7 - 13)

"And He called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits.

8 He commanded them to take nothing for the journey except a staff-- no bag, no bread, no copper in their money belts--

9 but to wear sandals, and not to put on two tunics.

10 Also He said to them, "In whatever place you enter a house, stay there till you depart from that place.

11 And whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!"

12 So they went out and preached that people should repent.

13 And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them." (Mark 6:7 - 13)

NOTE:

Matthew Chapter 10 is devoted entirely to details of Christ's dispatching His disciples to evangelize.

V. 7:

"Two by two" - In Ecclesiastes 4:9 & 10, Solomon says, *"Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up."* Thus, our Lord wisely dispatched them in pairs so that one would support the other. It should also be noted that, since the disciples at that point were novices, our Lord did not leave them without support - rather, He empowered them to exorcize demons - hence, He *"gave them power over unclean spirits."*

Vs. 8 & 9:

Our Lord prohibited His disciples from a few practices, not only to avoid any distractions from their mission, but also to have them experience the Divine economy which provides all their material needs throughout their service.

"Except a staff" - In St. Mark's account, Christ permitted them to carry a staff. It could be theorized that the "staff" refers to the "Cross" - the servant's supporting power.

"Bread" refers to food in general, since Christ would provide all their needs.

"Copper" refers to money.

"Not to put on two tunics" - This means that they should be content only with whatever is absolutely necessary - since God would satisfy all their needs.

V. 10:

"Stay there till you depart" - This means *"Do not be preoccupied with moving from one place to another, and/or eating in several homes. Rather, be satisfied with necessities: reside in one place and focus on evangelism and the service."*

V. 11:

This verse clarifies the penalty incurred upon rejecting God's word, which is a prerequisite for salvation - punishment will be on Judgment Day, if such rejection persisted, which implies blaspheming the Holy Spirit - the consequence will be more severe than God's punishment when He burned down Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24).

"Shake off the dust under your feet" - That was a well-known Jewish custom. It meant that those people, and even the dust of their land, were unworthy of being associated with, or of participating in anything. This also means that whoever rejects God's servants, rejects God Himself - since a servant is Christ's emissary and ambassador.

Vs. 12 & 13:

The disciples started working in accordance with Christ's instructions: hence, teaching and evangelizing, pointing out that the way is through repentance. God granted them power and talents. Thus, they were able to exorcize demons and heal the sick by prayers and anointing with oil.

"And anointed with oil" - This has become a sacrament and tradition of the Coptic Orthodox Church - as received from our fathers the apostles (see also 5:14).

(III) John the Baptist's beheading (vs. 14 - 29)

"Now King Herod heard of Him, for His name had become well known. And he said, "John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him."

15 Others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is the Prophet, or like one of the prophets."

16 But when Herod heard, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!"

17 For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her.

18 For John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

19 Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not;

20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.

21 Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee.

22 And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you."

23 He also swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom."

24 So she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist!"

25 Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

26 And the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her.

27 Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison,

28 brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother.

29 When his disciples heard of it, they came and took away his corpse and laid it in a tomb." (Mark 6:14 - 29)

Vs. 14 - 16:

In this excerpt, St. Mark presents various reactions to Christ's evangelism, expressed by people as well as by king Herod. Some thought, "***It is Elijah,***" returning to earth and performing miracles, after having ascended to heaven. Others thought He was "***one of the prophets,***" reaching out to God's people, after a lack of prophets for many years. Herod, though, having murdered John the Baptist, thought, "***This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!***" He thought that John had returned from the dead for revenge.
+ *Dearly beloved, Herod's feelings mirror the feelings of many evil-doers who have sacrificed their inner peace, favouring sin's lusts. Lust had motivated Herod to murder - which led to his loss of tranquility. In this regard, Isaiah says, "There is no peace.....for the wicked." (Isaiah 57:21)*
Therefore, my friend, do not be ensnared by sin; its price on earth is tremendous and, even more so, in eternity.

Vs. 17 & 18:

St. Mark narrates the entire story of John the Baptist's murder, including what had motivated it, and the events leading up to it. Herod Antipas (the son of Herod the great who had murdered Bethlehem's children) had jailed his brother Philip and married his wife. This had led John the Baptist to rebuke him for his deed, during the former's teaching and preaching repentance. Herod therefore had jailed John to avoid hearing his rebuke.

Vs. 19 & 20:

Herodias was seized with so much jealousy, anger and spite against John, that she sought to have him killed. She was held back by Herod himself who, despite his having had John arrested, feared and respected him, and knew that he was a man of God. Herod had also heard and learnt John's teachings and, "***when he heard him, he did many things.***"
+ *This is the spiritual awe which God places on His children's faces, when they face their persecutors who, inwardly, respect and fear God's children, despite the might and authority they may possess.*

Vs. 21 - 23:

At a feast that Herod had organized to celebrate his birthday, he invited "**his nobles**" (his ministers), "**the high officers**" (his army generals), and "**the chief men of Galilee**" (his aids). During the feast, Herodias' daughter came in and danced (according to the Jewish historian Josephus, her name was Salome). Her dance delighted, and elicited the praise of, all the guests.

In a euphoric moment, Herod pompously wished to reward her, offering her anything she desired - up to half of his kingdom. "**He also swore to her,**" making it impossible to retract his offer.

+ *My friend, now you see the extent of consequential degeneracy caused by drunkenness, lust, pride and vainglory! Indeed, it is nothing but folly and impulsiveness, leading to loss of everything, primarily, wisdom!*

My friend, let us then be wary - let us not permit anything to rob us of our will, alertness, or wise decisions.

Vs. 24 & 25:

St. Mark, as well as St. Matthew (Matthew 14:8), point out the fact that what the daughter requested was a realization of her wicked mother's desire to avenge John's reproaches. John represented, even while jailed, the unrelenting voice of the conscience, which the wicked, in turn, always seek to silence.

For this reason, "**Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, 'I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.'**" This emphasizes further, the bloody and cruel nature of Herodias' character.

Vs. 26 & 27:

"**The king was exceedingly sorry;**" his pride, though, prevented him from retracting his sworn promise before all the guests. Thus, persevering in his error, he sent his executioner to behead John. This reminds us of Pilate who, despite God's warnings, sent the innocent Christ to the Cross, out of fear of losing his stature.

+ *Dear God, such is evil's progression - once started, it proceeds from bad to worse, and leads to inevitable consequences. Evil's flame consumes everything in its path, even if it were ignited by a mere spark.*

Dear Lord, I implore You to shield me against evil, against myself, and against my whims. I am but a weak human being, and I have none but You for refuge.

Vs. 28 & 29:

In a scene which accentuates a human soul's savagery, once dominated by evil, Herodias' daughter took John's severed head to her mother, to appease her spite. On the other hand, John's faithful disciples took their teacher's body, embalmed it according to Jewish custom, "**and laid it in a tomb.**"

(IV) Return of the twelve - feeding the five thousand (vs. 30 - 44)

"Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught.

31 And He said to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.

32 So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves.

33 But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him.

34 And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.

35 When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, "This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late.

36 Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat."

37 But He answered and said to them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to Him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?"

38 But He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they found out they said, "Five, and two fish."

39 Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass.

40 So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties.

41 And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all.

42 So they all ate and were filled.

43 And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish.

44 Now those who had eaten the loaves were about five thousand men.

(Mark 6:30 - 44)

Vs. 30 - 32:

After John the Baptist's story, St. Mark resumes the discussion about the disciples' evangelism and their return to Christ. Naturally, the first thing the disciples did was informing Christ about what they had done.

However, rather than focusing on the disciples' report about their service, Christ's first priority was tenderly inviting them to rest after their toil - since they had neglected to eat, being fully preoccupied with the service. He took them to a boat, to a quiet place, away from the multitude, hence, *"they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves."*

+ *Christ's action with His disciples showed His extreme care and tenderness - He took care of everything. But woe is me! I often neglect exercising tender emotions, amidst life's preoccupations! Likely, this could be what people need above anything else. Teach me, Dear Lord, to follow Your example.....*

Vs. 33 - 36:

However, the multitude that consistently followed Christ, seeing Him departing with His disciples, rushed after them. Others, from the surrounding villages and towns, joined the crowd **"and came together to Him."** As our Lord looked up from the boat, He **"saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things,"** as He had done during His sermon on the mount. After many long hours, Christ's disciples came forward to Him and said: **"This is a deserted place"** - This means that the place was not residential, and was remotely located, devoid of any stores for buying provisions. **"And already the hour is late"** - This means that Christ had spent a long time teaching, and the multitude had hungered. The disciples then suggested that Christ dismiss the multitude so that they may buy food.

V. 37:

Christ's response was surprising: **"You give them something to eat!"** Where would we find food ... You know everything - and You know that we have no food to feed all these people....?? If You meant that we should buy food for this crowd, we would need at least **"two hundred denarii worth of bread"** only (this shows that there was a very large number of people)! The disciples' remarks indicated their amazement at Christ's! This situation is quite similar to circumstances when God's overall, perfect, economy, accentuates human incompetence and limited capability....

Vs. 38 - 40:

"Go and see" - Christ, of course, knew the number of loaves and fish. But He directed His disciples to see and satisfy themselves that, indeed, that was the only amount available. It would seem that they called out, **"Anyone with food please come forward!"** This is because in his gospel, St. John says that there was a lad who had **"five barley loaves and two small fish."** (John 6:9) Christ subsequently commanded His disciples to seat the multitude in groups on the grass, to facilitate food distribution. The disciples complied, and they seated everyone in groups, numbering fifty or one hundred in each.

Vs. 41 & 42:

"He looked up to heaven" - Christ desired to teach us that, in time of need, our only recourse is our heavenly Father.

He *"blessed"* - Christ blessed since He is God, the source of all blessings.
He *"broke the loaves"* - This means that He is in charge of distributing bread and blessings to His entire creation, and to His Church in particular.
He *"gave them to His disciples"* - This shows that God respects the role of His servants. God performs the work which they are incapable of doing, but they have a role to play: they labour and rejoice in God's work – especially after having seen that the multitude *"all ate and were filled."*

Vs. 43 & 44:

The multitude was numerous and the food abundant. St. Matthew adds, *"Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children."* (Matthew 14:21). Furthermore, there were leftovers, hence, the disciples *"took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish."* Interestingly, the baskets numbered *"twelve"* which is the same number of disciples. St. John tells us that Christ instructed the disciples to *"gather up the fragments that remain"* (John 6:12). Thus, He wanted each one of them to be a witness to this miracle.

The following should be noted:

1. This is the only miracle recorded by all four evangelists, because it resulted in the ubiquitous spread of Christ's fame; the word was spread by all who had eaten (Matthew 14:15 - 21, Luke 9:12 - 17 and John 6:5 - 14).
2. Due to this miracle's significance, the Church incorporated it in its liturgical lectionaries. It is read on the fifth Sunday of the Coptic month (when a month has five Sundays) - that Sunday is labelled "the Sunday of blessing."
3. One of the most beautiful spiritual implications of this miracle is that, whenever we offer, in all sincerity, our limited resources in Christ's hand - even a few minutes per day - He will bless them and foster their growth, leading to our, and others', satiation; we will consequently become at once His servants and witnesses.
4. Picking up all the fragments teaches us not to squander our bread leftovers which, frequently, we discard as waste, while others starve, unable to find even such leftovers.

(V) Walking on water (vs. 45 - 56)

45 Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away.

46 And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray.

47 Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land.

48 Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them.

Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by.

49 And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out;
50 for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."
51 Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased.
And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled.
52 For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.
53 When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret and anchored there.
54 And when they came out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him,
55 ran through that whole surrounding region, and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard He was.
56 Wherever He entered into villages, cities, or in the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched Him were made well."
(Mark 6:45 - 56)

Vs. 45 & 46:

"Immediately" - This means *"right after the multitudes had been fed, He instructed His disciples to take the boat and proceed to Bethsaida."*

On the other hand, Christ remained behind to accomplish two tasks:

- (a) to dismiss the multitude with fatherly tenderness, and
- (b) to pray in solitude.

The latter constitutes a practical lesson for each servant: serving the multitude does/should not negate in any way the need to spend time in solitary communication with God. No task, in an honest servant's life, takes precedence over being solitarily in God's presence: presenting his worries before his Father, while thanking Him for His bounties.

Vs. 47 - 49:

"Now when evening came" - Jewish custom defined two "evenings."

The first, *"when the day was now far spent,"* which refers to "dusk," was when Christ fed the multitude. The second definition of "evening" is "sunset."

St. Matthew mentions the two "evenings" in Matthew 14:15 & 23.

Christ was standing on shore, watching the boat being buffeted by the raging waves. The disciples were rowing with all their might to save their lives.

"The fourth watch" - That was the last segment of night - from about three o'clock until dawn's end. This means that Christ left them for a long time, labouring hard against the elements. He intervened at the last moment.

+ *This means that God may leave us for a while, as we toil against the currents of hardships and lusts. We are required to "resist to bloodshed, striving against sin." (Hebrews 12:4) God loves us and shepherds our souls. However, in His Divine wisdom, He knows when to leave us and when to hasten to our deliverance. "Loving" a person is completely different from "pampering" that person.*

"He came to them walking on the sea" - Christ left the shore and walked on the sea to save them. Because of their fear, they thought that, due to the darkness, He had missed the boat. They could not discern Christ's features and, believing they were seeing a ghost, they cried in terror.

"He...would have passed them by" - This means that Christ intentionally passed ahead of the boat so that they may see Him.

Vs. 50 & 51:

Their physical and psychological night-long toil against the storm, augmented their fear and perturbation. Christ's soothing words came at that point: **"Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."** Upon His entry into the boat, the wind died down completely, much to the disciples' amazement.
+ *Dearly beloved, upon Christ's entry into our life, we will experience calm, comfort and tranquility. There is no peace outside Christ, and there is no peace like Christ's.*

V. 52:

"For they had not understood about the loaves" - The reason for their astonishment and fear, was their failure to perceive that the God Who was capable of feeding an entire multitude with five loaves, is equally capable of walking on water.

"Because their heart was hardened" - The perfect Faith had not yet enlightened their hearts. *This is what we experience frequently, during periods of hardships - we tend to forget God's previous good deeds.*

Vs. 53 & 54:

The boat crossed over to, and docked at, Gennesaret, which is a plain south of Capernaum, on the western side of the sea. Despite its being very early in the morning, people there recognized Christ upon His leaving the boat.

Vs. 55 & 56:

People started assembling all their sick and handicapped, bringing them to Christ to be cured. Christ healed the afflicted, wherever He entered. St. Mark says, **"As many as touched Him were made well,"** to emphasize the fact that those who were healed were numerous.

Chapter 7

Undefined versus defiled - healing the Canaanite woman's daughter - healing the deaf- mute

**(I) Christ's response to, and rebuke of, the scribes and Pharisees
(vs. 1 - 13)**

"Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem.

2 Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault.

3 For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders.

4 When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, like the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.

5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?"

6 He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.

7 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

8 "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men--the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do."

9 He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.

10 For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'

11 But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"--' (that is, a gift to God),

12 then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother,

13 making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do." (Mark 7:1 - 13)

Vs. 1 & 2:

"Having come from Jerusalem" - It was quite unusual for scribes and Pharisees to leave Jerusalem. Thus, Christ encountered a delegation, visiting Capernaum, to ascertain the facts surrounding that Man, Whose fame had spread far and wide, and Whose teaching and miracles had attracted thousands of followers. Envy was their primary motive – rather than their desire to learn the truth. For that reason, their first "stumbling block" was seeing Christ's disciples eating bread without washing their hands a priori; they condemned them for that practice.

Vs. 3 & 4:

In those two verses, St. Mark presents important background information to the reader, since his gospel was addressed to Gentiles, generally unfamiliar with some of the Pharisees' and Jewish customs. Such information should facilitate the reader's understanding of the reason for their blaming the disciples (verse 2) and for their discussion with Christ (verse 5). Therefore, the evangelist explains to us their care for outward cleanliness, which they considered to be "purification." This washing included washing hands, at home, before eating, washing their hands prior to consuming any fruit bought at the local markets, cleaning all the vessels, and cleaning even their beds.

V. 5:

The delegation asked Christ for the reason His disciples contravened religious customs they had received from their forefathers.

Vs. 6 & 7:

Christ started His response by rebuking the scribes and Pharisees, quoting Isaiah's prophecy concerning them (Isaiah 29:13), which revealed their hypocrisy in honouring God theoretically: what they uttered was completely different from what their hearts harboured. Such practice nullified their apparent worship. Consequently, their instructions and precepts would stem from their human intellect, rather than from God's Holy Spirit's inspiration
We, too, would be hypocrites if, rather than conducting ourselves in a true godly fashion, we based our reputation on the manner in which people perceived our religious practices. Equally, we would be hypocrites by attempting to accentuate our virtues and others' shortcomings - while keeping our hearts away from God.

Vs. 8 & 9:

That is how apparent worship (hypocrisy) leads a person down a path separating him from God's commandments and their true intent. Consequently, Satan leads him astray by focusing on trivia, and awarding them the highest priority; unknowingly, he would be rejecting God Himself.

+ *My dear friend, when God commanded man, through the Mosaic covenant, to wash and be purified, His intent was purifying the heart and mind. Despite the importance of physical hygiene, purging the heart from jealousy, envy, spite and belligerence is more important. Prior to presenting yourself for communion, do you ensure that your heart and mind are pure, or do you focus merely on your body's cleanliness? May we consistently scrutinize our thoughts and intentions, and wash them in repentance - just as we wash our bodies with water.*

Vs. 10 - 13:

Christ gave them an example clarifying the extent of their elders' corrupt precepts and customs. In the Mosaic covenant, God commanded that a person's mother and father be honoured (Exodus 20:12). Furthermore, accentuating the parents' high stature, God had commanded that **"He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death."** Nevertheless, we see in verse 11 that the elders had introduced strange instructions, directly opposing God's commandments, namely, a person is more obliged to make offerings to the temple, than to give his needy parents!! Such a precept is flagrantly opposed to God's commandments, calling for honouring one's parents; it was useless for the parents since, practically, the only beneficiaries were the Jewish elders! Therefore, in verses 12 and 13, Christ accused them of hypocrisy since, by applying their human intellect instead of God's ordinances, they no longer allowed a person to **"do anything for his father or his mother;"** the result was **"making the word of God of no effect"** through their customs, which they taught the people. Also, **"many such things you do."** (Mark 7:1 - 13)

(II) Undeified versus defiled (vs. 14 - 23)

"When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand:

15 There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man.

16 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!"

17 When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable.

18 So He said to them, "Are you thus without understanding also?

Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him,

19 because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?"

20 And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man.

21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,

22 thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.

23 All these evil things come from within and defile a man." (Mark 7:14 - 23)

V. 14:

Whereas Christ's initial discussions were aimed at the scribes and Pharisees, He addressed His subsequent, comprehensive, ordinances to the entire multitude. In order to attract their attention further, He said, "**Hear Me, everyone, and understand.**"

Vs. 15 & 16:

"There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him"

- This refers to food, whether washed or not, as well as to hands that handle the food.

"But the things which come out of him" - This refers to evil/foul language, such as condemnation, lies, and verbal abuse. This also includes wicked looks or glances, since those defile the whole person.

"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!" Christ used this expression on several occasions, in order to emphasize the importance of precepts He had just taught. Christ's overall intent was to induce His audience to perceive the commandments in their profound spiritual sense, as opposed to the superficial literal, sense. In the Mosaic covenant, when God spoke of unclean versus pure animals, His intent was twofold:

a) to separate what His people ate from what the pagans consumed - thus keeping His people from melding with the Gentiles or adopting their practices and, more profoundly,

b) to emphasize that true purity and defilement stem from a person's heart and mind - not from any external influences.

The "**ears**" may refer to a person's outer ears with which he hears plus the inner ears which understand and act.

Vs. 17 & 18:

"When He had entered a house.....His disciples asked Him...." - It was the disciples' custom to ask Christ, away from the crowds, about anything they had failed to understand. Christ's explanation was similar to that given in the previous verses.

V. 19:

Christ continued explaining to His disciples, that food has no effect on a person's spiritual state - the person's heart - which is God's primary consideration. On the other hand, the body processes the food, and discards the waste, with no effect whatsoever on the heart's purity.

Vs. 20 - 23:

The meaning was expounded in verses 15 & 16. Nevertheless, our Lord added the various types of sin which stem from the heart, through an evil, corrupt, conscience. Those include evil thoughts of **adultery, fornication** (promiscuity), **murder, theft, covetousness** (greed - selfishness and excessive love of money), **wickedness, deceit** (harbouring evil for others), **lewdness** (unstemmed indulgence in lustful pleasures), **an evil eye** (this includes jealousy, envy, and scenes which stimulate evil and lustful thoughts), **blasphemy, pride** (being self-centred, despising others, and claiming self-righteousness before God), and **foolishness**. None of those vices is caused by food defiling a person. Rather, the source is a wicked heart and an evil mind, both of which defile a person. When we indulge in evil thoughts sent by Satan, we taint our heart and mind. We should never open the door permitting a debate with Satan - that door should be permanently sealed shut.

+ *The liturgical rite of our Coptic Orthodox Church is indeed splendid; the celebrant recites inaudibly and in total humility, "Remember, O Lord, my abject self.....and do not deprive Your congregation of the grace of Your Holy Spirit, because of my impure heart and my iniquities..."*

Through this prayer, the celebrant expresses our collective pleas to God, to purify our hearts, thoughts, and intents, prior to partaking of His Divine mysteries. Such is the humble spirit which the rite teaches both the celebrant and the congregation. It confirms Christ's teaching that uncleanness stems from the heart, and can only be washed by repentance, and Christ's blood offered on His holy altar.

(III) The Canaanite woman (vs. 24 - 30)

"From there He arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And He entered a house and wanted no one to know it, but He could not be hidden.

25 For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet.

26 The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

27 But Jesus said to her, "Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

28 And she answered and said to Him, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs."

29 Then He said to her, "For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter."

30 And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed." (Mark 7:24 - 30)

V. 24:

Christ left Capernaum and its surroundings, and proceeded to the region of Tyre and Sidon (these two seaside towns, situated in today's Lebanon, were about eighty kilometres west of Capernaum.) Our Lord visited that region for two main reasons:

- a) to distance Himself from the scribes' and Pharisees' obvious evil intentions, and
- b) His care for salvation of non-Jewish nations - Christ's salvation is offered to all believers.

News of Christ's arrival had spread, despite His attempts at remaining inconspicuous, whether for some solitary moments, or for privacy with His disciples.

"The region of Tyre and Sidon" included neighbouring towns and villages.

Vs. 25 & 26:

"She came and fell at His feet" - This reflects her desperate situation, the severity of her problem, the extent of her hope in Christ and, above all, her humility.

"The woman was a Greek" - Hence, she was not Jewish.

"A Syro-Phoenician" - The woman hailed from today's Levant region.

"Syro" is mentioned to distinguish it from Libya's Phoenicia, in northern Africa.

Implication:

Upon Christ's arrival at that region, this Gentile woman approached Him seeking a cure for her demon-possessed daughter - after having heard of all His miracles. Furthermore, St. Matthew gives the following details:

"And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.'" (Matthew 15:22) The disciples had asked the Lord to heed her pleas but, initially, He did not.

Vs. 27 - 29:

Although the Lord's response may have seemed harsh, His intent was to underscore the Jewish erroneous view that Jews were *"children"* while all others were *"dogs."*

Our Lord also had no desire to denigrate the woman - rather, to accentuate her profound faith and extreme humility. In turn, the woman's humble response, her persistence, and her acceptance of what had appeared to be insulting, led the Lord to praise her steadfast faith and her hope in Him; thereupon Christ responded to her petition, and told her to go home to her daughter who had been healed. This demonstrated that Christ's limitless power in crushing demons is unimpeded by distances.

V. 30:

The woman returned to her home, where *"she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed."* Her daughter had been fully cured.

The expression *"lying on the bed"* implies peace and tranquility (see also Matthew's record of the same miracle in Matthew 15:22 - 28.)

+ *My dear friend, would you agree with me that the woman's humility and steadfast faith were behind Christ's positive response to her petition?*

My dear friend, let us read together what the Holy Spirit says about prayers of the humble: "The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal; nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds, judges justly and affirms the right. (The Wisdom of Sirach 35:21 & 22)

Thus, it is the humble person's prayers which pierce the heavens, remaining before the Throne of the Most High, till His response.

Dear God, may we learn from this woman humility, confidence and persistence.

(IV) Healing the deaf-mute (vs. 31 - 37)

"Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee.

32 Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him.

33 And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue.

34 Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."

35 Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly.

36 Then He commanded them that they should tell no one; but the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it.

37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

(Mark 7:31 - 37)

V. 31:

Our Lord's sojourn in the Tyre and Sidon region was short, since He feared offending the Jews by helping the Gentiles; thus, He returned once more to the Decapolis region by the Sea of Galilee (see also Chapter 5:20).

V. 32:

"Then they brought to Him" - Naturally, *"they"* refers to the family of the deaf-mute person. It is known that a deaf person by birth would also be incapable of speaking. Analogously, turning a deaf ear to God's word, renders us incapable of witnessing for Him.

"They begged Him to put His hand on him." This shows their belief in the Lord's healing touch.

Vs. 33 & 34:

The Lord took the sick man ***"aside from the multitude."*** This means that Christ cares for each one of us individually, as well as for His Church. *Each one of us has a special place in Christ's heart. Dearly beloved, remember, when you are secluded with Christ in your chamber, He becomes yours and you become His.*

Here is what our Lord did in this miracle:

1. He ***"put His fingers in his ears"*** - The deaf-mute could neither hear nor understand; however, he could appreciate Christ's touch, conveying love and pity.
2. ***"He spat and touched his tongue"*** - To show that He was the source of the healing power, Christ touched His tongue first then the man's.
3. Then He looked ***"up to heaven"*** - This was a proclamation that Christ and the Father are one - *this also teaches us that heaven is our refuge.*
4. ***"He sighed"*** - This was an indication of Christ's empathy and tenderness towards that human being prior to his cure.
5. ***"And said to him"*** - This means that, through His sole authority, Christ commanded him.
6. He told him ***"Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."*** This was aimed at both senses of hearing and speech.

Vs. 35 - 37:

The man's cure was instantaneous, ***"and he spoke plainly."*** This means that he spoke as someone who never had a speech impediment; it also means that God's work in our life is always perfect.

"Then He commanded them that they should tell no one" - Christ's request to the man's family and the multitude, reflects Christ's humility, and His rejection of undesirable men's praise. However, ***"the more He commanded them, the more widely they proclaimed it."*** Thus, they spread the news of the miracle far and wide, despite Christ's instructions.

Furthermore, ***"they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well.""***

"He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak." The evangelist's record indicates that there were several other miracles, involving deaf and mute people, that were not mentioned.

+ Dear God, let my tongue praise and thank You in my prayers; make me talk to You consistently about everything. Open my ears so that I may respond to Your repeated calls. How beautiful it is to hear Your voice, and to talk with You!

Chapter 8

Feeding the multitude - the Pharisees' hypocrisy - healing the blind man - Christ prophesies His death and resurrection

(I) Feeding the multitude with seven loaves (vs. 1 - 10)

"In those days, the multitude being very great and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples to Him and said to them,

2 "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat.

3 And if I send them away hungry to their own houses, they will faint on the way; for some of them have come from afar."

4 Then His disciples answered Him, "How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?"

5 He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven."

6 So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke them and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and they set them before the multitude.

7 They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before them.

8 So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments.

9 Now those who had eaten were about four thousand. And He sent them away,

10 immediately got into the boat with His disciples, and came to the region of Dalmanutha." (Mark 8:1 - 10)

Since this miracle is similar to the one when Christ fed five thousand (see Chapter 6:31 - 44), only some spiritual insights are given below:

a) Christ demonstrated much compassion and tenderness for the multitude who had followed Him for three days, and had nothing left to eat. He pitied their failing strength, *"for some of them have come from afar."*

+ *Do you sense God's tenderness towards you, and His care for you, in all aspects of your life?*

b) The disciples had asked a similar question prior to the first miracle – it was as though they had completely forgotten that Christ was omnipotent capable of everything.

+ We do the same, forgetting God's work with us!!

c) "He....gave thanks, broke.....and blessed" - Similarly to the earlier miracle, Christ teaches us to thank God at all times and under all circumstances - especially before meals.

+May this be a lesson to teach our children, namely, a good habit for the family's prayer assembly before meals.

d) In Isaiah 11:2 we read, "The Spirit of the Lord (1) shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom (2) and understanding (3), The Spirit of counsel (4) and might (5), The Spirit of knowledge (6) and of the fear of the Lord. (7)" We note in Isaiah's prophecy, seven Holy Spirit attributes which satiate believers' souls. We also note that in this miracle, seven loaves satiated the multitude.

+Let us absorb the full implications of those attributes....

e) Evangelizing could be as simple, and as effective, as the effect which "a few small fish" had on the multitude.

+Is that what we do??

f) Metaphorically speaking, the expression "four corners of the earth" refers to the entire world. Christ fed "four thousand" - this similarity in number could be assumed to symbolize Christ's blessings covering the whole world.

+My dear brother, what have you done to acquire even the crumbs left from Christ's blessings??

V. 10:

"Dalmanutha" is a small, inconspicuous, village by the Sea of Galilee, in the proximity of "Magdala," believed to have been Mary Magdalene's birthplace.

(II) Christ warns against the Pharisees' hypocrisy (vs. 11 - 21)

"Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him.

12 But He sighed deeply in His spirit, and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation."

13 And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side.

14 Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat.

15 Then He charged them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

16 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have no bread."

17 But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened?

18 Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember?

19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?" They said to Him, "Twelve."

20 "Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?" And they said, "Seven."

21 So He said to them, "How is it you do not understand?"" (Mark 8:11 - 21)

Vs. 11 - 13:

"Then the Pharisees came out" - St. Mark's expression implies that they were as cunning foxes emerging from their holes to pounce on their prey.

"....and began to dispute with Him,....testing Him" - This also emphasizes that their intent was ensnarement of Christ, rather than benefitting from His teaching.

"But He sighed deeply in His spirit" - This means that our Lord grieved, feeling sorry for their state and evil intentions. He rejected their request for a miracle, since they should have believed after everything He had already done; they should have focused on their task of teaching the people, instead of testing Christ.

"And He left them...." - Our Lord Christ teaches us an important lesson: we should not waste time with those seeking unprofitable debate, syphoning our energy in useless endeavours. *Dearly beloved, avoid such people!*

V. 14:

In their haste, the disciples had neglected to take bread: *"and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat."* This is how St. Mark introduces the disciples' misunderstanding of Christ's intent in vs. 15 & 16.

V. 15 & 16:

Once in the boat, Christ started warning His disciples against the Pharisees' hypocrisy (see also Matthew 12:1), and evil Herod's leaven, likening the Pharisees' hypocrisy unto evil leaven buried within the dough, insidiously spreading its evil. The disciples though, assumed that Christ was referring to bread (leaven), and realized they had forgotten to buy bread.

Vs. 17 - 20:

The Lord knew what they were saying, and their shallow understanding; thus, He reproached them through seven questions - *which He could ask us as well, given everything He has done for us:*

Q1: *"Why do you reason because you have no bread?"* (Why are you focusing on bread - hence, "material issues?")

A1: *Because we have not yet become spiritual*

Q2: *"Do you not yet perceive....?"* (Why have your emotions not shifted towards loving Me?)

A2: *Because we love too many other things more than we love You, Lord!*

Q3: *"Do you not yet understand?"* (What have you been thinking, after having seen everything I have done?)

A3: *Our minds are saturated with worldly considerations.*

Q4: *"Is your heart still hardened?"* (How long will it take your hearts to repent?)

A4: *It will take a very long time!!*

Q5: "Having eyes, do you not see?" (Do you contemplate the implications of everything you see?)

A5: *No, we do not. Often, we are too superficial to understand Your profound meanings.*

Q6: "And having ears, do you not hear?" (Have you forgotten my teachings and commandments?)

A6: *Dear Lord, our memory is short-lived.*

Q7: ".....how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?.....Also,how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?" (Has your faith in Me increased, having witnessed all My deeds?)

A7: *Yes, dear Lord, upon remembering, we will believe, be encouraged, and our confidence will increase. We will then not fear any apparent shortcomings - since You will perfect them for us.*

V. 21:

"How is it you do not understand?" - That was Christ's final admonishment, summing all His previous questions. Hence, our lack of understanding is always due to forgetting God's work in our life.

+ *Dear Lord, help us remember, and always reach out to us through Your love, and be longsuffering with us. Even when we forget, do not forget us, rather, let Your compassion last, as a mother's lasting compassion for her children.*

(III) Healing the blind man in two stages (vs. 22 - 26)

"Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him.

23 So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town.

And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything.

24 And he looked up and said, "I see men like trees, walking."

25 Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up.

And he was restored and saw everyone clearly.

26 Then He sent him away to his house, saying, "Neither go into the town, nor tell anyone in the town."" (Mark 8:22 - 26)

V. 22:

"Bethsaida" - This town, north of the Sea of Galilee, straddling the Jordan, was the birthplace of Andrew, Peter and Philip. There, **"they** (the man's believing relatives) **brought a blind man to Him."** They were seeking Christ's healing touch (their faith was similar to that of the woman with the blood issue.)

V. 23:

"He took the blind man by the hand" - Christ's action could be projected onto humanity: Christ takes us by the hand to deliver us from falling into sin. Again, this could be an application of Christ's aphorism, namely, **"...if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch."** (Matthew 15:14)

"....and led him out of the town" - Christ's action here bears two direct implications: (a) Christ sought neither fame nor praise from people, and (b) the blind man's faith and hope in Christ were to the extent that he allowed a Stranger to lead him (he did not know Christ.)

We may also meditate on this clause, and assume that **"the town"** could be analogous to this world's preoccupations; hence, we should meditate on God's work during times of seclusion - away from our daily chores.

"And when He had spit on his eyes" - Throughout His healing miracles, our Lord used this approach several times. It implies that the healing power emanated from the Divine essence within Him.

"And put His hands on him" - This action imparted the sense of peace to the man, reflecting Christ's abundant, consistent, flow of tenderness towards us. *May we feel worthy of such tenderness!*

"He asked him if he saw anything" - Christ is omniscient and is in no need to ask anyone anything. Christ's question, though, was to teach us that, "whoever asks, knows." Numerous indeed, are those facts which God conceals from the wise and knowledgeable, yet reveals to children (see Luke 10:21).

V. 24:

When Christ asked him if he saw anything, he replied, **"I see men like trees, walking."** That constituted "progressive healing," is analogous to the gradual growth in our spiritual life, leading to repentance, and resulting in our seeing all matters clearly.

+ *This is a lesson, especially to servants, to tread lightly with those returning to the fold of the Church, to whom aspects of the Faith may still be in a preliminary stage. However, God loves them, and they may precede us to the kingdom.*

Vs. 25 & 26:

Christ subsequently touched the man's eyes, perfecting his vision. *This was like Christ telling us, and telling all who had started the process of their spiritual healing, "My hand is with you, supporting you, perfecting your cure, and granting you the perfect, discerning, spiritual vision."*

As usual, Christ told him not to tell anyone about that miracle, thus confirming His principle of avoiding people's praise. *This teaches us not to publicize the good deeds which we do through God's grace.*

(IV) Peter confesses Christ (vs. 27 - 30)

"Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, "Who do men say that I am?"

28 So they answered, "John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets."

29 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ."

30 Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him."

(Mark 8:27 - 30)

Vs. 27 & 28:

"Caesarea Philippi" - This town, located north of the Sea of Galilee, was home to pagans who worshipped the god "Pan." It was named "Paneas" in honour of that god. In Christ's days, it was rebuilt by Philip, the son of Herod the Great, and renamed *"Caesarea Philippi"* in honour of both Philip and the Roman Caesar.

On the road from Galilee to Caesarea Philippi, Christ asked His disciples, *"Who do men say that I am?"* The disciples gave various answers, according to what they had heard. Some people thought that Christ was John, whom God had resurrected after his murder by Herod (that was also Herod's view). Others thought that He was Elijah, paving the way for Christ's advent, according to Malachi's prophecy, *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord."* (Malachi 4:5) - this is consistent with Matthew 16:14. A third group believed that Christ was Jeremiah or one of the prophets resurrected.

Vs. 29 & 30:

Following up on His first question, Christ asked His disciples, *"But who do you say that I am?"* Peter answered, *"You are the Christ."* (You are the Redeemer Himself, the awaited hope of the entire world.) It should be noted that in Matthew 16:17, St. Matthew gave two additional details:

(a) Christ praised Peter for uttering such a tenet of the Faith, *"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah,"* and

(b) Christ proclaimed that Peter's answer was only possible due to a Divine proclamation to him, *"Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father Who is in heaven."*

However, Christ cautioned His disciples not to reveal that secret to anyone, since His time had not yet come for manifesting His glory after His crucifixion.

+ *My dear brother, the Jews had various views concerning Christ, whether He was Elijah, Jeremiah or some other prophet. This stance is typical of the attitudes of many people these days: they view God through their own perspective of the Divine attributes - rather than according to God's own comprehensive reality. Hence, while some believe in a merciful unjust God, others see Him as a harsh, unmerciful judge. However, we are taught through our Church's perfect spiritual balance, that our God, seen through all His attributes and commandments, is merciful, just, compassionate and strict - all at the same time. It is a serious mistake indeed to depict God relying solely on one attribute or on a single verse.*

(V) Christ prophesies His death and resurrection (vs. 31 - 38)

"And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

32 He spoke this word openly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.

33 But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

34 When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

35 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

36 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?

37 Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

38 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.'" (Mark 8:31 - 38)

Vs. 31 & 32:

After Peter's and the rest of His disciples' declaration that He was the awaited Messiah and the hope of all nations, Christ started telling them of forthcoming events: namely, the Jewish elders and priests would plot against Him and deliver Him, He would endure much suffering, He would be tried and crucified, and He would die and rise on the third day. However, Peter did not like what Christ had just said and, at that point, he disagreed with Christ's resolve - rather, he impulsively yielded to his natural human emotions.

Thus, Peter failed to see in Christ the suffering Slave about Whom Isaiah had prophesied: "***He has no form or comeliness.....He is despised and rejected by men.....a Man of sorrows.....***" (Isaiah 53:2 & 3) A Christian lifestyle often involves hard labour, deprivation, and much suffering. *Therefore, let us focus on the resurrection that follows the Cross.*

V. 33:

"But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples..." -

Prior to rebuking Peter, Christ looked at His disciples, so that His words may be addressed to everyone sharing Peter's short-sightedness.

On the other hand, Peter's strong admonishment was due to his failure to appreciate Christ's redemption of the world - his focus, like most people, was on Christ's terrestrial reign, rather than on God's care for mankind's salvation.

"Get behind Me, Satan!" - Christ's use of this expression, despite its severity, was intended to confirm that solely Satan was uniquely interested in derailing the process of redemption.

Vs. 34 & 35:

In these verses, Christ addresses the disciples, the Church, and all successive believers. In order to follow Christ, it is imperative to accept the notions of bearing the cross, suffering through consequential persecutions, and abandoning relatives, friends and other preoccupations. This is impossible without denying oneself, and submitting, in all humility and sincere love, to our Lord Who suffered for us first.

Christ emphasizes that salvation's prerequisite is the soul's struggle, encompassing abandonment of its selfishness, and material pleasures and lusts - namely, all the impediments to salvation. Subsequently, the soul's path to its deliverance is via service and evangelism. *Nothing is comparable to Christ's reward.*

Vs. 36 & 37:

Christ's words continued to be levelled at everyone. He warns us that we will find all worldly material acquisitions to be empty and hollow, grossly unmatchable to the soul's loss and perdition. Put differently, all the worldly treasures that a man may muster, cannot possibly redeem his soul - the soul can only be redeemed through the blood of Christ.

Following Christ is the only means whereby we may learn the meaning of true life on earth - which will lead us to eternal life.

V. 38:

Whoever ignores Christ's words on earth, and whoever is ashamed of Christ's Passion and Cross, will have no place, and no part, in Christ's kingdom, at His second coming.

+ Dear Lord, I find myself, in many instances, rejecting pain, persecution, and the way of the Cross - without knowing that, in so doing, I am rejecting You, and losing my part with You. Teach me, Dear Lord, and open my eyes and heart, to this world's insignificance, along with all its material issues. Then I will rush towards You, irrespective of anything except following Your footsteps and Your example, thus pleasing Your heart first and foremost, and securing my crown in Your kingdom....Amen.

Chapter 9, Verse 1

"And He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power." (Mark 9:1)

"Some standing here" - This meant that some of the disciples present would not die before seeing the signs of the start, and ubiquitous spread, of the kingdom of God, via evangelism, nations' acceptance of the Faith, and the Church's clearly asserted presence. The kingdom of God means that God reigns in the hearts of believers.



Chapter 9

The Transfiguration - healing the demon-possessed - discussion with the disciples

(I) Christ's transfiguration (vs. 2 - 10)

"Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them.

3 His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them.

4 And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus.

5 Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"--

6 because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid.

7 And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!"

8 Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves.

9 Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

10 So they kept this word to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant." (Mark 9:2 - 10)

V. 2:

About one week following Christ's foretelling His Passion, crucifixion, resurrection, and kingdom, He took His three most faithful and loving disciples, *"and led them up on a high mountain."* There, *"He was transfigured* (His form changed) *before them,"* and His glory was magnificent. It is worth noting the following:

1. Christ took with Him only Peter, James and John. God is not biased in any way. Rather, those who are more prepared than others, receive greater blessings.

2. Christ led them up on a high mountain. The "height" could symbolize our transcending high above worldly issues - that would enable us to perceive God's glory.

V. 3:

In this verse, St. Mark describes the extent of Christ's magnificence: His

clothes were shining white - like snow - such that no one, and no process, on earth, could match their whiteness.

V. 4:

During Christ's magnificent transfiguration, **"Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus."** Elijah represented the prophets (he was a prophet), all living mankind (since he never died) and all celibates (since he never married and led a monastic life). Moses represented those who had reposed in the hope of Christ's redemption, the spiritual leadership of God's people, and those in holy wedlock. Each one of them had fasted forty days, symbolizing their holy lifestyles on earth - whether enjoying celibacy or holy matrimony. Showering more honour upon them, St. Mark added that they were both **"talking with Jesus."**

+ *My dear brother, have we ever considered acquiring the honour and blessings of conversing with Christ??*

Vs. 5 & 6:

Peter was awed and overwhelmed by the resplendent scene before him - not to mention being overjoyed by such a revelation. He spoke spontaneously as though driven by Divine emotions, **"Rabbi, it is good for us to be here;"** however, he added a human component to his thoughts, saying that each of Christ, Moses and Elijah may need a tabernacle. St. Mark attributed Peter's spontaneous reaction to his fear at beholding such an awesome scene.

V. 7:

"And a cloud came and overshadowed them" - In Matthew 17:5 we read that the cloud was **"bright"** - indicating a Divine presence. We also read in Exodus 16:10 that **"the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud"** as Aaron spoke to the congregation. The cloud's appearance was accompanied by the Father's proclamation concerning His Son and His Divinity, similarly to what had happened during Christ's baptism.

Vs. 8 - 10:

The heavenly scene ended suddenly, our Lord regained His former nature, and Elijah and Moses disappeared. During their descent from the mountain, our Lord instructed His disciples to wait for His resurrection, prior to telling anyone about what they had seen. However, at that point, the disciples had failed to understand the meaning of Christ's resurrection - but **"they kept this word to themselves."**

Comments on the Transfiguration

1. Either the disciples were inspired by the Holy Spirit to recognize Moses and Elijah, or the Lord mentioned their names as He spoke with them.
2. **"It is good for us to be here"** - It is important for servants and spiritual persons to ensure that their lifestyle incorporates periods of meditation and seclusion. Such periods will impart strength, aiding them in their fields of toil and service.

3. Christ's discussion with Elijah and Moses shows that God continually speaks with His saints. Our Church thus teaches that, in addition to speaking to God, we can talk to our saints through our prayers (without worshipping them.)

4. *My friend, given the magnificence of that scene, how much more splendid would heaven be?? Therefore.....muster your courage....How beautiful heaven is, with its Christ and saints!! Also, do not forget that there is a place for you there....*

(II) A query concerning Elijah (vs. 11 - 13)

"And they asked Him, saying, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

12 Then He answered and told them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man, that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt?"

13 But I say to you that Elijah has also come, and they did to him whatever they wished, as it is written of him." (Mark 9:11 - 13)

V. 11:

Elijah's appearance gave rise to a question that the disciples posed to Christ. Namely, the scribes taught that Elijah would precede Christ - hence, he would come before the Messiah's advent. Therefore, if what the disciples had witnessed was, in fact, what the scribes were teaching, how, then, would Elijah come after Christ?

Vs. 12 & 13:

"Elijah is coming first" - The scribes were correct in teaching that Elijah would precede Christ.

"And restores all things" - This means that he would lead all Jews to repentance, preparing them to receive Christ.

"He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt" - Due to the disciples' limited vision, they failed to understand that Christ must suffer (Isaiah 53:2 and Psalm 22:6).

"Elijah has also come" - This is a clear reference to John the Baptist, whose work and personality paralleled Elijah's. John had come and was murdered by the Jews: *"they did to him whatever they wished."* See also the interpretation of Matthew 17:10 - 13.

(III) Healing a demon-possessed youth (vs. 14 - 29)

"And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them.

15 Immediately, when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to Him, greeted Him.

16 And He asked the scribes, "What are you discussing with them?"

17 Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit.

18 And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not."

19 He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me."

20 Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth.

21 So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood.

22 And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

23 Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."

24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

25 When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!"

26 Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead."

27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

28 And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?"

29 So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.'" (Mark 9:14 - 29)

Vs. 14 - 16:

"All the people were greatly amazed, and running to Him, greeted Him."

- This was St. Mark's depiction of the people's state upon seeing Christ: they ran to Him joyfully, while their amazement was due to His sudden absence, and His unknown whereabouts.

Following His Transfiguration, Christ returned, along with the three disciples to join the other disciples. He found that the others had been engaged in debates with many - including scribes who, seizing the opportunity of Christ's absence, had tried to embarrass the disciples. That was the reason for Christ's asking them, immediately, *"What are you discussing with them?"* Christ's intent was to respond to the questions on the disciples' behalf, thereby alleviating their embarrassment.

Vs. 17 & 18:

Christ's discussion with the scribes was cut short by a man in dire need of help: he told Christ that his son was possessed by a mute demon, and that

he could not find Christ - St. Luke adds, "*for he is my only child*" (Luke 9:38). This event shows that our struggle with Satan is continual, and can lead to victory only through a steadfast faith in Christ. The man then proceeded to explain his son's state:

"Whenever it seizes him" - This means "whenever the demon is agitated."

"It throws him down" - This means that the boy had fits of uncontrolled behaviour which could harm him.

"He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth" - This behaviour is similar to epilepsy's seizures: the muscles become rigid and the victim is incapable of moving.

"So I spoke to Your disciples (since You were absent), **that they should cast it out, but they could not."**

V. 19:

Christ's response had a reproachful tone - but to whom was this reproach addressed??

"O faithless generation:"

1. The rebuke could have been aimed at the disciples who, due to their weak faith, were unable to exorcize the demon and heal the sick youth.

2. Likely, Christ was reproaching the father who, despite his need, was doubtful - his faith was imperfect, since he told Christ, **"But if You can do anything."**

3. That admonishment could have also been levelled at the entire multitude since they had failed to believe, even after witnessing all of Christ's other miracles - thus Christ said, **"O faithless generation."**

"How long shall I bear with you?"

Naturally, our Lord endured much, and He would continue to endure - especially His disciples' weaknesses at His Passion and crucifixion. The intent here is to accentuate God's heart's intolerance to faithlessness or doubts about Him - all of which grieve God's heart. For this reason, Christ admonished His disciples for their lack of faith, as He had rebuked them during the incident of the stormy sea (see Matthew 8:23 - 26), and as He had rebuked Peter when he doubted Him and started sinking (see Matthew 14:25 - 32).

"Bring him to Me:

This confirms Christ's compassion towards us, and reaffirms His saying, **"Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."** (Matthew 11:28)

V. 20:

Upon the boy's approaching Christ, the demon was greatly agitated, convulsing the boy and causing him to foam at the mouth.

This demonstrates Satan's cruelty, on the one hand while, on the other, it shows that the demon knew he could not escape Christ's exorcism. This was

as though he were fighting his last, losing, battle.

Vs. 21 & 22:

"How long has this been happening to him?"

Of course, Christ knew, and knows, everything. The purpose of His question was to emphasize to the multitude that with God nothing is impossible, regardless of the length of time elapsed, or the severity of the affliction. In his response to Christ, the father went on to explain other details, saying, ***"From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him."***

"But if You can do anything"

The man's question reflects two sentiments: his hope that Christ was able to cure his son and, at the same time, his doubts - stemming from his weak faith - about Christ's capabilities.

"Have compassion on us and help us."

The man was seeking Christ's compassion on himself, his son and his family.

V. 23:

"But if You can do anything"

In His response, Christ indicated to the man that He was capable of everything, but that His miraculous work was contingent on a person's belief. The greatest impediment to the boy's cure was the father's doubt.

V. 24:

"Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears..."

The man's answer reflected his state: his cries indicated that his only hope was in Christ, and his tears expressed his weakness and remorse for his doubts. He then said, ***"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"*** Thus, he proclaimed his faith, acknowledged his weakness, and implored Christ to edify and strengthen his imperfect faith.

V. 25:

The crowd's intensity increased, and Christ ***"rebuked the unclean spirit"*** - He exorcized it by ordering it to leave the boy, saying, ***"Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!"*** Thus, He emphasized that Satan was behind those two afflictions.

"I command you" - This confirms Christ's Divinity and absolute authority over the kingdom of darkness with all its powers and, furthermore, confirming that it was totally incapable of resisting or disobeying Him. Christ continued saying, ***"Come out of him and enter him no more."***

Vs. 26 & 27:

"Then the spirit cried out" - That was the cry of the defeated, dejected, demon, expressing anger at being forced to leave the boy. The demon cast the boy on the ground - seemingly lifeless - such that onlookers said, ***"He is dead."*** However Christ, through His tenderness, ***"took him by the hand"***

and lifted him up, and he arose." The boy was completely cured from his afflictions.

Vs. 28 & 29:

Upon the disciples' seclusion with Christ, following that incident, they asked Him about the reason for their failure, wondering whether they had lost the authority to exorcize demons (see Matthew 10:1). Christ's response was clear: all Divinely-granted talents must be preserved through a spiritual lifestyle, characterized by "**prayer**" (hence, consistently seeking God's help) and "**fasting**" (hence, renouncing the world with all its lusts and pleasures.)

+ Therefore, my friend, we see that faith epitomizes the essence of a relationship with God. Without faith, we lose sight of God's work in our life. Unfortunately, recent intellectual currents have spawned doubts concerning God's omnipotence and His ability to solve our problems - anxieties mushroomed, and the problems remained unaltered....

*Would you not agree with me, that we both need to cry out saying, "**Lord, I believe; help my unbelief?!"** Prior to resorting to our minds, is it not better to seek and experience God's help??*

(IV) Christ foretells His death and discusses greatness (vs. 30 - 37)

"Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know it.

31 For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day."

32 But they did not understand this saying, and were afraid to ask Him.

33 Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?"

34 But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest.

35 And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all."

36 Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them,

37 "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me."" (Mark 9:30 - 37)

Vs. 30 & 31:

As mentioned in the previous chapter (vs. 31 & 32) Christ foretells to the disciples His betrayal, death and resurrection.

V. 32:

"But they did not understand" - Despite the linguistic simplicity of what Christ had said, the disciples failed to appreciate the profound, far-reaching

implications - since they continued to be fixated on an earthly kingdom. *"...and were afraid to ask Him"* - They preferred to keep silent, feeling too embarrassed to discuss that issue. Prior to Christ's redemption and resurrection, none of the disciples had understood Him.

Vs. 33 & 34:

On their way home (likely, Peter's house), the disciples had a discussion among themselves. Upon arrival, Christ asked them what they had been discussing - of course He knew, but He wanted to correct their understanding with respect to the concept of *"who would be the greatest;"* such a sentiment is pride's progeny.

V. 35:

Christ assembled the disciples, and started teaching: whoever desires to be the greatest among, and master of, everyone, must serve and position himself at the lowest rank.

Christ's aphorism here is completely different from the world's understanding of greatness. Whereas worldly greatness consists of control, manipulation and pride, Christianity's greatness embodies humility, self-denial, and service to others. Hence, *"...the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them."* (Matthew 20:25) See also the interpretation of Matthew 20:20 - 28.

Vs. 36 & 37:

While continuing to address His disciples, Christ tenderly embraced a child and said that whoever renders a minor service, such as kindness, to a child in Christ's name would be considered by Christ to have rendered that service to Christ personally, and to the Father Who sent Him. Therefore, selflessness and service to others are imperative; the appearance of leadership and greatness are of no significance.

(V) Service in Christ's name (vs. 38 - 41)

"Now John answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us."

39 But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me.

40 "For he who is not against us is on our side.

41 For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."" (Mark 9:38 - 41)

V. 38:

It would seem that the Lord's saying, *"Whoever receives....in My name"* had prompted John to recall an incident when someone had used the Lord's name to exorcize demons. Since that person was not one of them, their zeal led them to discourage him.

Vs. 39 & 40:

The Lord reproached them for their action, since the man loved and believed on Christ - his faith had enabled him to exorcize demons. Thus, Christ taught that anyone who had experienced Him, and experienced His work through him, would never turn against Him or blaspheme His name. Put differently, a person who continues to abide by the truth and the sound Faith, received from Christ through the Church, should not be resisted - the undesirable alternative is monopolizing talents and service.

V. 41:

A simple act or service, such as someone offering a glass of water in My name, will always be assuredly rewarded. How much more of a reward then, will be to someone using My name to mercifully cast out a demon from an afflicted person ?!

In verse 40, St. Mark quotes the Lord, *"For he who is not against us is on our side."* Sts. Matthew and Luke, though, record the Lord's teaching in different words; hence, they say, *"He who is not with Me is against Me."* (Matthew 12:30 and Luke 11:23) Both convey the same, clear, meaning.

(VI) Offences (vs. 42 - 50)

"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.

43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched--

44 where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.'

45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched--

46 where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.'

47 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire--

48 where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.'

49 "For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt.

50 Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it?

Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.'" (Mark 9:42 - 50)

V. 42:

Christ's teaching to His disciples about refraining from offences is applicable to all servants and believers. It accentuates the risks associated with offending anyone whose faith had not matured. *"Whoever causes.....to*

stumble" means "whoever directly causes others to sin, to doubt through unorthodox teaching, or to err in speech or deed."

In God's view, such a sin is so significant, that *"it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea* (than if he caused a faint-hearted person to stumble)."

Vs. 43 - 48:

Those verses were interpreted in Matthew 5:29 & 30 and 18:8 & 9. A few more points will be highlighted below:

1. *"Cut it off....pluck it out..."* - Of course, cutting off a leg or hand, or plucking out an eye, are given in the metaphorical sense. The intent is that a person must sever all ties with sources of evil - whether through the senses or through others. Our Lord used the expressions *"cut..pluck"* to accentuate the required degree of strictness in dealing with sources of offences. A small offence could generate a significant sin.

2. *"Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched"* - This is another expression, indicating eternal, unabating torment, and meant to terrify anyone taking God's punishment lightly, or offending others, or disregarding offences' significant influence on the senses.

+ *Therefore, my friend, all those who have been tricked by the world's temporal, perishing, pleasures and lusts, are propelling themselves towards extremely harsh, eternal, torment.*

V. 49:

In earlier verses, the discussion focused on fleeing sin and offences - labelled as "passive or reactive struggle" by our forefathers. The current verse focuses on "proactive struggle" which is explained as follows:

Oblations offered to God are salted for preservation. Similarly, a spiritual person should preserve himself not solely by fleeing offences, but also by growth in virtues, which keep him, rendering him pleasing to God. Such virtues are akin to a fire, radiating light and warmth to others.

+ *My friend, abide by constant repentance, plus struggle against all sources of offences. With all your might, flee for your life, attracting with you others whenever possible....*

V. 50:

On the other hand, unsalted virtue in a believer's life is tasteless and bland. A person would thus be unacceptable to God. We must therefore struggle to have virtues governing our lifestyle - hence, *"have salt in yourselves"* - which is conducive to having peace with one another, as well as within yourselves.

+ *Dearly beloved, do not neglect the Sacrament of Penance. This should serve not only to confess your sins which grieved God's heart, but also to declare your shortcomings in observing Christian virtues. Seek guidance and*

mentoring from your spiritual father. Thus, we can all be acceptably salted for our Christ.



Chapter 10

Impediments to attaining the kingdom - divorce - love of money - leadership

(I) Divorce (vs. 1 - 12)

"Then He arose from there and came to the region of Judea by the other side of the Jordan. And multitudes gathered to Him again, and as He was accustomed, He taught them again.

2 The Pharisees came and asked Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" testing Him.

3 And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?"

4 They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to dismiss her."

5 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.

6 But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.'

7 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,

8 and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh.

9 Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

10 In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same matter.

11 So He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her.

12 And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.'" (Mark 10:1 - 12)

V. 1:

"Then He arose from there and came" - This means that Christ left Capernaum, and proceeded south to Judea after having crossed the Jordan. As was His wont, Christ started teaching all present around Him.

V. 2:

"The Pharisees came and asked Him.....testing Him" - This tells us that the Pharisees were among those who followed Him - not to benefit from His teaching, rather, to test Him, seeking to ensnare Him. For this reason they chose a socially-debated topic - hence, divorce - despite the law's clarity.

Vs. 3 & 4:

Christ, in His infinite wisdom, responded to their question by asking another question, namely, *"What was the stipulation in that respect, in the law which God handed to Moses?"*

The teachers answered confidently that Moses' law permitted divorce, provided that a document was drawn to that effect, thus allowing the woman to re-marry if she so desired (customarily, the man would meet with one of the wise men to vent his anger prior to drafting that document.)

Vs. 5 & 6:

Our Lord clarified God's intent with respect to marriage, and His reason for permitting divorce. In God's plan and economy, He created one man and one woman so that each is for the other. However, due to the people's deviation from God's precepts, to their degenerating spiritual standards, and to their comparing themselves against pagan nations which permitted adultery and polygamy, God permitted divorce - not because it pleased Him, rather, to shield the man from paganism, and/or to protect the woman from murder.

Vs. 7 & 8:

Confirming His response, Christ quoted what Adam had said following Eve's creation (Genesis 2:24): *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."* The Pharisees knew those words quite well. The following is an elaboration on some of the expressions Christ used:

"For this reason (verse 7)" - This means *"for the purpose of fulfilling the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony."*

"A man shall leave" - This means that a man shall establish his new family independently of his parents. Such independence does not in any way imply neglecting obligations to care for the parents. Marital love is not at variance with the commandment of honouring one's parents.

"One flesh" - This refers to the awesome holy union in Christian wedlock. Through the Holy Spirit's descent during the Sacrament's rite, the two become one: in soul, body and spirit.

V. 9:

Having clarified the awesome image of holy matrimony (see v. 8), Christ further emphasized that God is not only the Founder of this union, but He also works through, and in, the married couple. For this reason they become one flesh; consequently, man cannot annul a Divinely-established covenant. It should be noted, though, that it is incumbent on a Christian person to strive, in concert with God's grace, to control him/herself, to offer love, and to tolerate the other partner's shortcomings, overcoming all obstacles.

Satisfying one's own pleasures and desires is not the objective of a Christian marriage - rather, it is a calling to subjugate oneself and to submit to the other, according to the Church's prayers of the Sacrament's rites: *"May each of you submit to the other."* Then, and only then, will there be congruence

between man's will and God's righteous will.

Vs. 10 - 12:

As was the case in several other instances, the disciples privately asked Christ to elaborate on His statements. He said that the fundamental motive for divorce is that one or both seek to gratify desires through a third party - therefore they seek to satisfy their sentiments by divorcing one and becoming attached to another. For this reason, God considers divorce to be a case of adultery - even if the second marriage were socially acceptable.

+ My dear brother, now do you understand why our Church will only accept divorce in the case of adultery? The Church is entrusted with God's commandment. The Church does not succumb to social pressures. Instead of resorting to the easy solution of divorce, it is incumbent on us to understand and apply sound spiritual concepts, and to indoctrinate our budding generation in the correct understanding of holy matrimony.

(II) Christ blesses the children (vs. 13 - 16)

"Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them.

14 But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them,

"Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.

15 Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

16 And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them." (Mark 10:13 - 16)

V. 13:

"Then they brought little children to Him" - Naturally, appreciating Christ's holiness, parents brought their children to Him seeking His blessings. This must have been so tumultuous, that the disciples rebuked them.

V. 14:

"He was greatly displeased" - Christ's displeasure should not be confused with humans' angry reaction resulting from our weaknesses. Rather, having seen how His disciples rebuffed the parents, Christ told them, *"Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God."* Put differently, those children, through their simplicity and purity - which attributes adults could have lost - precede us to the kingdom of heaven.

Vs. 15 & 16:

"Assuredly, I say to you" - Christ consistently used this expression prior to proclaiming a significant spiritual fact which, in this case, is: *"Being childlike is not an indication of, or reference to, a particular age; rather, it is indicative of childlike virtues, such as innocence, simplicity and trust. Those are the*

attributes of God's pure children who are thus solely qualified for the kingdom of heaven." Such characteristics are unknown to the evil world. God requires of us simplicity, spontaneity, and steadfast faith reflected in our prayers as we talk to Him. God also requires that our dealings with fellow humans be devoid of wiliness and the world's satanic wisdom - rather, they should be honest and frank, guided by the Holy Spirit.

Following this aphorism, Christ tenderly embraced the children and granted them His Divine blessing.

+ Dear God, I yearn for my childhood in You....I wish I were among those children, touching Your knees with my hands, feeling the touch of Your hand on my hair, and sensing the flow of Your holiness through my being.... My God, I know that You have given me much; but I cannot contain my heartfelt desire to cast myself on Your tender bosom!

(III) Love of money (vs. 17 - 27)

"Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

18 So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.

19 You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.' "

20 And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth."

21 Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."

22 But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

23 Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"

24 And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!

25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

26 And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?"

27 But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."" (Mark 10:17 - 27)

V. 17:

As Christ started down the road to Jerusalem, a man ran to Him, worshipped Him, and asked Him what the path was to eternity. The clause "**one came running**" indicates that he had come to Christ with the sincere desire to learn. Also, "**knelt before Him**" signals his respect and veneration for Christ.

V. 18:

Regrettably, Christianity's opponents deny Christ's Divinity, through the abusive misinterpretation of this verse. Our simple response to them is that Christ proclaimed His Divinity clearly, "**I and My Father are One.**" (John 10:30)

In order to clarify what Christ said, we should be familiar with some Jewish customs prevailing at the time.

1. The priests and Pharisees had prohibited people from using the word "God" in any conversation; rather, they should refer to God by using solely His attributes, hence, the Blessed, the Most High, the Righteous, etc...
2. Therefore, when that man hailed Christ as "**Good Teacher,**" Christ's response, "**Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God**" meant "*You either know that I am God, hence, calling Me by one of My attributes, or, you are simply referring to Me respectfully, as the prevailing custom for honouring someone.*"

Vs. 19 & 20:

Christ was not expecting an answer from the man. Rather, He answered his question by saying that the way to the kingdom was through obedience of God's commandments; Christ also mentioned some of the ten commandments. However, the man was not satisfied, and he told Christ that he observed those commandments since his childhood.

Vs. 21 & 22:

"Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him...." - Christ saw that man's enthusiasm, humility when he worshipped Christ, sincere effort in observing the commandments since childhood, and a desire to inherit eternal life. Christ gave him a look filled with love and encouragement, prior to prescribing the cure to his fundamental ailment, namely, love of money. The treatment consisted of complete eradication of his sin, by giving all his wealth to the poor, thereby assuring for himself a crown and treasure in God's kingdom. Despite the harshness of the treatment, our Lord did not alleviate any of its pain - He even added that the man should follow Him, once he had given up all his wealth to the poor, and given up all associated pleasures, bearing the cross of selflessness and acceptance of the pain. For this reason, the man grieved - since he felt his money's authority over him. Thus, instead of following Christ, he "**went away sorrowful.**"

+ *My God and Master, deep inside I feel I have not completely liberated myself from loving money - rather, I feel I am like that man....whenever I lose anything I feel fearful and agitated; You have identified my own affliction -*

not that man's....will You grant me the cure?? I entreat You - liberate me from this love which separates me from You.....May I be satiated with You through You.....everything I own will then become worthless beneath Your feet - and Your Cross will become all my heart's desire....

Vs. 23 - 25:

Following up on His discussion with the rich man, Christ commented on the difficulty for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God. Upon noticing His disciples' perplexity, He clarified His intent, saying that money in itself is not sinful. Rather, it is sinful to take pride in money: loving it, relying on it, and amassing it. Simply put, reliance on money rather than God is sinful; it leads to the heart's hardening against others, boasting of one's wealth, and ignoring humility, God's bounties, and thankfulness to God. In order to clarify further the difficulty for those relying on money to acquire salvation, Christ metaphorically used the analogy *"It is easier for a camel (given its huge size) to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."* Put differently, there is no salvation for anyone fully dependent on money.

+ My dear brother, we must not forget that there were indeed righteous rich people - such as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus - whom Christ never requested to abandon their wealth. Thus, amidst our material world, the sin residing in our depths is the love of money. Let us repent of it, since it impedes our perception of God's work. Instead of desiring wealth, let us seek that which is more lasting and beneficial, which is uncorruptible and untouchable by thieves: the kingdom prepared for us by our rich Father.

Vs. 26 & 27:

Appreciating the difficulty posed by Christ's aphorism, the disciples wondered among themselves about how difficult salvation would be, saying, *"Who then can be saved?"* Christ's response was comforting: God perfects, through His grace, whatever we are incapable of achieving through our struggle - this is contingent on our genuine quest for the kingdom, and our sincere declaration to Him of our weaknesses, *"for with God all things are possible."*

(IV) Abandonment for God's sake (vs. 28 - 31)

"Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You."

29 So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's,

30 who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life.

31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first."'" (Mark 10:28 -

31)

Vs. 28 - 30:

As usual, Peter spontaneously was the first to talk to Christ. Propelled by the seriousness of Christ's message he, likely, wished to allay any concerns for him or the other disciples - since they had abandoned all for Christ's sake. "**A hundredfold**" - Christ's answer clarified and confirmed the righteousness of our benevolent God - hence, God can never be indebted to anyone!! Whoever abandons something for God, in favour of the service, will be rewarded "**a hundredfold.**" The expression here is metaphorical, intended to depict God's abundant bounties to those who abandon in order to follow Him. They will be granted spiritual children and siblings, plus peace and tranquility unknown to the world, and they would lack none of the necessities required by the present material world. However, this age's hardships and persecutions will persist. The more lasting reward is embodied in inheriting eternal life that God Himself has prepared; they will have a special, distinct, place, closer and more satiating with God, their Saviour.

+ My dear brother, should we not be encouraged by Christ's promise, and should we not give up our rest, time and money, in favour of following Him, while offering spiritual, sincere, service?? Would you not join me in yearning for the one hundredfold? Therefore, come hither to church, and offer even a small amount of your time for serving - Christ needs all our energy for the Church's service.

V. 31:

Our Lord concluded with a warning. The promise of the kingdom, to those who abandon, should not lead to complacency, under the false conviction that salvation is guaranteed. Rather, we should be always vigilant, maintaining our struggle unto the end - was not Judas among those who left everything and followed Christ? But great indeed was his fall - he loved money and delivered Christ! Complacency and neglect will result in the last becoming first.....

(V) Christ foretells His death (vs. 32 - 34)

"Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him:

33 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles;

34 and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."'' (Mark 10:32 - 34)

That was Christ's final journey to Jerusalem. The disciples' perplexity

stemmed from the general environment: many sought Christ, the allegations multiplied, and it was common knowledge that the chief priests and Pharisees were trying to eliminate Him. Therefore, Christ started talking to them openly about the start of the final journey on the path of salvation, including Judas' betrayal, the trials before the priests then Pilate (the Gentiles), Christ's Passion and crucifixion, and Christ's resurrection on the third day.

(VI) Leadership (vs. 35 - 45)

"Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask."

36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

37 They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory."

38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

39 They said to Him, "We are able." So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized;

40 but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared."

41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John.

42 But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

43 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.

44 And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.

45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'" (Mark 10:35 - 45)

Vs. 35 - 37:

Everything that Christ had said about the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God, had been interpreted by the disciples, like the rest of the Jews, from a material and limited earthly perspective. They were thus preoccupied by the idea of leadership; that was the reason behind James' and John's quest to occupy prominent positions, hence, to sit at Christ's right and left (likely, building on their mother's earlier request.)

V. 38:

"You do not know what you ask" - Christ's response accentuated the difference between God's plan for mankind's salvation, passing through the Cross and its suffering, versus the human perspective, limited to the

perishing terrestrial glories. Christ completed the discussion by asking the two disciples a question, which meant: *"Are you capable of enduring My suffering on the Cross, and drinking the cup of oppression and humiliation unto its last drop??"*

Vs. 39 & 40:

"They said to Him, "We are able."" - Both disciples responded spontaneously, neither appreciating, nor giving much thought to, what Christ had just said. Christ gave an answer, which they would eventually understand, namely, they would indeed be granted the fellowship of suffering and death - but sitting on His right and left is a privilege granted to those who love God, maintaining their quest through constant toil and struggle. Our just God is impartial, and *"each one will receive his own reward according to his own labour."* (1 Corinthians 3:8)

Vs. 41 & 42:

Human - not spiritual - sentiments, continued to dominate. The rest of the disciples were quite irritated. Upon noticing their displeasure, Christ started correcting their thoughts. He explained to them the concept of true greatness in His kingdom, as opposed to greatness in the world, which comprises domination and manipulation of others.

Vs. 43 - 45:

Christ demanded of them sincere humility - because those who are great before God are those who sacrifice themselves, and their honour, serving others. Whoever desires a high stature in the kingdom, must renounce his pride as a slave having no rights. It should consistently be borne in mind, that we must follow the example of the incarnate Christ - since He came, renouncing all His glory, not seeking honour from anyone, and serving all in genuine selflessness - unto death.

+ My dear God, what You did during Your incarnation surpassed all imagination and understanding - even of angels. However, such was Your limitless love and humility. My God, make me ashamed of myself, since I continue to seek worldly glory and stature. Make me raise my eyes consistently towards Your Cross - then I will follow Your example in serving my fellow humans, sacrificing myself, as You did. Amen.

(VII) Healing Bartimaeus the blind man (vs. 46 - 52)

"Now they came to Jericho. As He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging.

47 And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

48 Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

49 So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. Then they

called the blind man, saying to him, "Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you."

50 And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus.

51 So Jesus answered and said to him, "What do you want Me to do for you?" The blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, that I may receive my sight."

52 Then Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road." (Mark 10:46 - 52)

Vs. 46 & 47:

As Christ passed through Jericho on His way to Jerusalem, blind Bartimaeus heard of His passing. He thus came to Him crying, "***Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!***" That was a solid proclamation of faith not shown by others. The title "***Son of David***" is that of Christ the Saviour. Bartimaeus had thus proclaimed, and believed on, Him Whom the priests and Pharisees had rejected. He aspired to be cured at Christ's hands. He had faith in that Saviour's absolute omnipotence.

V. 48:

When he cried for mercy, many rebuked him....

+ Satan does the same with us...he tries to silence us and divert us from the path of repentance and quest for mercy. Let us therefore follow the example of Bartimaeus, and intensify our cries to God - we will thus receive His mercies and cure for our spirits.

Vs. 49 & 50:

"So Jesus stood still" - Christ's overwhelming love and tenderness for mankind led Him to stand still and call the man pleading for mercy. Therefore, the man ***"throwing aside his garment*** (this is akin to casting aside our laziness)...***rose and came to Jesus*** (the healing fountain for all our afflictions)."

Vs. 51 & 52:

Despite the clarity of the blind man's plea, Christ asked him, ***"What do you want Me to do for you?"*** This reminds us of the sick man of Bethesda, whom Christ had asked, ***"Do you want to be made well?"*** (John 10:6) Thus, Christ is teaching us an important principle: it is incumbent on us to persevere in declaring our wishes to God, regardless of our weaknesses - Christ is capable of curing any and all weaknesses and incapacities. This man's faith and persistence thus earned him his cure, and he ***"followed Jesus on the road*** (the road to Jerusalem)."

+ My dear brother, may we learn from this blind man how to cry to the Lord, persisting until He grants our wish - especially the salvation of our soul.



Chapter 11

Christ's entry into Jerusalem - cursing the fig tree - purging the temple

(I) Christ's entry into Jerusalem (vs. 1 - 11)

*"Now when they drew near Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples;
2 and He said to them, "Go into the village opposite you; and as soon as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it.*

3 And if anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it,' and immediately he will send it here."

4 So they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door outside on the street, and they loosed it.

5 But some of those who stood there said to them, "What are you doing, loosing the colt?"

6 And they spoke to them just as Jesus had commanded. So they let them go.

7 Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothes on it, and He sat on it.

8 And many spread their clothes on the road, and others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

9 Then those who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"

10 Blessed is the kingdom of our father David That comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

11 And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. So when He had looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve." (Mark 11:1 - 11)

V. 1:

"Bethphage and Bethany" - From the south-east side, those were the closest villages to Jerusalem. Priests resided in Bethphage due to its proximity to Jerusalem; the name means "house of early figs." "Bethany," visited several times by our Lord (meaning "house of affliction"), was home to Lazarus and his sisters.

V. 2:

"A colt tied" - As they approached Jerusalem, our Lord sent two of His disciples to the closest village, to bring Him a colt, to ride into Jerusalem.

"On which no one has sat" - This could symbolize "purity" - hence purity of hearts which God desires to indwell....let us hasten to repent and present God with pure hearts. St. Matthew records that the disciples *".....brought*

the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them...." (Matthew 21:7)

Vs. 3 - 6:

Having known beforehand what the disciples would encounter, the Lord gave them precise guidance on how to react....events unfolded exactly as He had predicted.

+ *Dearly beloved, this teaches us that, by adhering to the Lord's commandments and the Church's guidance, He will subjugate all opponents, and grant us grace to deal with everyone....Do you painstakingly follow the Lord's guidance in all your decisions, and experience the path He paves, and the doors He opens, for you??*

Vs. 7 & 8:

The disciples returned to the Lord with the colt, on which He condescended to ride in all humility and peace - as opposed to pompously, proudly, riding a horse. Through His love, Christ descended from His cherubic carriage to a donkey's colt!! In those days, removing one's garment symbolized submission to a highly regarded person; consequently, by spreading their garments on the road, the multitude indicated their acceptance of Christ's reign. The "*leafy branches from the trees*" symbolized peace and triumph.

Vs. 9 & 10:

"*....those who went before and those who followed....*" - Some people went before Christ, while others followed. It is interesting to note the analogy with prophets who had preceded Christ and the apostles who followed....

The multitude cried saying:

"*Hosanna!*" - This means "*Please save us!*" They meant that Christ was their awaited deliverer from Roman colonialism.

"*Blessed is He Who comes....!*" - This is part of Psalm 118:26; this means that the One Who comes is the Lord's anointed Messiah.

"*Blessed is the kingdom of our father David*" - This proclamation is another indication that the multitude's hope was centered in Christ the King, Who would restore to them the anterior glory of David's kingdom of Israel.

"*Hosanna in the highest!*" - This means that the expected deliverance is Divine.

+ *My dear brother, Christ's entry into Jerusalem riding on a colt, is a lesson intended to teach us humility. Was He not able to ride a horse? Nevertheless, He chose a simple procession, confirming what He had started by His manger birth. What do you and I seek? Why do we seek this perishing world's honour? My God, teach me to follow Your example - let me learn from You simplicity and humility in everything.*

V. 11:

Following a quick visit to Jerusalem and the temple, Christ went to Bethany with His disciples to spend the night (likely, in Lazarus' house, although not

recorded explicitly in any of the gospels.)

(II) Cursing the fig tree (vs. 12 - 14)

"Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry.

13 And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.

14 In response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again." And His disciples heard it." (Mark 11:12 - 14)

V. 12:

"...the next day...." - On Monday morning, during His return to Jerusalem, Christ hungered. The Divine Christ hungers for our righteous deeds which He expects from us. Lamentably, our state, and that of the Jewish nation in particular, had the appearance of faith (as leaves - see v. 13 below), with no deeds (no fruit.)

V. 13:

"It was not the season for figs" - Of course our Lord knew that it was not the season for figs before His arrival at the fig tree. For this reason, it is incumbent on us to understand the spiritual implications of these verses.

V. 14:

The Lord cursed the fig tree in His disciples' presence, because, *"...every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."* (Matthew 3:10)

+ *This clear, stern, Divine warning applies to all of us; our conduct, frequently, parallels that tree's: hence, we have the outward appearance of righteousness and piety and, likely, service, while in reality we lack the true fruit that God expects of us. My dear brother, I urge you to have a selfevaluation session, and ask yourself, "What would I offer to Christ, if He were to come now, asking me for the fruit of my labour??"*

"And His disciples heard it." - This shows that the disciples paid much attention to everything Christ said. Our Church's Tradition is derived from focusing on the apostles' verbal teachings, received across the generations.

(III) Purging the temple (vs. 15 - 19)

"So they came to Jerusalem. Then Jesus went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.

16 And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple.

17 Then He taught, saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a 'den of thieves.' "

18 And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they

might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching.

19 When evening had come, He went out of the city." (Mark 11:15 - 19)

See also the interpretation of Matthew 21:12 & 13.

Vs. 15 & 16:

Naturally, Christ's destination in Jerusalem was the temple. Upon entering it, He took care to purge it of all degeneracy. Trade, fraud, bribery, and flawed sacrifices were rampant; the house of God had been converted into a market, and commerce replaced worship.

"He would not allow anyone to carry wares through the temple." - Due to the temple's central location in Jerusalem, people used to pass through it as a short cut - entering by one door and exiting through the other - especially by those who carried heavy loads. The Lord prevented such practice, since it conflicted with the sanctity of the house of God.

V. 17:

"Then He taught" - Christ did not merely zealously purge the temple, rather, He also explained His action, and how the house of God must be honoured and venerated, saying that, the house of God *"shall be called a house of prayer for all nations,"* not *"a den of thieves,"* for achieving financial profits.

Vs. 18 & 19:

Having witnessed the power of Christ's teaching and authority, and the extent of the multitude's admiration of His deeds, the scribes and Pharisees feared for their prestige - being sinners - and they sought to kill Him, driven by anger and envy.

When evening had come, Christ went back to Bethany where He used to spend the nights.

+ *My dear brother, referring to our Church - the house of God and the house of angels - David chanted, "Holiness adorns Your house, O Lord, forever." (Psalm 93:5) We are in dire need of setting the example for our children, teaching them how to respect the house of God. Submission, humility and silence during prayers are crucial for the heart to be fully focused on God.*

(IV) The dried-up tree and faith's effectiveness (vs. 20 - 26)

"Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.

21 And Peter, remembering, said to Him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away."

22 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God.

23 For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever

he says.

24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

25 "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses." (Mark 11:20 - 26)

Vs. 20 & 21:

"In the morning" (Tuesday), as the disciples *"passed by"* (en route to Jerusalem), they noticed that the tree, which Christ had cursed, had *"withered away"* (it had withered down to its roots.) Peter, the first to notice it, and remembering the previous day's event, brought it to Christ's attention.

Vs. 22 - 24:

"Have faith in God." This translates to: *"Why are you amazed at what happened? Where is your faith in God's omnipotence? Has He not created everything by His word??"* Christ then completed His discussion by saying that faith, untainted with doubt, can move mountains, and that anything we ask of God, in accordance with His will and His plan for our salvation, shall be granted - contingent on ardent prayer with steadfast faith. We should be fully confident in God's positive response at the appropriate time.

+ My God and righteous Saviour, I fear being a fig tree bearing nothing but leaves, with no fruit to please You. I therefore appeal to Your longsuffering - make me focus solely on what You expect of me, and make me ignore people's opinions and my appearance. All I desire is for my life to become a sweet fruit in Your holy mouth.

Vs. 25 & 26:

Following Christ's discourse about the necessity of steadfast faith for answered prayers, He emphasized another prerequisite, namely, forgiving those who wronged us. God's forgiveness of our sins is contingent on our forgiving others. We recall that the Lord's prayer comprises several petitions; however, Christ chose to comment only on one of them, namely, the condition of forgiving others (see Matthew 6:14 & 15).

(V) The authority of our Lord Jesus (vs. 27 - 33)

"Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him.

28 And they said to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?"

29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things:

30 The baptism of John--was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me."

31 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?'

32 But if we say, 'From men' "--they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed.

33 So they answered and said to Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus answered and said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." (Mark 11:27 - 33)

Vs. 27 & 28:

The cursed fig tree was on Christ's way to Jerusalem. Upon His arrival at the temple, along with His disciples, the scribes, chief priests and Pharisees asked Him:

"By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?"

Those questions reflected the fear and envy stirred in their hearts by Christ's purging of the temple; they also questioned Christ's authority for teaching in the temple, since such teaching required pre-authorization from the priests. In a nutshell, they were really asking Christ, *"Whom do You think You are, purging the temple, expelling the merchants, and overturning their tables?!"*

Vs. 29 & 30:

In His usual wisdom, Christ exposed their hypocrisy: rather than answering their question, He responded by another one, which significantly perplexed them. Namely, He asked them whether they acknowledged John's message as being Divine, or simply a human concoction....

Vs. 31 & 32:

St. Mark accentuates the fact that Christ's question truly baffled them, since any answer they would give would be illogical: they would either be embarrassed for not believing in John's message, or they would face the people's wrath if they claimed that John was not God-sent.

V. 33:

Thus, our Lord negated any opportunity for their accusing Him of anything; they had proclaimed their impotence before His wisdom.

+ Let us therefore learn from our Lord, the Source of all wisdom: how we should respond to evil-doers harbouring evil against us. In such instances, our only recourse is a quick prayer, raising our hearts to God imploring His support.



Chapter 12

Christ encounters resistance in Jerusalem - Christ calls for humility and giving

(I) The evil vinedressers (vs. 1 - 12)

"Then He began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a place for the wine vat and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.

2 Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers.

3 And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed.

4 Again he sent them another servant, and at him they threw stones, wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully treated.

5 And again he sent another, and him they killed; and many others, beating some and killing some.

6 Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

7 But those vinedressers said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'

8 So they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard.

9 Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others.

10 Have you not even read this Scripture: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone.

11 This was the Lord's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes?'"

12 And they sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the multitude, for they knew He had spoken the parable against them. So they left Him and went away." (Mark 12:1 - 12)

V. 1:

Seizing the opportunity of the multitude's gathering around Him in the temple, our Lord spoke this parable, to accentuate the extent of the Jewish institution's rebellion against God, in the Old Testament.

"A man planted a vineyard" - God, the Founder, called His people meticulously - with much care.

"Set a hedge around it, dug a place for the wine vat..." - This means that He guarded the vineyard with His mighty hand, and prepared it for processing the fruit produced from it (in reference to Christ the Saviour, the Seed of that nation, Who suffered in that vat.)

"And built a tower" - The tower, (or guardhouse), refers to the temple. He entrusted the people and the temple to the priests' and elders' care whom, He assumed, were trustworthy, and to whom He gave authority (He **"went into a far country."**)

Vs. 2 - 5:

These verses depict God's repeated attempts at reaching out to His people through successive prophets, and refer to the cruelty of the treatment those prophets suffered at the people's hands. Some were ignored, others were beaten or badly wounded, and others (like Isaiah) were murdered. Such was the fate of all the successive generations of prophets (abuse - torture -.....) The people and their priests thus had completely forgotten that, in fact, they were abusing the vineyard's owner himself.....

V. 6:

In his desperation to rectify the vineyard dressers' behaviour, the owner sent them his only son, bearing all the father's authority. He thought they would fear him, and renounce their aggressive behaviour.

Vs. 7 & 8:

In these verses, Christ reverts to His current era. Thus, He refers to what would befall Him through the evil plots of the scribes and priests, aiming to kill Him and crucify Him outside the vineyard - hence, outside Jerusalem.

V. 9:

After the son's murder and the Jewish nation's persistence in rejecting the father's final call (redemption), God would reject those who had rejected Him, **"and destroy the vinedressers** (the stubborn priests)," and **"give** (transfer) **the vineyard** (the Church) **to others** (the Gentiles and New Testament priests)."

Vs. 10 & 11:

"Have you not even read this scripture" - Christ's accusation was clearly aimed at the scribes, chief priests and elders - obviously, His parable applied to them. Christ even quoted from David's psalms with which they were quite familiar: **"The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes."** (Psalm 118:22 & 23) It applied perfectly to them and to Him: they rejected Him, and He was the Cornerstone. Today, the **"Cornerstone"** is equivalent to a building's concrete column.

V. 12:

"And they sought to lay hands on Him" - The elders and priests in the audience understood that the parable was about them. Their anger propelled their decision to kill Him. However, the sole impediment to their arresting Him was the presence of the multitude that adored His words - thus, they were compelled to depart in anger.

+ *My God, grant me a heart which consistently appreciates Your calling. Such a heart would respond to You without ignoring Your commandments. Purge my heart from the evil vinedressers' harshness, so that I may be submissive to You and Your Church, conducting myself in accordance with everything I hear and learn.*

(II) The tax question (vs. 13 - 17)

"Then they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians, to catch Him in His words.

14 When they had come, they said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and care about no one; for You do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

15 Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?" But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why do you test Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see it."

16 So they brought it. And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's."

17 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at Him." (Mark 12:13 - 17)

Vs. 13 & 14:

Christ's enemies joined forces and tried to ensnare Him. The Pharisees, representing the Jewish nation, were the educated, meticulous, Jews. The Herodians were Herod's followers, and supporters of the Roman occupiers. Hoping that Christ might drop His guard, they started by praising Him - then they asked Him about the legality of paying taxes to Caesar (the occupier.) They craftily ended their question with *"Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?"* Thus they attempted to corner Christ into answering either "Yes (they would then accuse Him of supporting Caesar and the Romans,)" or "No (they would then accuse Him of inciting rebellion against Caesar.)"

Vs. 15 & 16:

Our Lord, exposing their wiliness and intentions, surprised them by the question: *"Why do you test Me?"* He then asked them to bring Him a coin - *"a denarius."* They then responded to His second question, about the inscription on the coin, saying, *"Caesar's."*

V. 17:

Christ's wise response was unexpected. They failed to pin on Him any allegations.

+ *The spiritual meaning of Christ's response is that we should not neglect the needs of either the spirit or the body. Put differently, we should fulfill our worldly obligations - but not at God's expense and His precepts.*

(III) The resurrection question (vs. 18 - 27)

"Then some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him; and they asked Him, saying:

19 "Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies, and leaves his wife behind, and leaves no children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother.

20 Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife; and dying, he left no offspring.

21 And the second took her, and he died; nor did he leave any offspring. And the third likewise.

22 So the seven had her and left no offspring. Last of all the woman died also.

23 Therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife."

24 Jesus answered and said to them, "Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?

25 For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

26 But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?

27 He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken." (Mark 12:18 - 27)

V. 18:

"Sadducees" - That was a Jewish sect whose name is believed to have been derived from the name "Zadok," who was high priest in the days of kings David and Solomon. They also came to test Christ. They believed that *"there is no resurrection."* St. Mark took care to underline their belief, in order for us to appreciate their question, which scorned the concept of resurrection, and accentuated their limited materialistic view of eternity.

V. 19:

"Moses wrote to us" - They were referring to a section of the Mosaic law (Deuteronomy 25:5 & 6) which stipulated that, upon a husband's demise prior to having any children, his brother should marry the man's widow, and have the first son's name recorded in the name of the departed husband. That would ensure preservation of the name in his tribe, and would also secure his inheritance.

Vs. 20 - 23:

The Sadducees presented Christ with their argumentative question, aiming to test Him and, simultaneously, irritate the Pharisees, while mocking the notion of resurrection - hence, which one of the seven would be her husband?? See also the interpretation of Matthew 22:23 - 33.

Vs. 24 & 25:

Christ's answer implicitly rebuked them - He confronted them with their warped faith, stating that it stemmed not only from their abandonment of God's law in favour of intellectual logic, but also from their belittling God's might and ability to resurrect the dead. Furthermore, Christ pointed out (in verse 25) that physical marriage and reproduction are non-existent in resurrection, since bodies will be celestial, spiritual, like angels'.

Vs. 26 & 27:

Christ reaffirmed the dogma of resurrection, citing proof from the Holy Bible. He reminded the Sadducees of God's proclamation to Moses in Sinai, during the burning bush encounter: **"I am.....the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob."** (Exodus 3:6 & 16) It is thus illogical for God to attribute Himself to the dead - rather, to the living.

Christ concluded His discussion with them by reiterating His initial assertions, namely, they had deviated from the Faith by rejecting the truth about resurrection of the dead.

+ Dear God, although we fully believe the truths of resurrection and eternity, they are often absent from our hearts; our worldly preoccupations lead us to forget what is lasting. Induce us, Dear Lord, to focus on "the imperishable rather than the perishable, and the eternal rather than the temporal," as our Church teaches us, in the litany of the departed.

(IV) The greatest commandment of all (vs. 28 - 34)

"Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"

29 Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.

31 And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

32 So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He.

33 And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

34 Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that no one dared question Him." (Mark 12:28 - 34)

V. 28:

Following the Pharisees' and Sadducees' questions about taxes and

resurrection respectively, the scribes, having admired Christ's rebuttal, asked, "***Which is the first commandment of all?***" Put differently, "*Which commandment is considered to be the most important?*"

Vs. 29 - 31:

Christ's unequivocal answer was that since the Lord is one, God is first and foremost, and the most important commandment is: "***You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart*** (all your emotions), ***with all your soul*** (your spirit), ***with all your mind*** (your thoughts), ***and with all your strength*** (your might)." The second most important commandment, linked to, and complementing, the first, is: "***You shall love your neighbour as yourself*** (we must love our fellow humans, since we have one father, Adam, and one mother, Eve.)" Those are the two greatest commandments.

Vs. 32 & 33:

Christ's response pleased that scribe, who fully agreed with Christ that we must love God with all our being, and that loving "***one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.***"

V. 34:

Christ was pleased at the scribe's wise reaction, and told him, "***You are not far from the kingdom of God.***"

+ *Such a proclamation applies to all of us. Loving God and our fellow humans are the most significant commandments of Christianity. By struggling to observe them, we gladden God's heart.*

St. Mark also mentions that no more questions were posed to Christ by those present, suggesting that, likely, no one dared ask Him anything more, because of His consistently decisive, comprehensive, responses.

(V) Is Christ the Son of David or the Lord of David? (vs. 35 - 37)

"Then Jesus answered and said, while He taught in the temple, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David?"

36 For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: 'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.' "

37 Therefore David himself calls Him 'Lord'; how is He then his Son?" And the common people heard Him gladly." (Mark 12:35 - 37)

V. 35:

"How is it that the scribes say..." In this case, Christ initiated the discourse by challenging the scribes' and Pharisees' teaching that the expected Messiah would be the Son of, and from the seed of, David. That question purposely exposed the Jewish teachers' ignorance about the entire truth, and their limited understanding; it also aimed to prove Christ's Divinity by proclaiming that He, Himself, is the Lord of David.

Vs. 36 & 37:

Christ did not intend to elicit an answer; rather, He intended to answer, teach, and clarify the following: In Psalm 110:1, David prophesied through the Holy

Spirit saying, "*The Lord said to my Lord*, (meaning, the Father said to the Son) *sit at My right hand*," meaning, "You have all My might and authority; I will subject all Your enemies and the kingdom of evil under Your feet (under Your authority.)" How, then, could He be David's Son and Lord, at the same time?? Of course, the intent is that Christ was incarnate from the seed of David, from the tribe of Judah and, at the same time, He is the God Whom David worshipped, thus referring to Him as "*my Lord*."

"And the common people heard Him gladly" - St. Mark accentuates the difference between the commoners' gladness at hearing Christ's teaching, versus the priests' and elders' irritation at His aphorisms.

(VI) Christ's warning against the scribes and Pharisees (vs. 38 - 40)

"Then He said to them in His teaching, "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, 39 the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, 40 who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."" (Mark 12:38 - 40)

Vs. 38 & 39:

Christ taught the multitude a new concept couching a warning against the scribes' pride and glamour. They distinguish themselves above others through ostentatious attire, while seeking crowded places and the best spots in festivities, in order to elicit people's praise and honour.

V. 40:

Our Lord also exposed the scribes' and Pharisees' hypocrisy, since they benefit materially from service by swindling widows' income and inheritance. Even their prayers aim, solely, to elicit people's praise

+ *It was thus necessary for Christ to reveal to us the hazards associated with the sin of pride, selfishness, and boastfulness. Such attributes not only corrupt worship, but also lead us away from experiencing God, while incurring condemnation for lack of humility and submission. Dear God, induce me to ignore my pride among others - rather, make me cling to You, since my depths are fully open to Your scrutiny.*

(VII) The woman with two mites (vs. 41 - 44)

"Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much.

42 Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans.

43 So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury;

44 for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."" (Mark 12:41 - 44)

V. 41:

"Opposite the treasury" - The treasury was the temple's "donation box," where worshippers deposited their offerings. The phrase **"saw how"** is translated from the Greek *"continued to observe,"* which implies, spiritually, that God continually scrutinizes His children's offerings to Him, expressing their love for Him. St. Mark used the word **"how,"** implying that God is more concerned with "how," and with "the heart" as opposed to "how much," and "the appearance."

Vs. 42 - 44:

Amidst the wealthy who offered much, a poor woman came and **"threw in two mites"** which, in those days, were equivalent to a quarter of a Roman coin, or one-fortieth of a denarius. Despite the paucity of that amount, our Lord desired to teach the disciples a new concept, which seemed strange to human reasoning; namely, Christ considered that, in God's eyes, the woman donated more than the large amounts donated by the wealthy. He clarified this, saying that despite her poverty, the woman gave everything she had - whereas the others, gave some of what they had.

+ *From the above, we learn two principles:*

- 1. We should not judge people by what they offer, however small that may be; only God knows the circumstances of each person. For example, someone may be obliged to fast only one hour, due to health problems - while another, may abstain from food the entire day, but remain dominated by sin.*
- 2. We should not neglect tithing, with the pretext that we need the money; did not that woman give all she had??*



Chapter 13

Signs of Jerusalem's destruction and the end of the world - the necessity of spiritual vigilance

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is perfectly congruent with Matthew 24. Its events transpired during Tuesday of the Holy Passover week. It encompasses prophecies pertaining to Jerusalem's destruction in 70 A.D. at the hands of Titus, the Roman general (see the discussion of verse 14 below.) This chapter also addresses prophecies concerning the end of the age, and Christ's Second Coming. The apparent interrelationship of those two distinct groups of prophecies is due to the Jews' firm conviction that the temple's destruction would only transpire at end of the world. Consequently the two events (temple destruction and end of the world) were linked, as one event, in the disciples' minds. However, we should differentiate between them.

In any case, whether it is the end of the world, or the temple's destruction accompanied by the death of many Jews, the message is that we should constantly be prepared through repentance. Hence, Christ's concluding remarks at the end of this chapter (verses 32 - 37) focuses on preparedness.

(I) Introduction to Christ's discourse (vs. 1 - 6)

"Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!'"

2 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

3 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately,

4 "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"

5 And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one deceives you.

6 For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and will deceive many." (Mark 13:1 - 6)

Vs. 1 & 2:

Jerusalem's temple had survived for around five centuries. During the period 15 B.C. - 64 A.D. Herod the Great had renovated it, rendering it a magnificent structure. Herod's intent was not to honour God, rather, to please the Jews. Christ's prophecy was fulfilled in 70 A.D. when both Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed.

As Christ exited the temple, with His disciples, one disciple proudly pointed out the temple's splendour, and its huge building blocks. Christ seized that

observation as an opportunity to start addressing Jerusalem's destruction and the temple's demise - the latter bears a few implications:

1. The temple's demise marks the end of the era of animal sacrifices, and the beginning of the Church's age, whose Sacrifice is Christ Himself, rather than the blood of goats.
2. The temple's demise could be assumed to refer to the death of the old man through baptism, and the resurrection of a new spiritual man.
3. The temple's demise teaches us not to be awed by the world's glories, regardless of their apparent glamour, since everything terrestrial is temporal, while celestials are eternal.

Vs. 3 - 6:

The high elevation of the "*Mount of Olives*," east of Jerusalem, offered a clear view of the entire city, including the temple. When Christ sat with His disciples, four of them came forward, asking Him about the signs heralding the temple's destruction, which He had foretold. In Matthew 24:3, we also read that they asked about His Second Coming and the end of the age - since they considered them to be a single event (as explained earlier.)

Our Lord, though, started His important discussion with His disciples by warning them against the emergence of liars, feigning to be Christ or His emissaries, and leading many astray unto perdition. It is incumbent on the Church, throughout the ages, to be wary of such imposters.

It should be noted that Christ, during His discourse about the signs, never mentioned the timing of any. Similarly, the Church teaches us to focus solely on repentance and preparedness, rather than being fixated on timing.

(II) Signs heralding the end of the world (vs. 7 & 8)

"But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet.

8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows." (Mark 13:7 & 8)

Our Lord started specifying some of the signs preceding "*the end*." They included "*wars and rumours of wars*," meaning that wars would spread among countries in several parts of the world - we may experience some of them, and hear of others. Naturally, wars lead to divisiveness among nations since, as the end approaches, along with Satan's dwindling authority, he becomes more agitated and sows more discord.

"There will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines....." - Those are additional signs spreading in various parts of the earth. Likely, God permits earthquakes to prompt people to repentance; famines, on the other hand, result from devastating, persistent, wars.

"These are the beginning of sorrows" - This means that those events are

merely the beginning - to be followed by more severe hardships!!

+ *My dear brother, be neither scared nor perturbed by those signs or their consequences. God's children are constantly under their heavenly Father's protecting hand. Regardless of a given hardship's severity, there will always be comfort and solace in this life, plus glory and crowns in the next.*

(III) Inevitable disciples' and believers' hardships prior to Jerusalem's destruction (vs. 9 - 13)

"But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them.

10 And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.

11 But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.

12 Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.

13 And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved." (Mark 13:9 - 13)

V. 9:

Christ foretold some of the harsh circumstances that the disciples and believers would experience during the period between His ascension and Jerusalem's destruction - namely, a period rife with wars and false allegations against them. They would be liable to trials before Jewish councils, and they would be flogged because of Christ. However, all would be tantamount to opportunities for witnessing for Christ before their prosecutors. It should be noted that such events did indeed materialize in Stephen's stoning (Acts 7:59), James' murder, Peter's imprisonment (Acts 12:2 & 4) and others.

V. 10:

News of the Gospel and evangelism would spread throughout the surrounding regions, prior to Jerusalem's destruction, either through the disciples' preaching beyond Judea, or through the Jews spending the Passover in Jerusalem then returning to their respective towns bearing the news - that was the case with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27 - 39). On the other hand, Christianity's spread throughout the world, and the conversion of many, will precede the signs heralding the world's end and Christ's Second Coming.

V. 11:

Here, Christ comforts His disciples, lest they should be intimidated or apprehensive about what was destined to befall them. He assured them that the Holy Spirit would always be with them in all circumstances, consistently

granting them the courage and wisdom in all trials and interrogations to which they may be subjected. All they had to do was obey the Spirit, and utter what He dictates them.

V. 12:

The new Faith will lead to divisions within households - hence, unbelieving children could murder believing parents, or vice versa. Siblings could also rise up against each other.

V. 13:

Believers, across the generations, are consistently expectant of what Christ had foretold. Satan will usually incite many enemies around those who lead a godly lifestyle, evangelizing and striving to please God.

+ *However, my dear brother, we must be confident in our hope in Christ Whose promise never fails. Whoever patiently endures those hardships will not only receive eternal salvation, but also compensation for all his troubles (see Revelation 21:4). Therefore, my friend, courageously confront whatever you encounter - since you are living a covenant with Him Who promised.*

(IV) Events of Jerusalem's destruction - advice for escape (vs. 14 - 20)

"So when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" (let the reader understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

15 Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house.

16 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.

17 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!

18 And pray that your flight may not be in winter.

19 For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be.

20 And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days." (Mark 13:14 - 20)

V. 14:

"The abomination of desolation" - This is mentioned in Daniel 9:23 - 27.

That prophecy states that *"Messiah shall be cut off,"* and a *"prince"* would destroy Jerusalem and the temple, and *"bring an end to sacrifice and offering."* The word *"abomination"* means "defilement" which would accompany that destruction. Christ reaffirmed Daniel's prophecy.

During the period 66 - 70 A.D. Jerusalem experienced three Roman sieges, ending with Titus storming it. He destroyed several sections of the temple, and brought in it his idols, thus defiling it. Sacrifices offered in the temple ceased since that time.

"Let the reader understand" - Christ added this expression due to His knowledge that the Bible would be written and preached to the Gentiles. Our Lord also warned believers about the extreme severity of those events, and advised those living in Jerusalem and its environs, at that time, to flee to higher ground, to escape the Roman siege.

Vs. 15 - 18:

Those verses depict the harshness of that destruction, plus advice on how to escape. Hence, those on the roof should flee, since they will not have time to retrieve their belongings; those working in the field should not attempt to return to retrieve their clothes. Circumstances will be particularly difficult for **"those who are pregnant and...those who are nursing babies in those days."** Christ calls on them to pray for favourable weather conditions, since fleeing during the bitter winter cold would be especially difficult.

+ *My dear brother, all God's children aim to escape spiritually from evil and defilement. Christ offers avenues of refuge; hence, we must transcend above worldly pleasures and lusts, we must disregard material acquisitions (not to take anything out of the house), and we must not look back, rather, remain steadfast in the path of repentance while forsaking former sins.*

Prayer must constantly be our weapon, accompanying us until the terminal point of our escape - namely, settling with God in His kingdom....Amen.

V. 19:

The hardship of Jerusalem's destruction was indeed significant. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, more than 1.3 million Jews, from Jerusalem and its environs, perished at the hands of Titus. Such a scale of destruction was unprecedented in those days in that part of the world.

V. 20:

God compassionately limited the siege's duration to five months, thus granting the elite (Christians) a chance to flee.

NOTE:

The interpretation of verses 19 and 20 applies equally to end times; hence, persecution, during the last days, will be severe. However, through His love, God will shorten those days to permit deliverance of those who remain steadfast in the Faith.

(V) Signs of the end of the world and events thereof (vs. 21 - 31)

"Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it.

22 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

23 But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.

24 "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;

25 the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be

shaken.

26 Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.

27 And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.

28 "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near.

29 So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near--at the doors!

30 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." (Mark 13:21 - 31)

Vs. 21 - 23:

Our Lord warns us against the emergence of imposters, feigning to be Christ, and supported by Satan. They perform satanic wonders and perplex believers to the extent that they leave their Faith and follow them. Christ's words, though, are quite clear: **"Do not believe it."**

+ *For this reason, it is incumbent on us not to follow, impulsively, any current deviating from the Church and the spirit of the holy Bible - regardless of wonders that may be performed. Let us be consistently cognizant of Christ's words: "But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand." Our only recourse guaranteeing deliverance from deceivers' snares is adherence to prayer, humility, vigilance, and obedience to the Church.*

Vs. 24 & 25:

"But in those days" - This means "prior to Christ's Second Coming - not Jerusalem's destruction."

"The sun...and the moon" - We may speculate on a few possible meanings:

1. The direct meaning - hence, the physical world as God had created it, which depends on the sun and the planets' movement around it, will end.
2. The indirect meaning - hence, because of the appearance of Christ in His radiance, the sun appears dark comparatively.
3. The symbolic meaning - hence, after the spread of Christianity, heretics will distort the Faith's fundamentals, and confuse the simple-minded, dimming their minds (the sun) and their hearts (the moon).

"The stars of heaven will fall" - From the scientific standpoint, some stars have ceased to give light. A spiritual perspective, on the other hand, could be that heresies will lead to the fall of many believers and well-known Christian "stars."

"The powers in the heavens will be shaken" - Likely, this could be a reference to the visible natural elements in the heavens, to which St. Peter referred (2 Peter 3:10): ***"the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up."***

Vs. 26 & 27:

Christ describes the scene of His Second Coming. As He ascended in a cloud, He will return ***"in the clouds with great power and glory."*** Put differently, He will return in His indescribable glory and Divine might, authority and splendour. Usually, ***"clouds"*** refer to the Divine presence, as was the case in the days of Moses (Exodus 13:21 & 22) and Solomon (1 Kings 18:10 & 11) - also in the case of the Transfiguration (Matthew 5:17, Mark 9:7 and Luke 9:34). Then God ***"will send His angels, and gather together His elect*** (those who believed on Him and who survived the tribulations) ***from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven*** (meaning from the whole world)."

Vs. 28 & 29:

Christ offered this parable to His disciples, meaning that they could discern certain issues through signs, for example, seeing the fig tree's budding leaves is a sign of approaching spring. Analogously, upon seeing all the signs Christ mentioned, they should know that what He had foretold was imminent.

Vs. 30 & 31:

Most of the disciples and believers witnessed Jerusalem's destruction in 70 A.D.

Christ concludes by an unequivocal statement, eliminating any possible doubts about what He had said: He said that it is more credible for heaven and earth to pass away, rather than a single word from what He had said. + *Dear God, the signs of Your Second Coming are indeed awesome and terrifying. Nevertheless, I continue to be away from You, preoccupied with matters of this perishing world! Induce me, Dear Lord, to remember, constantly Your glorious Coming, and count me among those whom Your angels will gather....to Your bosom.....make me repent, Dear God....*

(VI) Constant vigilance (vs. 32 - 37)

""But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

33 Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.

34 It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch.

35 Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming--in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or

in the morning--

36 lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.

37 And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!'" (Mark 13:32 - 37)

Vs. 32 & 33:

No one either knows, or should strive to find out, the day and hour of Christ's Second Coming. That hour is known to God, and to God alone; He did not divulge it even to His angels - even Christ, during His incarnation, did not mention it.

Christ clarifies the wise reasoning behind concealing that hour from humans: namely, we should always be prepared and spiritually vigilant. Knowing that that hour lay in the distant future would lead to complacency and neglect of repentance and preparedness (see the comments below on Christ's knowledge of that hour.)

V. 34:

Our Lord Christ presents an example accentuating the importance of spiritual vigilance and the soul's salvation. The Master of the house is Christ Himself. He went "*to a far country,*" means, "He ascended to heaven after redemption." He "*left His house,*" means "He left His Church;" "*and gave authority to his servants,*" means "He entrusted His Church to believers on His name." He "*gave authority to his servants,*" means "He gave them the necessary talents and authority besides His commandments." "*And to each his work,*" means "He assigned tasks to each of his servants, to serve Him in His house, according to talents granted to each." He "*commanded the doorkeeper to watch,*" means "He entrusted the shepherds and priests to be spiritually watchful over His servants."

Vs. 35 - 37:

Christ concluded His example with an instruction, namely, "*watch therefore*" - since we "*do not know*" the time of His arrival.

"In the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning" - The Romans had sub-divided the night hours into four "watches," three hours each, from sunset until dawn. Hence, they were labelled, first, second, third and fourth watch respectively. The significant concern is that our Lord arrives and finds people asleep in their sins, and neglectful of their salvation - all would thus perish.

Christ concludes by warning believers over the entire world - not merely His disciples, hence, "*what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!*"

Important comments on verse 32:

Does the Son know, or not, the time of His Second Coming?? Why did He say "*nor the Son, but only the Father*"....??"

Our Church teaches us an important principle: upon encountering difficulties in understanding a particular verse in the Bible, we should not contemplate it in isolation; rather, we should seek its interpretation through other biblical

verses. This principle will be followed in interpreting verse 32.

Christ, being the Son of God and equal to Him in essence, naturally knows the time of His Second Coming. Proof is given in the following verses:

1. **"All things that the Father has are Mine."** (John 16:15) Given that the Father has all knowledge, it follows that the Son has it as well.

2. **"I and the Father are One."** (John 10:30) **"I am in the Father, and the Father in Me....I am in the Father and the Father in Me."** (John 14:10 & 11) These verses convey the same meaning. Also note the emphasis given through repetition in two verses.

3. How can Christ be the Creator, without knowing when His creation would end?? **"All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made."** (John 1:3)

4. How can He be the sole Judge, without knowing when He would judge?? **"For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son...."** (John 5:22) Also, **"And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I am with the father Who sent Me."** (John 8:16)

5. If the verse were taken literally, it would mean that the Son does not reveal His knowledge to the Holy Spirit - which is impossible: **"....For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God....Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God."** (1 Corinthians 2:10 & 11)

Therefore, the verse's intent is that Christ, being the Son of man, and a Man representing all mankind, prevents all humans from knowing this hour, and from attempting to know it. He desires humans to focus on repentance and on accepting His redemption.

We may also infer that Christ knows the day and hour; His saying **"nor the Son"** means that He declines its proclamation.

An example:

A teacher may deny knowledge of examination questions, when students ask him to divulge some of them; the teacher of course knows the questions since he authored them - but his denial simply means that he would not give that information.



Chapter 14

The Last Supper - Christ's arrest and trial

(I) Plotting to kill the Lord (vs. 1 & 2)

"After two days it was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put Him to death.

2 But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people."" (Mark 14:1 & 2)

A large council was assembled, comprising the chief priests and scribes (the people's teachers), on Tuesday evening (Jewish Wednesday). The meeting had a single agenda item, namely, arresting our Lord Christ and killing Him. However, the assembly voted for a postponement because of the impending Passover, with the associated large gatherings of Jews in Jerusalem, and the potential for spreading perplexity among them

"The Passover" - This is the most significant Jewish feast. According to God's commandment to Moses and the Jews (see Exodus 13:9 & 10), it was to be a *"memorial"* observed *"from year to year"* (that law is timeless). The Jews celebrate it to commemorate their exodus from Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, the perdition of Pharaoh and his troops, and the deliverance of Jewish firstborns through the sign of blood (Exodus 12:7) {Christ's redemption.} During that feast, the Passover lamb is roasted with fire and eaten with bitter herbs (all symbolisms were fulfilled through Christ's suffering on the Cross.)

"Unleavened bread" - Prepared from flour and water, no leaven, it would be eaten over a seven-day period following the Passover. It symbolizes a person's constant purity (seven days) after union with the Passover (Christ) - since leaven refers to evil in this context.

(II) The woman who poured costly oil on Christ's head (vs. 3 - 9)

"And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head.

4 But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted?

5 For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they criticized her sharply.

6 But Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me.

7 For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always.

8 She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My

body for burial.

9 Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her." (Mark 14:3 - 9)

V. 3:

Having mentioned the priests' plot on Wednesday's eve, St. Mark reverts to the previous Sunday evening (see also John 12:1 - 8). Christ had been invited to supper in the house of Simon, who was most likely a former leper whom Jesus had cured.

"Bethany" - The name means "house of affliction." This village lay east of Jerusalem at the foot of the Mount of Olives. While our Lord spent the nights there, He spent the days in Jerusalem, throughout Passover week.

"A woman came" - Neither Matthew nor Mark mentioned the name of that woman. In John 12:3, though, we read that she was Mary, Martha's and Lazarus' sister.

"Costly oil of spikenard" - That was the most expensive, exclusive, concentrated fragrance in those days. She poured the oil on Christ's head. Since St. John says that she poured it on His feet, we may infer that she poured it on His head and feet.

Vs. 4 & 5:

Many of the guests were irritated by Mary's action, including some of Christ's disciples (Matthew 26:8) - particularly, Judas Iscariot (John 12:4). They wondered among themselves: *"Why such waste - would it not have been better to spend all this money on the poor (300 denarius)??"*

To put the price of that oil in proper perspective, according to Matthew 20:2, a labourer's daily wages in those days was one denarius. Therefore, discounting Saturdays when work was prohibited, 300 denarius would have been roughly equal to one year's wages.

Vs. 6 & 7:

As the guests' criticisms to Mary mounted, Christ intervened in her defence, reprimanded those who reproached her, and praised her action, emphasizing: *"you have the poor with you always,"* but My days on earth are few.... Christ will never reject expressions of love from His children and those who love Him.

Vs. 8 & 9:

Mary's action was tantamount to a prophecy, on her part, foretelling Christ's crucifixion and burial. That was what Christ meant by saying, *"She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial."* Our Lord did not only thank and praise Mary, but He also instructed His apostles to record her deed in all their evangelism activities - so that the entire world may know what Mary, Lazarus' sister had done, and bless her...

+ *This incident teaches us the following:*

1. *Mary offered Christ her most precious possession....what are we offering?*
2. *What Mary did was an offering of thanksgiving to Christ Who had raised her brother from the dead....do we thank God for what He does for us....how do we thank Him?*
3. *Let us not judge anyone for their deeds.....whoever we judge, may be praised by God Himself.*
4. *God never forgets love's labour. He praises, encourages and blesses His children. Tender, indeed is His heart!*

(III) Judas' betrayal (vs. 10 & 11)

"Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them.

11 And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him." (Mark 14:10 & 11)

We see an amazing paradox: on the one hand, Mary's love motivated her to offer her most precious possession and, on the other, the treacherous disciple, sought to deliver His Master, in return for a price for his betrayal! The priests, naturally, were pleased, and offered him payment of *"thirty pieces of silver."* (Zechariah 11:13 and Matthew 26:15)

+ *Human attributes vary between honesty and treachery....in fact, we may be betrayed by someone from whom we least expect such behaviourtherefore, my friend, be not perturbed - even Christ Himself had this experience!*

(IV) The last Passover (vs. 12 - 21)

"Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?"

13 And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him.

14 Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' "

15 Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us."

16 So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover.

17 In the evening He came with the twelve.

18 Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me."

19 And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, "Is it I?" And another said, "Is it I?"

20 He answered and said to them, "It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish.

21 The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born. "' (Mark 14:12 - 21)

V. 12:

"On the first day of Unleavened Bread" - That was Thursday; on that day leaven was eliminated from all homes. The Passover lamb was slaughtered between the third and fifth evening hours, but not eaten before sunset - Friday eve. On that day, the disciples asked Christ, **"Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?"**

Vs. 13 - 16:

Christ refrained from announcing the location, so that Judas may not relay it to the priests, leading to the disciples' incurring the risk of being arrested. He sent Peter and John, and gave them a sign: namely, He told them to follow a man, whom they would meet; the man would be bearing a pitcher of water, and would lead them to the appointed house. They would then enquire of the owner of the house, who would lead them to **"a large upper room, furnished and prepared;"** there they would prepare for the Passover with Christ and rest of the disciples.

The following is worth noting:

- 1. Since neither our Lord nor any of His disciples owned property in Jerusalem, they had to use someone else's house.*
- 2. Our Church tradition stipulates that the house in question was the residence of St. Mark, who evangelized Egypt.*
- 3. Some may speculate that, since our Lord used "a pitcher of water" as the sign for His disciples - which sign preceded the institution of the eucharist - it could be analogous to baptism preceding, as a prerequisite, participation in the sacrament of holy communion.*

Vs. 17 & 18:

On Thursday evening, Christ came, along with His disciples, to the house where the Passover had been prepared for them. As they sat down to eat, Christ made a proclamation that hit the disciples like a thunderbolt: namely, one of the twelve eating at the table with Him, would deliver Him.

Vs. 19 & 20:

The disciples' jubilant feeling at their most cherished annual celebration was replaced with grief and perplexity. They started wondering, one after the other, **"Is it I?"** Christ's answer was clear: **"It is one of the twelve."** Christ also said that it would be the disciple **"who dips with Me in the dish."** St. John elaborates further: **"It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon."** (John 13:26) Judas' repentance was

the objective of all those calls, hints and warnings. However, this scenario gives a clear depiction of how an evil heart, which loves money, rejects all God's repeated, clear, warnings. Furthermore, Judas celebrated the Passover with everybody else, despite his resolve to deliver Christ. He joined them in a clear show of hypocrisy.....do we conduct ourselves similarly sometimes??

+ *May the Lord grant us a sensitive, alert, responsive, heart, that disavows the path of evil.....*

V. 21:

Our Lord confirmed His resolve to persevere in the path of mankind's redemption, according to the prophecies. However, this did not absolve Judas from betraying and delivering Christ, thus deserving condemnation. God did not induce Judas to deliver Christ - since Christ could have been arrested and crucified without any involvement by Judas. However, through his action, Judas earned perdition.

"It would have been good for that man if he had never been born." -

Christ was speaking figuratively, implying that the punishment for that person would be so severe, that it would have been better for him never to have been born, rather than to have been born and to have fallen in such a sin, incurring a horrible condemnation.

(V) Institution of the "Eucharist" - sacrament of the holy communion (vs. 22 - 26)

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

23 Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

24 And He said to them, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many.

25 Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

26 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." (Mark 14:22 - 26)

V. 22:

After the Passover meal, Christ took bread and blessed it, transforming it into His true body, through an amazing sacramental transformation. He proclaimed with perfect clarity that the bread had indeed been transformed into His body - hence, ***"Take, eat; this is My body."*** He gave His disciples and they ate. For this reason, our Church's Divine liturgies quote Christ's exact words.

Vs. 23 & 24:

Christ did the same with the cup, filled with wine and water, as was the custom for the Passover; He proclaimed clearly that the wine had been

transformed into His blood, shed for the redemption and salvation of the whole world. The cup was passed around and the disciples drank from it.

V. 25:

Thus, our Lord accepted the death sentence, through His own free will and authority, prior to its execution by the Jews. He proclaimed that He would not repeat that sacrament a second time with them on earth; it sufficed Him to have instituted it prior to His death. Nevertheless, he promised a new feast and fellowship in the kingdom of heaven, where we will exist as spirits: feeling, and being satiated with, Him, in a spiritual form, unrelated to physical food. Consequently, the expression "*when I drink it new*" is metaphoric, intended to convey the meaning expressed above.

V. 26:

"And when they had sung a hymn" - The Jews were accustomed to chant the psalms of jubilation (Psalms 115 - 118) after the Passover meal. After singing, Christ proceeded with His disciples to the Mount of Olives.

(VI) Foretelling Peter's denial (vs. 27 - 31)

"Then Jesus said to them, 'All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered.'

28 'But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.'

29 Peter said to Him, 'Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be.'

30 Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.'

31 But he spoke more vehemently, 'If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!'" And they all said likewise.' (Mark 14:27 - 31)

V. 27:

Concluding His discourse with His disciples, prior to delivering Himself, our Lord started priming them to the wars and struggles which they would encounter - the first was their having doubts about Him, since they would see Him being delivered into the hands of the Jews with no resistance, thus, having the appearance of weakness. As a result of that situation, they would flee and be scattered as shepherdless sheep; here, our Lord quoted the expression uttered by Zecharias (Zecharias 13:7).

V. 28:

Christ did not leave His disciples in a state of perplexity - rather, He confirmed that He would rise from the dead, and that He would meet them in Galilee. Naturally, the disciples did not fully understand everything Christ said - rather, their understanding was after the fact.

V. 29:

With his usual impulsiveness, Peter started talking, under the false impression that he was better than the rest. He declared, emotionally and unthinkingly, that he would be the only one who would neither doubt, nor

abandon, Christ - even if he were left alone after everyone had fled.

Vs. 30 & 31:

Christ countered Peter's pride and conceit by telling him that, in fact, he would be the sole disciple to deny Christ three times during His trial. In their meditations, our Church's forefathers proposed some symbolisms: hence, the rooster crowing twice could symbolize God's warnings in the Old and New Testaments, and Peter's three denials could symbolize man's weakness leading to full denial of God, in thought, speech and heart. Peter, though, persisted: *"If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"* All the other disciples voiced the same sentiment, declaring that they would never deny Christ, and that they desired to die with Him.

+ My friend, it is very good to trust God, and trust one's soul in Christ, as long as this trust is selfless. Let us consistently seek God's help humbly; He will support our human weakness, and sustain us in hardships.

(VII) In the Garden of Gethsemane (vs. 32 - 52)

"Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here while I pray."

33 And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed.

34 Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch."

35 He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him.

36 And He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will."

37 Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour?"

38 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

39 Again He went away and prayed, and spoke the same words.

40 And when He returned, He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him.

41 Then He came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.

42 Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."

43 And immediately, while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.

44 Now His betrayer had given them a signal, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him and lead Him away safely."

45 As soon as He had come, immediately he went up to Him and said

to Him, "Rabbi, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.

46 Then they laid their hands on Him and took Him.

47 And one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

48 Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me?"

49 I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled."

50 Then they all forsook Him and fled.

51 Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him,

52 and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked." (Mark 14:32 - 52)

Vs. 32 & 33:

The Garden of Gethsemane, meaning "the oil press," was located on the Mount of Olives; it earned its name from its abundant olive trees.

Our Lord instructed His disciples to sit, then took with Him Peter, James and John - the same disciples who had witnessed His transfiguration; He did so to avoid the risk of their being offended upon seeing Him apparently weak, and suffering, while praying during the final hours preceding His arrest, trial and crucifixion. Indeed, they saw on His face signs of human suffering.

Vs. 34 & 35:

Rather than conceal His human emotions from His disciples, Christ told them plainly, "*My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death....*" - this means that His internal sorrow had peaked, since He knew, through His Divinity, what He would have to endure.

It may be said that Christ's human sorrow was promulgated by two factors:

1. Despite Christ's sinlessness, purity and innocence, He would bear the exceedingly heavy load of the whole world's evil and uncleanness.

2. As a human being, Christ would be oppressed, since redemption requires the death of a sinless Person on behalf of a sinful humanity.

Therefore, despite His willing submission to, and full knowledge of, what He would have to endure, He prayed to the Father, as a human, asking that the impending suffering be alleviated - thus proving His full humanity.

V. 36:

"Abba, Father" - This is a Chaldean expression, well-known to the Jews, transliterated into Aramaic. St. Paul also used it in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6. Although both words bear the same meaning, "*Father*," they convey, when uttered simultaneously, sentiments of special endearment and affection.

The scene remains unchanged: with His continuing suffering and bitter emotions, Christ raises His heart to the omnipotent heavenly Father, asking

Him to alleviate the pain of the Cross. However, obediently, He submits to the Father, proclaiming His full obedience to, and acceptance of, His will.

+ *From this scene, let us learn acceptance of God's will in our life, and let us learn from our Saviour persistence in prayer - as He did. Let us not conceal our emotions from God, however bitter or sorrowful they may be. Let us be confident that, since He permitted those sentiments, He would help us through, and help us overcome.*

Vs. 37 & 38:

Our Lord had taken a few steps away from the disciples to pray solitarily to the Father. Upon His return, He found that the disciples had fallen asleep. He addressed Peter reproachfully: "**Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch** (with Me, in My suffering) **one hour?**" However, being gentle and tender-hearted, He expressed an excuse for the three disciples after His rebuke, namely, their spiritual will desired to watch and continue working spiritually with Him, but the weary, weak-willed flesh is often an impediment to the spirit's desire.

+ *Indeed, Dear God, we often feign active spirits and make grandiose promises....however, our lethargy hinders our struggle and leads us to accomplish none of our promises. Let us, therefore, subjugate ourselves - even by struggling incrementally - and let us not succumb to our body's weakness, so that we may not fall into temptation.*

Vs. 39 & 40:

Our Lord went back to pray a second time, expressing the same sentiments as before. Upon returning to His disciples, "**He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.**" They were too ashamed to answer Him, because He had told them earlier, "**Watch and pray.**"

V. 41:

For the third time, our Lord returned to His disciples. This time, though, He reproached them saying, "**Are you still sleeping and resting?**" The time for struggling in prayer was over, and the hour had come for the Son of Man to be "**....betrayed into the hands of sinners** (of His own free will)."

V. 42:

"**Rise, let us be going.**" - Through His Divinity, Christ knew of Judas' approach, accompanied by those who would arrest Him. He went to meet them, without waiting for them to arrest Him; by going to them, Christ desired to prove to His disciples, and to us, that He was the One Who delivered Himself, and He knew when His hour had come.

V. 43:

During that conversation - the last one prior to Christ's arrest - Judas came (he knew where to find Christ) accompanied by "**a great multitude,**" dispatched by "**the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.**" They were armed with "**swords and clubs,**" likely, with the expectation that the

disciples would resist Christ's arrest.

"Judas, one of the twelve" - This expression was used by both Sts. Matthew and Mark, to underscore the repulsiveness of the betrayal, undertaken by a member of Christ's closest circle during His years of ministry. It was indeed a heinous act!

Vs. 44 & 45:

Judas, the traitor, used a specific sign to identify Christ to the multitude. Ironically, he chose a "kiss" - normally a sign of love and sincere friendship - to deliver our Lord. In brazen hypocrisy, he called on Christ twice: **"Rabbi! Rabbi!"** This, usually, would be a call indicating submission and respect that a student would express to his teacher; he used this expression to conceal his wickedness and treachery. He said, **"seize Him and lead Him away safely,"** in order to avoid a potential tumult, which could ruin the plan for Christ's arrest.

Vs. 46 & 47:

As Judas kissed Christ, the multitude clustered around the peaceable Lord. In grievous amazement, St. Augustine described the scene saying, **"They arrested the One Who had come to liberate them!"**

In Luke 22:38, we read that the disciples had two swords between them: **"So they said, 'Lord, look, here are two swords.'"** One of the swords was with Simon Peter (John 18:10). Being appalled at what he saw, Peter **"drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear"** (it may be speculated that, analogously, the Jewish nation cut off its ears, thus shutting out the Lord's teaching)."

Vs. 48 & 49:

Christ reprimanded those who had come to arrest Him. Such an evening crowd would have been more appropriate for an escaped criminal - certainly not for our Lord, Who was consistently present, daily, among the people. This reprimand accentuated their cowardly behaviour: knowing the extent of the multitudes' attachment to Christ, they had resorted to that despicable approach. Our Lord also clarified that what they had done, had, in fact, been foretold by the prophets (see Psalm 22, Isaiah 23 and Zechariah 13:7).

V. 50:

"Then they all forsook Him and fled." This refers to the disciples. The surprise which struck them was so horrific, that they, in their human weakness, abandoned Christ, thus fulfilling Christ's prophecy (John 16:31 & 32), hence, **"Jesus answered them, '...the hour....now has come..... that you will be scattered.....and will leave Me alone.'"**

Vs. 51 & 52:

"Now a certain young man followed Him" - That was St. Mark himself, the author of the gospel; he humbly omitted his name. Having the same human

weakness as the disciples, St. Mark also fled.

(VIII) Trial by the Jews (vs. 53 - 65)

"And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes.

54 But Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire.

55 Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none.

56 For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree.

57 Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying,

58 "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.' "

59 But not even then did their testimony agree.

60 And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying,

"Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?"

61 But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"

62 Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

63 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses?"

64 You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.

65 Then some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, "Prophecy!" And the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands." (Mark 14:53 - 65)

Vs. 53 & 54:

The crowd took our Lord Jesus to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest (according to John 18:13, *"they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year."*) There, all the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees had assembled. According to John 18:15 - 18, the only two disciples who went to Caiaphas' house were Peter (who followed from a distance) and another disciple, likely John, who was known to the high priest. Peter stood outside with the servants and officers, warming himself over a fire of coals, since it was very cold.

Vs. 55 & 56:

"To put Him to death" - The discussion of these two verses revolves around this expression. That was merely a semblance of a trial, since the elders and

chief priests had decided, a priori, to sentence Christ to death. In order for them to authenticate that "theatrical show," they had mustered several "witnesses" to testify against Christ - hence, to provide justification for the death sentence. Since all the testimonies were false, they were contradictory, and nothing was found to justify a death sentence.

Vs. 57 - 59:

Another group testified falsely that Christ had said He would destroy Solomon's temple and rebuild it in three days. However, they failed to agree on that statement, since what Christ had really said was, "(you) *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*" (John 2:19) "*But He was speaking of the temple of His body.*" (John 2:21) Christ was also referring to His resurrection three days after His death.

Vs. 60 & 61:

The assembly never arrived at the conclusion that would have satisfied their intent. For this reason, Caiaphas stood up and asked Jesus, "*Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?*" Christ, though, remained silent, thus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy, "*He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.*" (Isaiah 53:7) Finally, and in desperation, Caiaphas asked Him directly, "*Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed (God)?*"

V. 62:

In order to tolerate the evil-doers' oppression, Christ maintained His silence, and did not defend Himself, throughout the false testimonies against Him. However, He did not deny Himself, when the question was aimed directly at His Person. He proclaimed clearly and powerfully "*I am.*" He proclaimed that He was indeed the Messiah, the Son of the living God. He even proclaimed His glory that would be manifested at His resurrection, His ascension, and His sitting "*at the right hand of the Power* (the Father)." He also proclaimed His awesome Second Coming on the clouds (Acts 1:11) at the end of the world.

V. 63:

The high priest was thunderstruck by Christ's response - when He proclaimed His Divinity and His Second Coming on the clouds. For this reason he cried angrily declaring:

1. that he had no need for witnesses, and
2. that Christ had blasphemed (see verse 64).

Caiaphas expressed his anger in a manner prohibited by law, namely, by ripping his clothes (see Leviticus 10:6 and 21:10). Furthermore, ripping his clothes was tantamount to terminating the Old Testament priesthood along with animal sacrifices, while initiating the New Testament covenant, which

continues in the Person of Christ Who delivers priesthood to the new Church, in the form of the apostles, and their successive bishops and priests.

Vs. 64 & 65:

Caiaphas subsequently asked the council for its opinion. Members agreed with him that Christ should be sentenced to death; however, their sentencing was not executable without the approval of the Roman authorities. All the Jews and slaves present started mocking Christ, despicably scoffing at His Person - hence, they blindfolded and beat Him, then said, "**Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?**" (Matthew 26:68)

+ *Dear God, have my iniquities indeed caused You all this suffering and humiliation?! I should have been in Your place....But You took the form of a slave and, for my sake, my Lord, You did not shield Your face from the shame of being spat upon (excerpt from the Divine Liturgy of St. Gregory).... Therefore, do repent, my soul....and do not disgrace the One Who endured all this suffering out of His love for you.....*

(IX) Peter's denial (vs. 66 - 72)

"Now as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came.

67 And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with Jesus of Nazareth."

68 But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are saying." And he went out on the porch, and a rooster crowed.

69 And the servant girl saw him again, and began to say to those who stood by, "This is one of them."

70 But he denied it again. And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, "Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it."

71 Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know this Man of whom you speak!"

72 A second time the rooster crowed. Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." And when he thought about it, he wept."

(Mark 14:66 - 72)

Vs. 66 & 67:

Peter was below, in the courtyard, where the servants had lit a fire to warm themselves. One of the high priests' maids came by and, seeing Peter warming himself, recognized him as one of Christ's disciples, and told him, "**You also were with Jesus of Nazareth.**" A rooster then crowed.

Vs. 68 & 69:

Peter denied knowing Christ and, in order to avoid the difficult situation, he went out on the porch. Once outside, he was confronted by the same maid (according to Matthew 26:71 another girl accosted him). There is no

inconsistency between Mark's and Matthew's accounts, since the first maid could have informed the second who, in turn, repeated to Peter what the first girl had said, namely, that he was one of Christ's disciples.

Vs. 70 & 71:

Peter denied a second time. Shortly thereafter, by-standers confirmed what the maid(s) had said, and confronted Peter saying, "***Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it*** (your dialect is similar to Christ's and the rest of His disciples)." At that point, Peter cursed and vehemently denied what they said, trying to prove the opposite of their "accusation," and trying to distance himself completely from the "charges" of being associated with Christ!!

+ *Dear Lord, I should not blame Peter for his action - since I find myself repeating the same offence; thus I conceal You from my actions and I, almost, deny You through my speech and deeds.*

V. 72:

The rooster crowed for the second time - precisely as the Lord had predicted (see verse 30); this awakened Peter's slumbering conscience. He recalled what our Lord had told him, and wept bitterly, thus repenting from the act of having denied the Lord.

+ *Dearly beloved, there is no doubt that Peter's denial was a grave error. Nevertheless, he remembered upon the rooster's crowing - and he repented. His repentance was genuine, stemming from a sincere heart. Our impulsiveness may lead us, in some instances, to commit significant errors like him - however, do we possess a rapidly responsive heart, like Peter's, reacting quickly to God's calls for repentance? God always awaits the return of His children....grant us, Dear Lord, the tears of repentance, so that we may repent like Peter.....*



Chapter 15

Christ's trial, crucifixion and burial

(I) Christ's civil trial before Pilate (vs. 1 - 15)

"Immediately, in the morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council; and they bound Jesus, led Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate.

2 Then Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" He answered and said to him, "It is as you say."

3 And the chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing.

4 Then Pilate asked Him again, saying, "Do You answer nothing? See how many things they testify against You!"

5 But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled.

6 Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested.

7 And there was one named Barabbas, who was chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion.

8 Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask him to do just as he had always done for them.

9 But Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?"

10 For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.

11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them.

12 Pilate answered and said to them again, "What then do you want me to do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?"

13 So they cried out again, "Crucify Him!"

14 Then Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, "Crucify Him!"

15 So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified." (Mark 15:1 - 15)

V. 1:

Following the Lord's trial before the Jewish council in Caiaphas' house, and before the Sanhedrin - the highest Jewish judicial authority (see Matthew 5:21 & 22) - the decision was made to kill Him. However, the death sentence was within the purview of the Roman, not Jewish, authorities, Therefore, they retained the Lord, bound, until the morning, when they would present Him to Pilate, the Roman governor, in his house.

V. 2:

Pilate asked Christ, "*Are You the King of the Jews?*" Pilate may have either heard of the multitude's reception to Christ upon His entry to Jerusalem, or he could have heard the chief priests' charges that Christ was a rebel against the Romans and wanted to establish Himself King. In any case, Christ answered "*It is as you say*" - that was a Jewish expression indicating agreement. Naturally, Christ was referring to His spiritual kingdom, since He had stated earlier that He was from above, and that His kingdom was not of this world (John 8:23 and 18:36).

Vs. 3 - 5:

Being more succinct in his account than the other evangelists, St. Mark makes no mention of Pilate's wife, of Pilate washing his hands, or of the detailed false testimonies against Christ - he simply said that there were many testimonies against Christ. Pilate offered Christ an opportunity to defend Himself, However, Christ preferred to remain silent, thus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy: "*He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.*" (Isaiah 53:7) Pilate was amazed at the Lord's silence.

Vs. 6 & 7:

Customarily, Pilate released to the Jews, at each feast, one of their detained criminals, given that settling Jewish brawls was within the Roman authorities' purview. At that time, one of the prisoners, awaiting his execution, was a murderer named "*Barabbas.*"

Vs. 8 & 9:

St. Matthew clarified, in Matthew 27:17, that Pilate had given the crowd the choice of releasing either Barabbas or Christ; he did so thinking that they would choose Jesus. The crowd, though, was at once loyal to, and fearful of, the chief priests.

V. 10:

This verse explains why Pilate decided to give the people a choice between Jesus and Barabbas: not only did he know the evil priests' motive, but he also believed that Christ did not deserve the death penalty.

Vs. 11 - 13:

The priests' hearts were burning with feelings of rage, evil and envy; those sentiments motivated them to incite their followers to demand the release of Barabbas. Thus, when Pilate asked them what Christ's fate should be, they cried, "*Crucify Him!*" Such was the Roman penalty for rebellious slaves.

V. 14:

Pilate remained confident that he had not heard anything justifying Christ's crucifixion. Expressing this sentiment, he asked, "*Why, what evil has He done?*" This question, though, simply caused the crowd to cry out more,

"Crucify Him!"

V. 15:

Once more, St. Mark recorded the events briefly. However, he made it a point to mention that Pilate sentenced Christ against his will and conscience; rather, he did so ***"to gratify the crowd,"*** to avoid the people's potentially tumultuous reaction (see also Matthew 27:24), and to avoid, consequently, incurring the risk of losing his position. Therefore, he ordered that Christ be scourged and crucified.

+ *My dear friend, we should note that there were many opportunities proving Christ's innocence and justifying His release. The first was Pilate's offer to choose between Jesus and Barabbas - they chose release of the criminal, rather than the Righteous. The second opportunity was when Pilate tried to prod their conscience by asking, "Why, what evil has He done?" Yet, they persisted in their wickedness, and insisted that Christ be crucified. My dear brother, we are not attempting here to put the Jews on trial; rather, let us learn some lessons:*

- 1. We should not make decisions in moments of anger or irritation.*
- 2. We should not ignore God's call to rectify our decisions.*
- 3. We should not allow our conscience to be influenced by others; rather we should follow, solely, God's prodding and, remember, "He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord." (Proverbs 17:15)*

If I were to ask myself: "Who was responsible for Christ's crucifixion?" We would find that Judas delivered Him, the religious leaders clamoured for His death, Peter denied Him, His disciples, in their fear, abandoned Him, Pilate feared for his position, the multitudes were passive and did nothing, and the troops mocked, struck, and tortured, Him! What about me, if faced with the same situation??! This is a very difficult question indeed!!

(II) Mocking Christ (vs. 16 - 20)

"Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison.

17 And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head,

18 and began to salute Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

19 Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshiped Him.

20 And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him." (Mark 15:16 - 20)

Vs. 16 - 18:

"The whole garrison" - That would have normally consisted of around 600 troops. Gathered in the Praetorium's courtyard, they amused themselves by

mocking Christ.

"Purple" - Matthew 27:28 refers to it as **"a scarlet robe."** That was the colour used by royalty. It has been speculated that the red (or scarlet) colour symbolizes the blood of Christ shed on the Cross for mankind's redemption.

"A crown of thorns" - That was made from a thorny plant called *"Euphorbia milii."* In addition to the crown of thorns placed on Christ's head, St. Matthew says, **"they put....a reed in His right hand."** (Matthew 27:29) This completed their derisive image of Christ: a King, with a crown on His head, a scarlet robe, and a sceptre (reed) in His hand. Mockingly, they bowed before Him, and saluted Him as King of the Jews.

It should also be noted that the Jewish nation persevered in their rejection of Christ, having initially blocked their ears to shut out His teaching (see the explanation associated with Chapter 14:46 & 47).

Vs. 19 & 20:

This grievous, heinous, scene continues, depicting humanity's appalling contempt to its Creator and Redeemer. The troops brazenly struck the Lord on His head in blatant abuse. They spat on Him, and worshipped Him, mocking His title of King. Subsequently, **"they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him."**

+ *My soul, what can you possibly say, before this unbelievable, indescribable, scene?? Who is mocking Whom - and why....are you not the cause?? Was not this for the purpose of liberating you?? What do you do in return....do you acknowledge this unmerited favour, or do you continue to inflict pain upon Him through your abundant iniquities?! My soul, do repent, and focus constantly on your Saviour's Passion, lest you should forget it....by so doing, I doubt you would dare to err....Dear Holy Saviour, forgive us... and we thank You for everything You have endured for us.*

(III) The Cross (vs. 21 - 41)

"Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross.

22 And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull.

23 Then they gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it.

24 And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take.

25 Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him.

26 And the inscription of His accusation was written above: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

27 With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left.

28 So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with the transgressors."

29 And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days,

30 save Yourself, and come down from the cross!"

31 Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save.

32 Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him.

33 Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

35 Some of those who stood by, when they heard that, said, "Look, He is calling for Elijah!"

36 Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink, saying, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down."

37 And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last.

38 Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

39 So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!"

40 There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome,

41 who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem."

(Mark 15:21 - 41)

V. 21:

Christ started bearing His Cross, and walking towards "*a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha.*" (John 19:17)

Christ was overwhelmed by fatigue, promulgated by scourging, long night hours of vigilance, and repeated trials; the Roman troops therefore

"compelled a certain (Jewish) man, Simon a Cyrenian (he hailed from Cyrene in today's northern Libya).....to bear His cross." St. Mark took care to mention the names of that man's sons, "*Alexander and Rufus,*" likely, because they had become known to the Christian community at that time.

V. 22:

"Golgotha" or *"the Place of a Skull"* lay outside Jerusalem. While some believe that it derived its name from its rock formations, shaped like a human skull, the Jews believe that Adam's skull was buried there.

V. 23:

"Wine mingled with myrrh" - Myrrh was known to be a powerful sedative, and it was usually administered mixed with wine (see also the explanation accompanying Matthew 27:34), to make it more palatable. Customarily, this mixture would be given to the crucified to alleviate their pain. Christ refused it in order to endure the pain's full, unmitigated brunt!

V. 24:

"They crucified Him" - They raised the Cross after nailing Christ's hands and feet to it. The suffering started, due to the breathing difficulty, plus the loss of blood from internal and external hemorrhaging. Roman troops had the right of taking possession of the crucified's clothing. Therefore, they laid bare Christ, Whose mercies sustain and cover all mankind. The soldiers therefore cast lots over His clothing to decide who would take them, thus fulfilling David's prophecy: *"They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots."* (Psalm 22:18)

V. 25:

Our Church's tradition stipulates that the crucifixion took place at about the sixth hour - Jewish timing (midday). In John 19:14, we read, *"Now it was the Preparation Day....and about the sixth hour* (Roman timing, corresponding to 6 a.m. in today's timing). *And he* (Pilate) *said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"*" St. Mark, on the other hand, says, *"it was the third hour* (Jewish timing - 9 a.m. today's timing), *and they crucified Him."* Likely, St. Mark could have meant that the proceedings for the crucifixion lasted for some time, starting at the third hour (9 a.m.) with the crucifixion taking place some three hours later (the sixth hour - Jewish timing and Church tradition - corresponding to midday). It should also be noted that, in Jewish time-keeping, proceeding from the third to sixth hours was not precisely delineated - analogously, we do not, today, have a clear-cut separation between "morning" and "noon."

V. 26:

"The inscription of His accusation" - The Roman custom was that, for each crucified criminal, an inscription be placed on his cross describing the crime for which he had been crucified. Since Pilate could not identify any justification for Christ's crucifixion, he wrote on the inscription: ***"THE KING OF THE JEWS"*** in the three prevailing languages at that time: Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Some speculate that Pilate wrote this to mock the Jews, by saying that their King was crucified.

Vs. 27 & 28:

Two criminals were crucified with Christ, one on either side of Him, thus fulfilling the prophecy: "***And He was numbered with the transgressors***" (Isaiah 53:12) Crucifixion of the two robbers with Christ could also indicate that redemption was for all Jews and Gentiles.

Vs. 29 & 30:

All passers-by scoffed at the crucified Christ, reiterating what the false witnesses had alleged about Christ destroying the temple and rebuilding it in three days (when He was referring to His body). They said that, since He was capable of destroying the temple and rebuilding it in three days, He should be able to come down from the Cross.

V. 31:

A group of priests, scribes and elders participated in mocking the Lord of glory. They purposed, through their mockery, to prove that their decision to kill Christ was a sound one. If He were indeed God's anointed Messiah, could He not save Himself from His current plight? Thus they said, "***He saved others; Himself He cannot save.***"

V. 32:

Following their argument in verse 31, they stated that they would believe on Him if He satisfied a certain condition.

"Those who were crucified with Him reviled Him" - Both Matthew and Mark mentioned that the two robbers crucified with Christ also mocked Him, and Luke recorded what they had said. Although we may conclude that both of them reviled Christ, we can see from Luke 23:39 and Matthew 27:44 that one of them did not.

V. 33:

"There was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour" - That darkness was indeed a miracle by anybody's standards! The longest solar eclipse lasts only for a few minutes - this one's duration was three hours! That phenomenon should have alerted the Jews - the manifested Divine wrath and nature's displeasure at their deed should have warned them.... However, anyone eclipsed by oppression and spiritual blindness is incapable of the simplest discernment....

+ *My soul - do understand....nature in its entirety was shrouded in gloom, mourning its Creator Who bore all our sins; but....you....what are you doing?? Re-examine and awaken your conscience!*

Vs. 34 & 35:

Darkness prevailed from the sixth to the ninth hours - Jewish timing (from midday to 3 p.m. today's timing). "***....at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"***" (which is Aramaic, meaning) "***My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?***" Those are the first words in Psalm 22:1, in which David had prophesied all of Christ's suffering, casting lots for His garments, and mockery. That was as though

Christ's final cry to the Jews was, *"Refer to your prophecies - then you will find that everything has been fulfilled precisely as foretold."* However, some of those present thought that He was calling Elijah the prophet.

NOTE:

Christ's sayings on the Cross have been traditionally referred to as the *"Seven Last Words from the Cross."* St. Mark recorded only the fourth one (see the explanation of Matthew 27:50).

V. 36:

"Sour wine" - It was acidic and cheap, and usually given to soldiers. One of the soldiers offered some of it on a sponge to Christ - likely out of pity - but he said mockingly, *"Let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down."*

V. 37:

"Jesus cried with a loud voice" - That was Christ's last cry on the Cross. Neither Matthew nor Mark mentioned whether that cry was accompanied by words. However, we read in John 19:30, that Christ's final words were *"It is finished."* He may have cried out saying those words, as a powerful proclamation that redemption had been fulfilled for every human being who believed on Him. He then yielded His human spirit.

V. 38:

As soon as Christ had yielded His human spirit, *"the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."* The veil was a curtain made of woven linen, separating the holy place from the holy of holies. It symbolized separation between the all-holy God and the sinful humans. Tearing of the veil implied the following:

1. Christ offered Himself a perfect Sacrifice, entering to His Father (the holy of holies). With that Sacrifice, He annulled the animal sacrifices, along with Jewish worship, and started the New Testament (Hebrews 9:11 & 12).
2. Enmity was terminated - which existed between the all-holy God, and sinful humans, who can only see Him through repentance and acceptance of Christ's redeeming blood, that was shed for this reconciliation.

V. 39:

A Roman centurion was among those at the crucifixion site, supervising the execution of Christ's sentencing. Upon perceiving the darkness over the land, all the events at the Cross, and the blood and water coming out of the Lord's side (John 19:34), he could only testify saying, *"Truly this Man was the Son of God."*

+ *My dear friend, let us contemplate together the testimony of this pagan. He was not of the seed of Abraham, he was not awaiting the Messiah, and he had no knowledge of Jewish prophecies. Nevertheless, he uttered a truthful testimony. On the other hand, the Jews - those who were called - persisted in their stubborn rejection, hardness of heart, and spiritual blindness. Indeed, that was a testimony from a pagan, through which he*

condemned all Jewish nonbelievers.

Vs. 40 & 41:

Throughout Christ's ministry, He was followed by many women. They ministered unto Him in a manner whose details we do not know; however, St. Luke says, "*...and many others who provided for Him from their substance.*" (Luke 8:3) St. Mark says that some of those women followed Christ till the Cross; with the exception of St. Mary (John 19:26 & 27), who stood at the foot of the Cross, the others stood at a short distance from it.

"Mary Magdalene" - She hailed from Magdala, a village close to Tiberias. She had followed Christ after He had exorcized seven demons from her.

"Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses" - She was the wife of Clopas, and St. Mary's sister (John 19:25).

"Salome" - She was Zebedee's wife, James' and John's mother.

This demonstrates those women's courage: they loved Christ, and their desire to follow Him unto the Cross was not daunted by their fear. By contrast, all the men disappeared (with the exception of John - see John 19:26 & 27 - who, through Divine economy, was by the Cross, so that Christ may leave His mother in his care)!!

+ *Thus, we see, dearly beloved, when our Lord Christ reigns, through love, over our heart, we fear nothing, rather, we follow our Christ, unto the end, braving all suffering and hardships.*

(IV) Christ's burial (vs. 42 - 47)

"Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath,

43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

44 Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time.

45 So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.

46 Then he bought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.

47 And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where He was laid." (Mark 15:42 - 47)

Vs. 42 & 43:

"When evening had come" - That was at sunset, Friday evening.

"The Preparation Day" - That was Friday evening, when Jews prepared to eat the Passover; it was also preparation for the Sabbath, the first day of unleavened bread.

"A prominent council member" - Joseph of Arimathea was a member of

the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish council. St. Mark also ascribes to him the label "***prominent***," indicating his respectability and high regard in the community. He was one of Christ's disciples "***but secretly for fear of the Jews***." (John 19:38) He went boldly to Pilate, "***and asked for the body of Jesus***," maintaining his focus on "***the kingdom of God***." Had the Romans buried our Lord's body, the Jews would have doubted His death and, consequently, debated His resurrection.

Vs. 44 & 45:

"Pilate marvelled that He was already dead" - That was because a crucified person would have normally hung on the cross more than one day, before his death. Therefore, he called the centurion in charge, and "***asked him if He had been dead for some time***." Having verified Christ's death, "***he granted the body to Joseph***."

V. 46:

Joseph wrapped Christ's body in spices and expensive white linen (symbolizing purity). Divine economy was such that the disciples did not bury Christ's body, so that they would not be accused of stealing it. Joseph (and Nicodemus - see John 19:39) laid the body in a newly hewn tomb (which he had for himself - see Matthew 27:60) , since our Lord did not have His own tomb - Whoever vanquishes death, does not acquire a tomb. The tomb contained solely the Lord's body. They rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. The chief priests and Pharisees subsequently "***...went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard***." (Matthew 27:66)
+ *Dearly beloved, Joseph of Arimathea reminds us of an important spiritual implication, namely, when we receive grace, we must secure it and guard it carefully - this is one reason for placing a napkin against our mouth after ingesting Christ's holy body during communion.*

V. 47:

The Marys and the other women were incapable of being present before Pilate, the Sanhedrin or the multitude. Nevertheless, they did their best, namely, their love love drove them to follow Christ to the tomb and throughout His burial. It was as though their eyes refused to lose sight of their beloved's body until the last possible moment.

+ *Blessed indeed, and jubilant, is the soul which clings to Christ until the last moment; it can emphatically say, "***He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son***." (Revelation 21:7) Grant, Dear Lord, that each night, our eyes not close before ensuring that Your image is the last we had seen with our hearts. Amen.*



Chapter 16

From Christ's resurrection to His ascension

(I) The women's visit to the tomb (vs. 1 - 8)

"Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him.

2 Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen.

3 And they said among themselves, "Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?"

4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away--for it was very large.

5 And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.

6 But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.

7 But go, tell His disciples--and Peter--that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you."

8 So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." (Mark 16:1 - 8)

V. 1:

"Now when the Sabbath was past" - This means "after sunset." At that time, the women bought spices, intending to proceed to the tomb to complete the anointing of Christ's body. Their action proves two points: their great love for our Lord, plus their continued failure to understand the notion of Christ's resurrection.

NOTE:

Our Lord spent, in the tomb, part of Friday, Saturday day and night, plus Sunday eve until dawn. That period is counted as three days, according to Jewish accounting.

Vs. 2 & 3:

"Very early in the morning" - This statement is perfectly consistent with John 20:1, *"Now on the first day of the week...when it was still dark..."* St. Mark, though, adds, *"when the sun had risen."* Thus, we conclude that when the women exited the city, it was still dark. Dawn was breaking as they arrived at the tomb. They were wondering who would help them in rolling away the huge, heavy, stone from the tomb's entrance.

Vs. 4 & 5:

Upon arriving at the tomb, a great surprise awaited them. They found that the stone had been rolled away completely, and the tomb was open. They entered the tomb, and were alarmed at seeing an angel, in the form of a young man clothed in white robes, sitting at the right side.

While St. Luke says, "*...two men stood by them in shining garments...*" (Luke 24:4), St. John says, "*...two angels in white...*" Since, normally, each observer accentuates certain aspects of a given event or scene, it is quite likely that St. Mark focused on the angel who spoke to the women.

V. 6:

The angel immediately comforted them, reassuring them to alleviate their feelings of alarm - he knew Whom they were seeking: "***Jesus of Nazareth Who was crucified.***" It would have been quite sufficient for him to say "*Jesus,*" or "*the Nazarene,*" or "***Who was crucified.***" However, he stated the Lord's name and attributes to eliminate any potential doubts about Whom he was speaking.

"Who was crucified" - The angel could have said "*Who was resurrected*" instead of "***Who was crucified.***" The latter attribute, however, remains the symbol of love, selflessness, and redemption; it is a title forever attached to our Lord, even following His resurrection - it is our pride and distinguishing insignia proclaiming our acceptance of His limitless love and redemption.

"See the place where they laid Him" - The angel pointed to where Christ's body had lain, confirming His resurrection and absence from the tomb.

+ *Our Lord fulfilled His promise to rise from the dead. It is thus incumbent on us to be confident in His faithfulness to fulfill all His promises. God's might which raised Christ's body from the dead, is available to resurrect our spiritually and psychologically dead souls, enabling us to change, grow, and lead a resurrected life.*

V. 7:

The angel requested the women to bear and confirm the news of Christ's resurrection to Peter and the disciples, and to go to Galilee, where Christ would have preceded them, to meet them and confirm His resurrection. The disciples, though, being terrified, remained in Jerusalem (see John 20:19 & 26). Therefore, Christ met them initially in Jerusalem (Luke 24) and subsequently in Galilee (John 21). Christ then returned to Jerusalem, where He ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:2).

+ *From the above, we learn a significant lesson: it is insufficient for each Christian to profess his/her faith - rather, it is incumbent on all Christians to inform others that, regardless of their sins, Christ's redemption and acceptance remain available. That is precisely what our Church teaches us in the Divine Liturgy, when the congregation chants: "Amen, Amen, Amen, we do evangelize Your death, O Lord; and we profess Your holy resurrection*

and ascension...."

V. 8:

In this verse, St. Mark expounds the sentiments of the women who had gone to visit the tomb. Despite the angels' words of encouragement, they were overwhelmed with feelings of fear and perplexity, promulgated by human weakness plus the enormity of the circumstances.

"And they said nothing to anyone" - In Luke 24:9 we read, *"Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest."* We may therefore conclude that they informed no one on their way - not even any friends - rather, the first to know were the disciples.

(II) Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene, plus two disciples, then to the rest of the disciples (vs. 9 - 18)

"Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.

10 She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept.

11 And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe.

12 After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country.

13 And they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either.

14 Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.

15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

16 He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

17 And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues;

18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."'" (Mark 16:9 - 18)

NOTE:

It should be mentioned at this point, that the four evangelists recorded the events of the resurrection and the empty tomb; the visits, though (by whom and when) were not all mentioned by each evangelist. In order to formulate a complete picture, the reader is advised to consult the explanation given for Matthew 28.

Vs. 9 - 11:

Matthew, Mark and Luke record that Mary Magdalene was among the first

women to visit the tomb: either with another Mary (Matthew 28:1) or with others (Luke 24:10). John mentions that she was alone at some point (John 20:1 & 2 and 11 - 17). We may thus conclude that she was the "common denominator" in several instances. Since she was motivated by her profound love for our Lord, she merited seeing Him with Mary once, then another time by herself. She went to inform the disciples - who disbelieved, due to their intense grief. St. Mark did not record another detail given by St. John (John 20:4 - 10), namely, Peter and John hastened to verify the news.

"Seven demons" - St. Luke also mentioned this (Luke 8:2) although without elaboration. It is important to note that God is capable of defeating all the powers of Satan, manifested in humans, regardless of their number. The prerequisite is man's humility, leaving God to act.....Amen.

Vs. 12 & 13:

St. Mark mentions, briefly, another appearance by Christ, namely, His appearance to two of the seventy disciples. St. Luke elaborates that appearance; those two disciples are labelled "the disciples of Emmaus" - Luke 24:13 - 35. St. Luke also states that when those two relayed the news to the eleven disciples, they were not believed.

+ *Having recognized Christ, the Emmaus disciples went to inform the disciples.....so, what do WE do, having believed that Christ is God incarnate, and having repeatedly experienced Him? Do we adhere to Him, call others to encounter Him in His Church, and relish His holy body?*

V. 14:

"Later He appeared" - This means that after Christ's two appearances mentioned earlier (to Mary and the Emmaus disciples), **"He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table,"** and reprimanded them for disbelieving the news they had heard, from the others, about His resurrection.

In his gospel's concluding statements, St. Mark took great care to accentuate the essence of Christ's message to His disciples. Hence, he did not mention whether Christ appeared to His disciples in Jerusalem or Galilee.

Furthermore, his brevity, may leave the reader with the false impression (in verse 19) that Christ's appearance to the disciples and His ascension occurred at the same encounter.

V. 15:

The essence of Christ's message to the disciples was evangelizing the kingdom of God, Christ's redemption for the whole world, and salvation for all believers. The expressions **"all the world"** and **"every creature"** mean that the Church is charged with continuing the holy apostles' evangelizing - Christ's message of salvation has yet to be relayed to millions, while countless souls have apostacized and deviated from the spiritual lifestyle. Christ's assignment to us is thus clear; the service needs significant Divine help, especially given the current world's increasing tendency towards evil.

V. 16:

This constitutes not only salvation's primary, but also its only, access: belief on Christ's name, followed by holy baptism. That was precisely our Church's approach across the ages: in evangelizing, our Church delivers the Faith, then gathers believers and baptizes them in the name of the all-holy Trinity, at the hands of the apostles, bishops and priests. That Sacrament is so important, that our Church rejects anyone seeking to join and participate in the other sacraments without, a priori, having been baptized. Furthermore, our Church rejects any strange teaching saying that baptism is a mere sign. Our Lord's declaration is quite clear: God will condemn all who hear, yet disbelieve, and fail to be baptized. Today, children are baptized in their parents' faith - thus, parents are accountable to God for planting the sound faith in their children's hearts.

Vs. 17 & 18:

Christ not only assigned His disciples the task of evangelizing all over the world, but He also encouraged them, namely, miracles would accompany them as necessary proof for would-be believers of that era. Additionally, for the sake of spreading the Faith, they would speak in languages with which they were previously unfamiliar.

"They will take up serpents" - The intent here is that serpents would not harm them. Christ had previously promised His disciples, *"Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you."*

(Luke 10:19) This could occur to God's children, as was the case with St. Paul (Acts 28:3 - 6) when he miraculously shook the viper off his hand. There could be another implication, hence, *"serpents"* could refer to evil surrounding God's children, and which can only be vanquished through Divinely-granted power. God's children acquire this special power through their full submission to Him and their perseverance in prayer.

(III) Christ's ascension (vs. 19 & 20)

"So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.

20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs.

Amen." (Mark 16:19 & 20)

V. 19:

After numerous appearances and teachings, St. Mark records our Lord's ascension to heaven (see also Acts 1:9).

"At the right hand of God" - This is a metaphorical expression, referring to the glory, splendour and might, namely, Christ's attributes, which He had concealed from us during the period of His incarnation.

V. 20:

St. Mark concludes his gospel with a verse, expressing the Church's work, extending from the apostles' days till today, namely, evangelizing in Christ's name. As the holy apostles experienced the Lord's work through them, our Church - through its servants, priests and bishops - continues to experience the mighty hand of God, working in the service, and attracting souls to the true Faith.

+ Dear Lord, render me a fruitful branch in Your vine, a member evangelizing Your kingdom, steadfast in Your Church and Your word - then I shall be satiated, and win my brethren to You, solely for the sake of Your glorification. Amen

