

Introduction

“Do you remember when” or “In a land far, far away ...” are how many stories for children begin. These stories may have been read to us as children with some remaining with us throughout our lives. Others we have read for ourselves. When we are adults we can remember some of the stories read to us. The result is that we have a great affection for stories; they stimulate our imagination, some because they are funny, some amusing, some intriguing and others because they cause us to think and reflect. When older we feel stories can place us in our world, help us to think about who we are and even enable us to have a moral compass that can assist us in the various circumstances and situations we find ourselves in.

The effect is that we have an enormous affection for and happy memories of those stories which have made us reflect upon our place in our world as well as helping us to think about who we are; our relationship to ourselves and others. They encourage us to have a moral compass to know good from bad, right from wrong, therefore assisting us to relate better to the various situations and circumstances we find ourselves in life. Stories teach us that although we make our own decisions in life, at times we have to refer to others that we make right choices.

Every country, every culture and every language have their own stories that are passed on from generation to generation, although some are more memorable than others. In all cultures the storyteller is a highly respected member of the society and community. The storyteller has been lauded from the beginning of time as a valuable member of the community keeping together traditions. This extended into a world where the written word has become dominant for the “story” helps us to have a better and fuller understanding of who we are as a community, a society, as a group and as individuals and to place us in the world we inhabit.

From Homer to Virgil, from Shakespeare to Dostoevsky from Dickens to our present day we have valued storytellers for their ability and insight to speak to us of our human condition. In our modern age, the time of technological advances, the information age, this has been extended to involve not only the spoken word and the written word but to encompass the cinema, song, the computer and mobile phone. However, no matter the medium it is the ability to say something about our lives, our hopes, our struggles, our relationships, and even our future together as a community.

In the midst of all this God has also been involved, active in the use of “story” to gradually reveal Himself to us. It began with the story of the people of Israel where in the Old Testament He manifests Himself through the lives of individuals, of groups and the whole people. This gradual revelation culminates in the coming of the promised Messiah, the Christ, in the person of Jesus. After the Resurrection the Apostles would tell incidents from the life of Jesus which they had witnessed. These “stories” had a profound effect upon the hearers. Eventually the apostles wrote down in a systematised form the life of Jesus, the Gospels.

It is in the Gospels we discover that Jesus is the greatest storyteller of all time. During His ministry, His preaching, He related directly with the lives of His listeners with stories, the Parables. Not only were these understood immediately by the hearers for they were relevant to their lives but also manifesting to all about the Kingdom of God and who Jesus is.

So great were these stories that many have passed into common usage even today in our more secular world. For example “the good Samaritan”, “the lost sheep”, the prodigal son” these and many other sayings touch our hearts, our souls, our imagination, our understanding helping us to come to a knowledge of ourselves, our world and our position in relation to God, Our Saviour, our Church and the Kingdom of God. Jesus, the storyteller reaches out to people of all time, in all situations and circumstances that each listener may hear something of how to grow in love of God and our neighbour.

The world of today is more materialist and more secular and sceptic age than ever before in history. This has great consequences for the ministry of preaching. Our present age can be characterised as one of having no time to listen, the fast-moving pace means everything has to be quick, relevant instantly and entertaining. However, the preacher can follow the example of Jesus and has the opportunity of reaching out and touching his listeners by telling “stories” that relate from the Gospels to the lives of the hearer.

The homily/sermon/talk is not a theological lecture but it has to instruct, to encourage and affirm those listening that the Word of God is alive and active, remembering that Jesus is present in the homily at Mass. So, the preacher has to pray to the Holy Spirit that his words may reach out to open the minds and hearts of those hearing. The preacher is tasked to “break” the Word of God into easy ways that relate directly to the lives of today. It is here that the use of stories from every day, ordinary life can be a great assistance. When this is done well the hearer has a sense of belonging, participating and relevance and can come closer to know the love, the mercy, the forgiveness and compassion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. When we hear an incident from ordinary life this can be used to express and relate to a larger group.

A Christmas Gift

Two ladies of a certain age talking about Christmas. One speaks. “All that fuss, rushing about, all the stress involved and then it over for another year”. “Yes” her companion replies, “and that’s not to mention the problem of presents. Not knowing what to buy, and will it be appreciated?” The other says: “Your right. And what about the gift you receive. There is never anything you really want or need” Her friend responds saying; “That’s not the worst of it. The worst is when you receive a present from someone unexpectedly. You don’t know what to do. You have to rush out and buy something. But how much to spend?” “I know” is the response. “You don't want to be seen as mean nor do you want to seem too generous”. “Oh Never be too generous” Her friend answers. It is a problem for some.

We are taught from our earliest days not to be too generous, as most respond by saying “What is he up to” or “What does she want” So do not be generous. We are always suspicious of the generous person. As this is the natural attitude of many people it can overflow into all aspects of life, even towards our attitude to God.

It is at Christmas when we celebrate the birth of Jesus and so celebrate just how generous God is to all of us. “The Word is made flesh”, God becomes man, one like us in all things but sin. It means that God has raised the dignity of humanity to a new and higher level. We receive the most precious and wonderful gift. A gift of pure generosity for we have done nothing to deserve such a gift. This new raising of humanity’s dignity is raised further

by our Baptism. It is at our Baptism that God is no longer “out there” separate from us, now God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit live within us. We are raised to a new level because now not only are we made in the image of God but also God living within us. It shows His incredible generosity; freely given, to make us special to Him, His chosen, His Saints. We are so special, so loved by God that He has carved our names on the palm of His hand.

Through the greatest gift of all time and place, the Word made flesh, we become a Baptised nations, a people set apart, a holy nation, a royal priesthood. Jesus is our Brother, we become the family of God. We are chosen to be the workers of God’s Kingdom. This is why we should celebrate Christmas. There should be a great celebration going on inside us, the light of the world dispelling any darkness in our lives (even the hidden places) bringing us gladness, joy and peace. We are brothers and sisters of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We are special to him. God has been so generous to us. So celebrate Christmas as the beginning of our redemption and Salvation. So whether you are with family, or own your own or part of a community. No matter whatever else you have received as a gift rejoice and be glad for you have received the most wondrous gift of history and time; the gift of your Brother Jesus, the Word made flesh. The “story” of salvation began with Jesus but continues through each one of us who are called to be His brothers and sisters. We have God with us, we have Father, Son and Holy Spirit living inside of us and so we continue the Gospel “story” for our world today. Never forget that Jesus walks with you every step of the way so we can say: “Jesus walks with me”.

Our Lady

We often hear it said that our school days are the “best days of your life”. A time of friendships, new relationships. A time of education where we develop intellectually, emotionally and physically. For some people they remember a special teacher who encouraged, affirmed as well as taught. However, for others school may have been a torture, something to endure.

As Christians our first “school” to learn from is the “school of Our Lady”, the school of Nazareth. It is from her that we can learn so much that will lead us to a greater knowledge and closeness to her son.

We begin to learn from Our Lady at the Annunciation. It is easy for us to think that Our Lady “floated” through her life. It must have been so as she was “full of grace”, everything came easy, no hesitation, no wondering. But the reality is different as told by St Luke. At the Annunciation, we learn that Our Lady’s reactions are so similar to what our own would be. Her first thought when she encounter God’s messenger (the Archangel Gabriel) is fear. “Do not be afraid”. She is afraid of this strange and mysterious visitor. Anxiety and apprehension would have overcome her, as it would each one of us. Next she questions what is being said to her. After this there is hesitation as she begins to understand the enormity of what is being asked of her. The result is the Angel Gabriel realises she needs not only the reassurance of a sign (her kinswoman Elizabeth) but the strength of God so that she can respond positively to the call of God.

Our Lady teaches us that she reacts in the same way we would if this happened to us. We are afraid of what God may be asking of us when He asks us to be His witnesses in our world, our community, our family. We have questions, hesitation and worries for our future. But Our Lady teaches us how to respond to God and so we learn from her to open our hearts, mind and soul to the Word of God. Open our hearts to His grace.

However, this is only the start of a life that entails much difficulty and hardship. First she had to tell her parents that she is expecting a baby, never easy. Next, she would have to tell her betrothed Joseph and we know from the Gospel of Matthew his reaction before the intervention of God. All this emotional, psychological and physical turmoil for a young girl. Also, there would be the problem of “the neighbours” and the rumours and the gossip she would have to endure. Here we must think of how small and close knit the community would have been at Nazareth. It is now that she would indeed need the “strength of God”, and to know she is “full of God’s grace”. It is now we learn from Our Lady that when we follow God’s way we need *not* fear rejection or ridicule, or fear what others say about us.

Also, almost immediately we learn of her care and concerns for others, as with a generous heart and a desire to help others makes a hazardous journey to support her kinswomen Elizabeth. Here we learn of her humility, “my soul magnifies the Lord” “my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour”, as God has listened to the prayer of His lowly handmaid. This teaches us of the importance prayer played in Our Lady’s life.

On returning to Nazareth things do not improve, she is confronted with the knowledge of another journey this time to Bethlehem. Remember that a heavily pregnant woman having to journey at that time could be dangerous to her and her unborn child. She teaches us how to lace our trust in God and that He never asks more of us than we can give. Eventually after the troubles at Bethlehem and birth of her Son, the gracious visitors and all that is being said about her new born child, she takes her Son to the Temple to fulfil what the Law of Moses asks new parents to do. It is here she meets with Anna, hears the prophecy of Zechariah and Simeon. In the midst of a time of celebration she is told "a sword will pierce you heart". The anxiety of motherhood, the apprehension for the future, the thoughts about her Son are compounded by prophecy. It is here Our Lady teaches us that she has all the feelings of a new mother which every mother, every parent has at the birth of their child. Our Lady, therefore, is at one with parents. Like all mothers Our Lady remembers everything about her child and although unlike today there are not the multitude of photographs and images she treasures all these things in her heart.

Here Our Lady teaches us of the importance of silence and prayer. These are things she would have taught her son about, the importance of prayer, meditation and contemplation. Just as children learn today about saying prayers from the security of their mother's knee. Prayer was such a part of her life that the importance would have been passed on to her Son and it was at His mother's knee that Jesus came to know Himself as the Messiah, The Son of God. So it is here at the "school of Nazareth" Our Lady teaches us that it is through prayer, meditation and contemplation that we come closer to her Son.

Our Lady teaches us to abandon the many voices that distract us and keep us from focusing on that which is essential, the life giving word of her Son. As Our Lady treasures these things in her heart she teaches us to reflect and recollect how the grace of God has been at work in our lives. Our Lady teaches us about silent reflection so we can see how Jesus is "God with us" at all times, never abandoning or refusing us. It is at the "school of Nazareth" we can copy her by looking, listening and learning from her.

This reflection includes the dignity Our Lady gives to "work". In those days the "ordinary life" was hard, difficult and frustrating. As wife and mother she had to clean, cook, collect water, wash clothes, sew and have so many other tasks, all without our modern day advantages. Again she teaches us how close she is to wives and mothers. They must have a special place in her heart for she above all others understands their lives, their "work" for the family.

However, as Our Lady was "full of grace" and of course the "mother of God" we have the persistent thought that her life was special, easy and without hardship. Her life was so different from anyone's life of today. This is shown when we think of all the wonderful titles she has been given in the Litany of Our Lady.

All these titles tell us of her life walking with her Son every step of His way from Bethlehem to Calvary and the Resurrection. There are so many titles, so many images from art, statues and pictures that we can forget that it is in the "school of Nazareth" that she can teach us. Yet of all these images and icons perhaps the one that expresses to us the closeness we have to her is found in the icon "Our Lady of Vladimir". Another name for this icon is Our Lady of Tenderness. It shows Our Lady, Mother of God, with the infant Jesus in her arms and their cheeks touching in a truly tender way. As she holds the Body of Christ they touch in such an affectionate and loving way we can but remember we the Church, are the Body of Christ and so Mary, Mother of God, holds the Church, and each one of us tenderly, lovingly, affectionately in her arms. She teaches us that she listens to us, she

hears us, and she intercedes for us to her Son. That is why every one of us must have a great love for Our Lady that she will teach us about her Son and we will come to know Jesus as our brother, Our Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Lady has an enormous number of beautiful titles given to her and each one tells us something of her life and the honour due to her who is "full of grace". Most of these titles (names) have been given many years ago. Perhaps we can consider some 'new' names for Our Lady which come from the world of today. So much has changed that we can invoke the intercession of our mother Mary for circumstances of our time.

We can ask for her prayers and maternal care as Our Lady of single mothers. After the death of St. Joseph, Our Lady was left to bring up her Son alone, so she knows the difficulties experienced by single mothers in our own time.

Another title may be Our Lady of Refuges. The holy family had to flee to Egypt after the threat from a despotic leader, and so Our Lady understands those who have fled war, persecution and threat, leaving everything for a new land where they are strangers in another culture.

Our Lady of Widows is another title we can attribute to Our Lady. She understands the trauma of widowhood, the emotional distress, the loneliness, the sudden lack of comfort and support. Our Lady is close to widows.

Yet another title is Our Lady of Bereaved Mothers. As she held the body of her dead Son at the foot of the Cross, Our Lady is close to all mothers who have had a child die in pregnancy, at birth or at an older age. As someone who has experienced the trauma, the raw emotions involved and can give her support and her prayers to others. For all mothers who have had a child die Our Lady has a special place in her heart for these mothers.

As a wife and mother Our Lady is especially placed to understand the demands, the concerns and hopes of families. So we should ask for the intercession of Our Lady of the Family. It is to her we can turn to pray for our own family and our greater family, the Church.

When you need a special grace, a special help from Jesus we can go to our Mother, the mother of Jesus and she will act on our behalf. Here is a prayer to say when we need something special.

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that any one who fled to thy protection, implored thy help or sought thy intercession, was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins my Mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful; O Mother of thy Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy clemency hear and answer me.
Amen.

LENT

An old man talking to his grandchildren and telling them about when he was a young man “ You will have heard people talk about the good old days when you could leave you front door open and no one came in to rob or steal. The reason is very simple, in those days we had nothing worthwhile to steal. Also, many of the people who lived round about were your relatives. You are far better off these days. But it’s not all great. We may have more possessions than then but now we are much more suspicious of others and the huge temptation is that what we own, what we have identifies who we are.”

The season of Lent seems to sneak up on us, it’s either very early or very late. However, Lent begins each year with the temptations of Jesus. This can cause us to be confused as we think that temptation is a sin. However, Jesus was tempted so it cannot be sinful. He was tempted that the gaining of possession, of “things” lends to happiness but Jesus tells us we “do not live on bread alone”. It would have been easy for Jesus to work the miracle that all the suffering, all those in poverty are “healed”. Removed from being poor they would have all they require for life. But He did not give in to the temptation of working some “economic miracle”. This is a temptation we can all think of, namely if I only had a bit more money, or a better paying job or if only I was rich. The thought is that with money will automatically come happiness and peace.

Instead Jesus tells us to pray “give us this day our daily bread”. This is the “food” our hearts need, our souls require. When we give in to the temptation of possessions, then we are in danger of our hearts becoming hardened. If we listen to the words of the world we are told we need to be tough, we need to be strong, we have to protect ourselves. This results in building ‘walls’ around ourselves. If we have a ‘hard heart’ we are filled with suspicion for others. We see others as a threat where jealousy and envy over take us and

we no longer see the other person as an opportunity for loving God but a threat to steal from us, to hinder us and take away from us.

However, just as parents come to realise that what their children need is far more than just material things, so Jesus is telling us the way to life and happiness is about the people around us. Just as children need their parents to give their time to listen to them, give them attentions and affection that they grow through understanding, so we need to know the love God has for us. It is through prayer we come to know this love God has for us. Lent is called a time of prayer.

It is in the season of Lent we are called to listen with more attention to God's Word, for it is through Jesus, the Word made flesh, that we come to know the eternal life promised to us. When we listen to the Word made flesh our hearts are opened, our hearts are softened and the walls we have built to protect ourselves are broken down. Then we see others as made in the image and likeness of God. Then we look beyond ourselves.

Another temptation we can easily fall into is idolatry. In this country over two billion pounds is spent each year on powders, potions and products to make us better, lovelier and more attractive. We believe the adverts and so are tempted by the idol of our bodies, and the way we look. We believe the publicity machine that tells us if we wear the right clothes, use the right products we will be "better people". This stretches to exercise, diets, healthy living. Belonging to the right gym, the right club, the right circle of people. When we look right, speak right, have the right job, the right friends, the right clothes, the right house, the right car then others will appreciate us more and we will be liked. This is a false idol, a false god, a false way.

Jesus too was tempted to bow down. We have so many idols in our lives and the great idol is money. If you have money you will be happy. The temptation is to strive after this for then we will have the "right clothes" the "right house" the "right car" and only with money can we have these and happiness. But the idols of our lives tempt us away from that which is important, the people in our lives. When we are driven by money and the false gods of the world the result is that we see other people as 'things', things either in our way or as 'possessions' or as a means to be used for our own ends. With a hard heart we no longer see God, we come eventually to believe we no longer need God. With a 'hard heart' we think we can go our own way because we can achieve what we want by 'myself'.

Selfishness, pride and a self centered attitude takes control and we can be lost in a

world of idols. It is only when we turn to Jesus, when we focus on Him that we understand that He is with us, that the Holy Spirit frees our hearts and souls. It is the Spirit that gives life. It is in the silence of prayer that the idols, the false gods of our lives are knocked down. It is in prayer lead by the Holy Spirit that see our talents, our gifts are freely given by God not to honour ourselves but to help, support and encourage others and give the praise to God. This is why the season of Lent is given to us to find the healing grace of God in the sacrament of reconciliation.

The last temptation was can call the “temptation of power.” This temptation can sneak up on us for it is the most invidious. We all like “power”. All to often in our lives we feel powerless, we have no control over the events, circumstances and situations in our lives. For example sickness can over taking us and we are at the mercy of doctors, where we have to do as we are instructed. Or at work we are at the beck and call of ‘the boss’. It can easily that from our earliest days people have “lorded it over us”. Our parents in control about what we wear, what we eat, how to behave, to do as we are told. Our reaction is that we “want powers” so that we can enjoy being in charge of others, of being in control. We seek to be in a position where others are at our “beck and call”. This need for power leads us to harden our hearts to the needs of others. This desire for power is corrosive where we use and abuse others. We feel no conscience as these “others” are weak, unworthy and need to be controlled.

Jesus as the Son of God had ultimate power but refused to use it as a means of controlling others. It was His humility, His obedience to the Father’s will that leads Him to be the sacrifice that takes away our sins. He is the Lamb of God sacrificed for us. And it is in our prayer that we recognise Jesus as Saviour and Redeemer. It is in prayer that we follow Jesus by giving up “power” to walk humbly with Jesus. The great prayer Jesus gave us tells us “Thy will be done” taking way and removing those who seek power when they want “ my will be done”. It is in prayer that we are transformed from self centered to being open to others. It is in prayer that we are transformed from “my way” to “your way”. It is in prayer that the Holy Spirit transforms us from power to humility, the humility that acknowledges that our gifts and talents come freely from God. It is in prayer that the Holy Spirit transforms us from selfishness to the way of Jesus, to ask what the other needs. It is in prayer that we are transformed from seeking to make ourselves in an image consumed by what things we own, or dictated to by the idols of our life into knowing that Jesus is the true model of our lives. His way becomes our way.

And so the season of Lent is given each year to help us recollect, recreate and renew ourselves in the image of Jesus. Lent is given each year that we may walk in the way of Jesus, our Lord, our Brother, our Saviour. It is in the season of Lent that we are called to celebrate and participate more often in the perfect prayer of the Mass. It is especially at Mass that we come to recognise that Jesus walks with me through my life.

A Meditation on the Stations of the Cross.

1. Jesus is Condemned to Death

v/. We adore you. O Christ, and we praise you.

R/. Because of your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Lord Jesus, you are the innocent one, now condemned. As the Word made flesh you understand our feelings, our worries, our concerns, our fears, our life.

The innocent who sit in the doctor's office or lie on a hospital bed to be told the "bad news". Jesus you are there.

Why you. Why me, why my mother, my father, my brother, my sister, my child. The helplessness and anxiety we feel can crush our hearts. At times we feel as though the world conspires against us.

Lord Jesus, I need to trust in You. Lord Jesus give me the courage to face the future. Lord Jesus, give me the grace and strength to follow your will.

May I find strength to face responsibilities, just as you faced your future.

I love you, Jesus, my love, above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again.
Grant that I may love you always, then do with me what you will.

2. Jesus is Made to Carry His Cross

v/. We adore you. O Christ, and we praise you.
R/. Because of your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Lord Jesus, you are taken away to be scourges, to be beaten almost to death.

Then a Cross is placed upon your scourged body. The rough wood digs deep, laid upon those open wounds, the pain is intolerable, you are weighed down. Yet you bear all in silence.

There are times when I think everyone places these burdens on my shoulder; my family, my work, my friends. There are times I feel that others only want to take from me, to use me.

Lord Jesus,. On occasion I feel no one care, no one understands no one listens.

Lord Jesus help me to bear the burdens of my life, the daily crosses I have to carry; disappointment, cares, worries boredom, monotony.

Forgive me for grumbling about my life. Forgive me for meaning about my life. Forgive me for being a cross in other people's lives.

I love you, Jesus, my love, above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again.
Grant that I may love you always, then do with me what you will.

3. Jesus Falls for the First Time.

v/. We adore you. O Christ, and we praise you.

R/. Because of your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Lord Jesus as you carry the weight of the Cross, you stumble. The crowd pressing round on every side. You fall.

The mocking crowd laughs and jeers at you. Yet your courage is boundless, you stumble to rise. On rising you continue on this way of salvation from me.

Lord Jesus, may your grace so fill me that I may always follow you. I turn to You for strength.

In my weakness I know you will give me the strength to carry on. All I have to do is look at you, turn to you. When pressed on every side by those who mock and jeer and laugh may I know you are the. The words of your Gospel are the truths that strengthen my way. All I have to do is look at you.

May I always turn to you in prayer, for without prayer there can be no effective action.

I love you, Jesus, my love, above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again.

Grant that I may love you always, then do with me what you will.

4. Jesus Meets His Mother.

v/. We adore you. O Christ, and we praise you.

R/. Because of your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

The saddest meeting in history.

Lord Jesus, you look into the crowd, you see your mother. You see her love, you feel her support. Lord Jesus, you gain strength from those loving eyes, those gentle hands that once held you as a child.

Mary, your blessed mother gives you strength to continue on this way of love.

May as you walk this way with your Son, you feel His pain; every cut, every blow, every bruise, every agony. You hear every jeer, every humiliation, every degradation these pierce your heart and mid. Yet you are full of grace, you walk with Him every step.

Lord Jesus you are telling me that to watch the pain and suffering of those we love is so very hard. It is almost unbearable to walk wit someone we love who is dying. We are helpless, yet a glance, to hold a hand, to be there is enough. Lord Jesus, with the prayers of Mary, my Mother, give me the courage to support and help my loved ones; their heartaches, sicknesses, grief and pain.

Hail Mary, full of grace. Our Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

5. Simon Helps Jesus to Carry His Cross

v/. We adore you. O Christ, and we praise you.

R/. Because of your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Lord Jesus, your strength has gone. Not another step. The agony is so great. Lord Jesus, just as Simon helped you, so You are there to carry me when I feel lost, weak or in need. All I have to do is ask.

You are there for the parents who mind a sick child, the wife who nurses a husband, the husband who cares for a wife, a child who cares for an elderly parent.

Lord Jesus, you are with me at all times.

You are there not only in great things but in the ordinary times of life; when I wash a dish, clean the house, go to work, go for groceries, cook a meal. When I help my brothers and sisters then I am like Simon. I help the Body of Christ.

Lord Jesus, forgive my selfish ways. Lord Jesus, forgive my self centered ways.

Lord Jesus, forgive my lack of care.

I love you, Jesus, my love, above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again.

Grant that I may love you always, then do with me what you will.

4. Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

v/. We adore you. O Christ, and we praise you.

R/. Because of your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Lord Jesus, some relief. A cooling cloth that wipes away the blood and sweat that blinds you. A poor, brave woman who takes pity upon you in the midst of the hostile crowd.

Lord Jesus, you ask me to see Your face in those who suffer; in hospital, in the playground, in the slums, in prisoners of conscience. Lord give me the grace to see Your face in; the tired, the suffering, the lonely, the dying.

Lord Jesus, give me the grace of self sacrifice that I may see you face in those around me. Give me the grace that I may be brave enough to wipe the face of those who suffer, to bring You healing comfort and presence. Give me the grace to understand those with whom I live, those whom I love and the stranger at my door.

Give me the grace that I may encourage those around me.

I love you, Jesus, my love, above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again.

Grant that I may love you always, then do with me what you will.

7. Jesus Falls the Second Time

v/. We adore you. O Christ, and we praise you.

R/. Because of your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Lord Jesus, your burden is so great. You are so weakened but the agony continues. The pain goes on and on. Not just the physical pain but the pain from the crowd, the same crowd who welcomed you with “hosannas”.

Now you are rejected, now you are unwanted, now you are abandoned. The only loving face in the crowd is your mother who walks with you even though a sword pierces her heart.

Lord Jesus, give me the grace to walk with you in the midst of society who rejects you. May I stand beside you, stand up for you, stand up for your values. May I have your grace that I may not be confused by the world and its values.

Lord Jesus may I always know how much you love me, Lord Jesus, you love me so much you walked this way for me. Your way is the way of life.

I love you, Jesus, my love, above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again.

Grant that I may love you always, then do with me what you will.

8. Jesus Speaks to the Women of Jerusalem

v/. We adore you. O Christ, and we praise you.

R/. Because of your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Lord Jesus, even in your Passion, you have compassion, sympathy, consideration for others. You stop to listen. Your heart goes out to others.

Lord Jesus, help me to be compassionate, to be gentle, to be understanding.

Lord Jesus, may I follow your way to be; a source of solace, a source of comfort, a source of healing, a source of peace. Lord Jesus, grant me the grace to give time to others even in the midst of my own troubles and cares. Lord Jesus, help me to listen to others, help me to be understanding; help me to be a person of prayer.

Lord forgive me for not listening to others. Lord forgive me for not bringing comfort to others. Lord forgive the times I do not pray.

I love you, Jesus, my love, above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again.

Grant that I may love you always, then do with me what you will.

9. Jesus Falls for the Third Time

V/. We adore you. O Christ, and we praise you.

R/. Because of your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

As you lie there a silence falls around you. Lord Jesus, you are alone, pain and suffering your only companions. Lord Jesus, you are alone in the midst of noise and confusion. Lord Jesus, you rise to do not your own will but the will of the Father who sent you.

Lord Jesus, be with me in those lonely times, be with me when I feel no one is there to help. When others seem to have everything, others seem so happy. When I feel lost and alone, in the loneliness of the night, lonely in a crowd or lonely with the pain of emptiness, let me remember You lying alone and in pain.

Lord Jesus, give me the strength to continue as you did, knowing you are always there. You never abandon me. Lord Jesus, you are always with me. Lord Jesus, may I always turn to you.

I love you, Jesus, my love, above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again.
Grant that I may love you always, then do with me what you will.

10.. Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

v/. We adore you. O Christ, and we praise you.

R/. Because of your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Lord Jesus, you emptied yourself to become man. Now you are stripped even of your human dignity. Everything has been taken from you, now You are the poorest of the poor.

You stand alone, only blood, sweat and pain for companions.

Lord Jesus, forgive my envy of others and their possessions. Lord Jesus, forgive my jealousy of others lives. Lord Jesus, forgive my thoughts of obtaining wealth, power, prestige.

Lord Jesus, forgive my foolish pride for everything I have received from you. Lord Jesus, forgive me for thinking I can do everything by myself. Lord Jesus, you have given me all that I am, may I always be thankful to you then I will be rich in love.

I love you, Jesus, my love, above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again.
Grant that I may love you always, then do with me what you will.

11. Jesus is Nailed to The Cross

v/. We adore you. O Christ, and we praise you.

R/. Because of your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Lord Jesus, your agony continues. With every blow o the hammer it is my sin that nails you

to the Cross. It is my sins that cause you to suffer. Not just normal sins but the thoughtlessness I have, the lack of charity I show, the selfishness of my life, the lack of forgiveness I show. Lord Jesus, with every cry you utter you are forgiving my sins.

Lord Jesus, help me to forgive others. Lord Jesus, help me to forgive others the pain they cause me. Lord Jesus, may I have no resentments, no bitterness, no anger, no hostility to others.

Lord Jesus, as my sins caused you pain, may the forgiveness you give me, enable me to be a source of healing and forgiveness for others.

I love you, Jesus, my love, above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again.

Grant that I may love you always, then do with me what you will.

12. Jesus Dies on The Cross

V/. We adore you. O Christ, and we praise you.

R/. Because of your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

“This is my body which will be given up for you” “my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. I will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven”.

Lord Jesus, nailed to that Cross you seem barely human. My eyes are filled with tears. My heart is broken. My Lord and my God dies for me. You have died to save me. You suffer to redeem me. You offer salvation to me through this agony.

When the priest elevates your Body and Blood during Mass I see your saving and life giving death. I am at the foot of Your Cross. I witness the salvation you offer.

Lord Jesus, may I join the small crosses of my Life to Yours.. May I receive your Body and Blood with joy, reverence and thanksgiving. Lord Jesus, may I always know the love you have for me. A love so great you were willing to die for me a sinner.

O sacrament most holy, O sacrament Divine, all praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

I love you, Jesus, my love, above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again.
Grant that I may love you always, then do with me what you will.

13. Jesus is Taken Down from The Cross

v/. We adore you. O Christ, and we praise you.

R/. Because of your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Lord Jesus, your dead body is taken down from the Cross and placed into the arms of your loving mother. Mary, Mother of God, what pain, what agony, what suffering for you. As the lance pierced the side of Jesus, so it pierced your heart. Yet your faith tells you Jesus is not just your son but the Son of God. The darkness descends to surround you. Yet your faith tells you Jesus is the light of the world, dispelling all darkness.

Mary, my mother as you suffer you are there with all mothers whose child has died; in miscarriage, still born, in infancy, in adulthood. All these mothers have a special place in your heart. Mary, my mother you are there to love, to support, to share the agony of all mothers.

Mary, my mother I ask your prayers for all mothers; for their worry; their care, their disappointments, their grief, their agony.

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection, implored your help or sought your intercession, was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto you, O Virgin of virgins, my mother. To these do I come, before you I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in your

14. Jesus Is Laid in The Tomb

v/. We adore you. O Christ, and we praise you.

R/. Because of your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

Lord Jesus, you lie in the dark coldness of death. You are alone. Your disciples are crippled by grief and fear. All have abandoned you. Death brings pain, emptiness and loss to those who are left to live. The dark descends like an endless night. Lord Jesus, now we have to look to you. Now we have to turn to you. Only by turning to you in prayer do we have hope

Lord Jesus, you are the light of the world. You are the light of my life. By your death you have conquered death. By trusting in you we find love. By loving you we find faith.

Lord Jesus, when one we have loved dies we must look to you, you are the one who brings light in darkness. Lord Jesus, you are the one who brings comfort and warmth Lord Jesus, you are the one who gives hope. Lord Jesus, you are the Resurrection and Life, only by gazing upon you can our sadness turn to joy, Lord Jesus, only with you can grief turn to hope, only with you can death give way to life. Lord Jesus, you come to us each day in the Holy Eucharist only through Your body and Blood can we have eternal life.

I love you, Jesus, my love, above all things; I repent with my whole heart for having offended you. Never permit me to separate myself from you again.
Grant that I may love you always, then do with me what you will.

Holy Thursday

A newly ordained priest is invited to his home Parish to give a talk to the Union of Catholic Mothers. The Church hall is full. As the priest begins his talk a later comer arrives. There are no seats at the back. She has to elk down to the front row. As she walks she makes a clip clop noise on the wooden floor and continuous says "sorry, sorry" until she takes her seat. At the end of the priest talk there is tea an cake an a chance to meet the newly ordained priest. The woman who was late approaches the priest; "Holy Father", she says "I'm sorry for interrupting your talk, I hope I didn't distract you. I have to say I enjoyed you talk". "Thank you responds the priest, "I wasn't distracted". The woman asks "Tell me Father, which Order do you belong to?" "I'm not in an Order, I'm a Diocesan priest" the priest answers. "Oh, you're just an ordinary priest, But I sill enjoyed your talk". the priest say "yes, just an ordinary priest". No offence was intended, none takes.

Catholics love their priest. However, their is a judgement that those in a Religious Order are more Spiritual than the ordinary Diocesan priest. The reason for this could be that those in a Religious Order follow a "Rule" laid down by the founder of the Order. Whereas the Diocesan priest has no "Rule" no distinctive spiritual path to follow. For example a Jesuit follows the writing of St Ignatius, a Franciscan the writing of St Francis etc., but the Diocesan priest has no obvious founder, well no founder but Jesus. It was Jesus who instituted the sacrament priesthood at eh Last Supper. Every Holy Thursday the Church universally celebrates the instruction of the priesthood in the way of Jesus. The consequence of this means that the spiritual life, contemplation of Sacred Scripture, especially the Gospels must be an essential part of the priest ice and ministry. The priest has to have a great love for the New Testament (Scripture as a whole) by listening to what God is saying through His Word that they may grow "insight" into the vey person of Jesus. This requires faith. listening, attentiveness an self surrender which means sacrifice and self discipline. At the ordinate of a priest the Rite instructs the ordinating Bishop to speak to the newly ordained and at the same time hands hi a paten and chalice saying "Accept from the holy people of God these gifts to be offered tot Him. Know what you are doing and initiate the mystery you celebrate; mode you life on the mystery of the Lord's Cross". In this simple act and in these words the life of the ordained is laid out. Is it from this moment that the ministry of the priest is spelt out; preach the Gospel, celebrate

the Sacraments can be a shepherd of souls, in other words Jesus is your model and so model yourself on Him.

This requires two dry unfashionable words; sacrifice and self discipline. To preach the Gospel means one has to break the Word of God into small amounts connecting the Gospel to the lives of the hearer. Also, to break the Body of Christ that the faithful are fed with the sanctifying Eucharist. The priest through God's Word and Eucharist comes to understand that his life is about sacrifice and service to the Body of Christ, the Church. At the Last Supper the disciples/apostles did not fully understand what was happening, they failed to comprehend the full message of the Gospel and where this message would lead Jesus and ultimately themselves. For when Jesus calls the first disciples in the Gospels of John they asked "where do you live?". Jesus responds with "come and see". This is the invitation to all who are called to the priesthood.

Although it is necessary to study the many disciplines of philosophy and theology this is only the start of the journey and an adventure of reflection, contemplation, listening and responding to the word of God. Where it leads we only know through opening our minds, our hearts, and our souls to the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the inspired Word of God. Just as after the Last Supper the apostles were led to the Garden of Gethsemane, so their joy disappeared as Jesus journeyed to Calvary. So through meditation upon the Scriptures and in the silence of prayers does the priest come to the realisation that he must walk the way of Jesus. This way may have pain, but also rejection, it may have glory but also a sacrifice for ultimately the priest (through prayer) comes to the knowledge that if Jesus is our model then the Cross is part of that way, for where Jesus leads we must follow.

It is when the priest enters the Gospel then the words, actions and examples make Jesus present to the world. As we travel on our way, a way of "God with us", slowly and inspired by the Holy Spirit, the mind, the heart and soul becomes of God's love for me. An unconditional love for Jesus loves His priest to the end. It is then that the message of the Gospel brings joy, peace and contentment for it is only then that we have accepted the invitation of Jesus to develop and progress by His grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. When we understand that the way of Jesus includes the Cross and this should be embraced we come to recognise Jesus as our Brother as well as our Saviour. When we accept this then we understand that one cannot "do it alone" but embraces the Lord one commutes that "our way" must be the way of Jesus and He is with us every step of that way to lead, to guide, to

heal, to renew, to restore but above all to save. When we realise that it is Jesus who asks “come and see” then we understand that His choice which calls us to priesthood we merely respond.

As we examine the ministry of Jesus, following His example, then we recognise the adventure of service, the adventure of prayer. But our consent is not once given only, it has to be continued as we grow in Christ, as we grow in prayer so we have to continually give our consent to follow more closely our Lord Jesus.

As the priest says “Yes” he has the hope (that ability to look to the future), of one who can walk with others on their journey of faith as a friend, as a brother. The example is that of Simon of Cyrene, Jesus needed Simon to carry the Cross so that as Redeemer He could reach Calvary, so the priest should be there to help support, affirm, encourage and carry the Cross for others as they journey on their road. It is through internalising the Gospel, through internalising the Eucharist that the priest can be a “brother” to others just as Jesus is his “brother”.

Prayer Before a Crucifix

Look down upon me, good and gentle Jesus, while before Thy face I humbly kneel and, with burning soul, pray and beseech Thee to fix deep in my heart lively sentiments of faith, hope and charity; true contrition for my sins, and a firm purpose of amendment. While I contemplate, with great love and tender pity, Thy five most precious wounds, pondering over them within me and calling to mind the words which David, Thy prophet, said of Thee, my Jesus: They have pierced My hands and My feet, they have numbered all My bones.” Amen.

Good Friday

Everyone has a picture in their head of what they think Jesus looks like. Unfortunately we have no real idea. There are no descriptions of Jesus in the Gospels or the New Testament of the physical appearance of Jesus. It is possible that the evangelists and New Testament writers thought that the Second Coming would be very soon and therefore there was no need to give a description. Although we do not have a description everyone has created a picture of Jesus. This may come from the many "holy pictures", from painting, from icons, from statues or from TV or movies. The flowing blond hair, the blue eyes, the long robe. Perhaps more Hollywood than reality. Of course many of our pictures may come from the famous Shroud of Turin images. Whether this is the actual burial shroud of Jesus or not it is impossible to say, and not important.

However, what the Shroud of Turin does give us is a image of the brutality and savagery of death by crucifixion. This image focuses our minds on Good Friday and the way to Calvary. The Gospel accounts have very general description of the horrific Passion and death of Jesus but we have sanitised in our images these details.

Jesus tells us in the Gospels that as disciples, as His followers, the Cross will be part of our lives. This can be frightening for some, that if we do not take up our Cross we cannot be His disciples. For others it can mean something we should try to avoid. But no matter what we may think Jesus is the model for our lives His life is part of our lives. There will be times we will be praised, times of healing, times of rejection and a time for the Cross. So Good Friday will be part of our lives.

When we look at Jesus on the Cross we see the face of Him who saves and redeems us. We should be used to seeing the different "faces" of Jesus. For in our own lives we have many "faces". The "face" we have for our boss at work, and how this differs from the "face" we have for co-workers, the "face" we have for friends and the different "face" we have for our family. We are used to having different ways of speaking, acting and behaving for the many situations and occasions of our lives.

We wear many "face". There are times we are the center of attention, being entertaining for others. Times we are "the boss" when we correct others, instructing others about what to do and how to behave. The face parents put on when their children misbehave. There are times when we are "the friend" being sympathetic, empathetic, listening to the stories or problems of others. Times when we pretend to be interested when

actually we are bored or have no interest in what is being said. Times when we are “the martyr” when we feel that we are used or abused by others. There are many faces that we wear.

As disciples if we want to see the ‘face of God’ we must look to Jesus. Although we may carry on our person representations of the Crucifixion (a crucifix in our pocket or purse, a crucifix round our neck) it is only when we stop, think, pray and reflect that we can appreciate the wondrous work of redemption brought about by the Passion and Death of Jesus. His scourging at the pillar is the example of how much He was willing to suffer for us. With each stroke Jesus bears the times in our life when we feel rejected, unwanted or unloved. With each stroke Jesus bears for us the hurt we experience of angry, hateful and spiteful words used against us by others. By each of those strokes biting into His flesh He accepts every unkindness done to us, every injustice carried out against us at work, in the family or with friends. With every stroke of that lash Jesus carries the mark of the times our trust in others has been shattered.

When the crown of thorns is thrust and jammed upon His head he accepts our willfulness, our selfishness towards others. His crown of thorns is Him bearing our pride when we think we are greater, better than those with whom we live. As this crown of pain is thrust upon His Sacred head it is Jesus accepting those times when we do not accept Him as our Lord and God.

As the Cross is placed upon His ravaged shoulders it is our sinfulness He carries. It is our small, frequent and almost forgotten sins. With this heavy Cross it is our thoughtlessness towards others, our lack of care for others, our abuse of family and friends by thought, by our stinging tongue, our words meant to demean or belittle others. As we look upon His battered face carrying His Cross we are like the jeering and laughing crowd insulting those we dislike, those we are afraid of, those we deliberately hurt. As we see His battered and shattered face collapse under the weight of the Cross we realise it is the weight of my sins, small and great, that exhausts the Saviour.

Then we see the “face” of Simon, the stranger in the crowd commanded to carry the Cross. Now we remember those occasion we have failed to have the courage to step forward and give our time to help those in need.

As the beaten and battered body of Jesus struggles on His way then we reflect on those times we think only of ourselves failing to see the “face” of Jesus in the those who will take up too much of our precious time. When we fail to see the “face” of Jesus in the unemployed because they refuse to work when jobs are available. When we fail to see the

face of Jesus in the homeless, those who have become invisible to us. When we fail to see the “face” of Jesus in the unmarried mother who in our judgement is responsible for her own situation. When we fail to see the “face” of Jesus in the old because they are too much trouble and will bring us down. When we fail to see the “face” of Jesus in the lonely, the unloved, the slum dweller because they should be doing things to improve their own lives. When we fail to see the “face” of Jesus in the starving of the world shown on our television screens.

When we fail to see the ‘face’ of Jesus in those protesting about climate change or anti war or water shortage or human rights.

There are so many times we fail to be Simon of Cyrene because we are afraid, we don't have the time, we have enough happening in our own lives. We cannot help because do not know what to do and it is easier not to see or recognise the “face of Jesus in others.

As we observe the scene of Calvary we come to see the courage of those three woman at the foot of the Cross. Mary His mother and her companions see the true face of the suffering Christ. But that we had their courage, their love and devotion. The courage of these woman who are there to support their Lord and each other. But that we could follow their example.

As Jesus journeys on this redemptive way we, through prayer, come to understand the great love Jesus has for us. He truly loves each of us to the end of His being. As he is nailed and lifted up on that Cross we understand that we are partakers and co-responsible for His Passion for His Death. As we kneel at the foot of His Cross we become aware that He suffered all of this for me, not because I am so good, so perfect, but because I am not perfect, I am a sinner. As we walk with Jesus on this redeeming way we come to recognise the need for the healing grace of Jesus, the healing touch of Jesus to enter into me.

It is then that I, we, can understand how we, through His grace, can carry our own individual crosses. For each of us share in the Passion of Jesus. although our crosses may be different, through them we make up for what is lacking in the suffering of Christ. We may have the crosses of disappointment; disappointment in how our own lives have worked out perhaps because we decided we can “go it alone”. there is the disappointment for children who have not become what we have hoped for them. The disappointment in our relationships that are not as hoped. There is the cross of rejection in our

relationships, the pain of failure, the depression at not achieving. There is the cross of sickness or chronic illness. There is the cross of the death of a loved one; spouse, child, family member, friend. There is the cross of loneliness, of emptiness, the cross of lack of achievement causing unhappiness, resentment or anger.

There are so many crosses but just as Jesus suffered for our salvation, so our crosses are for the salvation of others. We share in the Cross of Jesus that others may be saved. And if we have shared in His suffering we hope to share in His glory.

Good Friday is a day of silence. The day of silence. The silence necessary to reflect, to contemplate on the work of Jesus for our salvation. It is in the silence of Good Friday we can recognise the "face" of Jesus in those we know, those we live with, those we work beside, those we care for, those we meet, those we see. It is in the silence of Good Friday that we come to recognise the many "face" we put on to hide our true selves. It is the silence of Good Friday that we can understand the Cross in our own lives, that we must walk in the Way of Jesus, our model, and with His grace we can share in His suffering for the salvation of the world.

God is love

Here is a thought exercise. Think of the number of people you have met in your life. You should have quite a large number in your head. Now think of the number of people you know. This will be a smaller number than your first number. Now think of the number of people you love. Your third number will be, smaller than the other two numbers. Last of all, think of the number of people who are not your family or relatives but you genuinely love. The probability is that this last number will be a very small number.

Yet if we ask ourselves what is the purpose of our lives, the majority of people will answer to love and be loved. This could be described as a 'principle of life'. In the twentieth century great progress was made and advances in our knowledge and understanding of our human condition through the work and study of renowned psychologists and psychiatrists. Sigmund Freud thought our principle motivation in life was pleasure. In his analysis of people he thought that all our thoughts and actions are based upon a basic emotion of seeking pleasure for ourselves. Even what might seem selfless acts are really about giving us pleasure. A contemporary, Alfred Adler, believed from his studies that the overriding principle of our lives is 'power'. He deduced that all our actions and motivation comes from a basic desire to control over others and to be more powerful than the other. The third great analyst and thinker about the human condition was Carl Jung. We can summarise his extensive studies as 'the self' or the individual. All actions come from this. Much later in the century behavioural scientists inform us the principle of our lives comes from the 'programming' we receive in the very early years of our lives, the remainder of our years is merely the playing out of this programming.

However, as the followers of Christ, no matter how useful scientific analysis and observation may be we, as people of faith, must look to the revelation of God and the Word made flesh, Jesus, as the source of our understanding of our human condition. Our faith informs us that we are made in the image and likeness of God. The New Testament (especially the Gospels) informs us that God is love. Therefore the disciple is made in love and to live in God is to live in love. The principle of life for the follower of Jesus is to know that God loves us and to reach out and to love others. Only in this way can we actively fulfil the commandment of Jesus. Therefore, the first and most important step on our spiritual journey is to be aware and accept that God loves me. When we understand this fully then we can journey on our way as members of the Body of Christ. But to fully come to terms and

understand this we need the silence of contemplation and reflection. It is in this quiet that we understand and accept the great love God has for the individual and we accept it not just intellectually, emotionally but deep in our hearts that is in our spirit. This principle of love is something the values of the world cannot give. When we know the love God has for me then we have a peace and acceptance of who we are as God made me.

If we had the possibility most of us would change something about ourselves, very few people are perfectly happy with all areas of our lives. It could be a physical characteristic being taller, shorter, thinner, there is something which we feel holds us back from attaining a better life. Or it may be more intellectual, a better education or a better developed and more mature emotional life that would make us feel more fulfilled. These characteristics we want to alter enabling us to be better liked by others. The result is that we create an image for others so that we are accepted more or appreciated more. When we behave like this we easily fall into the temptation that we can do the same with God. The idea that this is what God wants me to be, this is what God expects of me. We are so scared of being ourselves because just as we say others will not like me if they knew what I was really like, so we find it difficult to think God will accept me as I really am with all my shortcomings, my failures and my sins. It is in silence that we come to know God loves me as He made me, if He wanted me to be different He would have made me different. It is in the silence of prayer God shows me to myself as He made me. Think of a full length mirror, the true reflection is who I am and God says: "I love you. Then He says "Remain in my Love". When we remain in God's love we have the courage to reach out to others. We begin to follow the commandment of Jesus to love God by loving our neighbour and loving ourselves. We start by loving ourselves, not in a selfish, self-centered way but by opening our hearts to know the love God has for us.

God slowly reveals Himself to us through salvation history but it is on that first Christmas Day He revealed the depth of His love for us. God gave us the greatest gift in history, not gold, frankincense or myrrh, but the gift of His Son. This is the greatest gift in history and it is given to humanity for our salvation. Jesus reveals to us in His ministry the depth of His love for us. First of all when He heals the sick He always says 'your sins are forgiven', The depth of his love, of course, is seen in his Passion and Crucifixion. His suffering and humiliating death on the Cross is for our reconciliation, our redemption, our salvation. His Passion and death is not because we are virtuous but because we are sinners who wander from him. Then he continues to show the depth of his love in the Resurrection and the

sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Then we have the 'peace of Christ. a peace the world cannot give and we become the ambassadors of Christ taking Him with us into our world of family, community and work.

It is through loving one another that we build the community of Christ, that we make, no matter how imperfectly, the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom begins here and is perfected in the glory of the Resurrection. We should not be distracted by the concept of 'love'. The distractions are many; romantic, physical or selfish then we become unfocused, not centered on the real meaning of love. Yet there are so many definitions without one clear definition. Probably the best, or at least a working model is; to seek the good of the other before your own good. When we can do this we no longer see others as threats, or as 'things' but people also made in God's image. Then the God who lives in me is seeking the God who lives in you. When the principle of love, the command of Jesus is the foundation of our lives, our work, our home, our family then we reach out to others We contradict the philosophies of the world which tell us love is a risk, love is dangerous, love is pain and rejection. Jesus on the Cross is the most true and wonderful sign of his love for us. It was from the Cross He said "Father forgive the" and "this is your mother, this is your son" When we know the love Jesus has for us, when we follow his example then we open our hearts and see others as our mother, our father, our sister, our brother. Then we build God's kingdom as his saints, as his children, as his family. The married show God's love by their lives of love, parents share in the nature of God by creating life through their love, mothers show their love for their children by caring, understanding, accepting, by their unconditional love. Fathers show their love by their toil, by forging by supporting their children. We all show our love by supporting one another, giving a gentle hand, an embrace of empathy, a word of encouragement, a smile listening to the other, spending time with others, . These, and many more ways, are the practical examples of putting into practice the command of Jesus.

We are like a 'sacramental' making God present in our world by fulfilling the command of Jesus. Do not be afraid and Peace but with you are the words of the Risen Christ, therefore live in his love and we will make his love something alive and active in our families, our communities and in our world.

An Open Heart

Not so long ago if you were walking along the street and heard someone talking behind you then you may think it was something strange, making you feel anxious. Not so today, you would presume the person talking to themselves behind you was on a mobile phone. There are around sixty four million people in Britain yet it is estimated that there are over seventy five million mobile and smart phones in Britain. It seems everyone has a mobile phone. Children have one to play games or text, young people text, look up Twitter, Facebook and take photographs and the older generation have a mobile to keep in contact with others. We can say with some certainty that we live in an age of technological advances where it seems every six months something new is invented to make our lives easier. We are so tempted to have the latest device, the latest “must have” that our lives, our work and even our relationships can progress to new levels. We could describe the times we live in as the age of the silicon chip. Our lives are so dominated by the silicon chip and the devices using it that we often wonder how we survived before it was invented, for these incredible inventions are in so many of our ordinary domestic devices; TVs, cookers, cars.

It's easy to see why we can believe that every aspect, feature and expression of our lives has changed in this modern age. It's as though we have developed or progress as human beings where the silicon chip dominates and determines everything. Yet we still have our emotions; happy, sad, frustrated, glad, this is one area of living that is still a part of life and unfortunately this includes those times when we have been hurt by another. When we are hurt or in pain in our relationships it is as though there was a silicon chip inside our heads. When we are hurt by another the chip becomes a “memory” machine. We remember so many details of the last time we were hurt by that person. The weather, what they were wearing, what was said, as well as the times that same person hurt us in the past. Our emotions go into a kind of “overload”, pulling us down reminding us just how vulnerable we really are. Our next reaction is how to get revenge or say something that will hurt them in return. But we also remember the others who hurt us at different times, rejecting us, mocking us ignoring us

The result is that from our earliest days we have the need to protect ourselves. We are taught and we learn that to get through life we have to ‘toughen up’. and protect ourselves. The consequence is that the great symbol of our emotions, the human heart, needs to be guarded from harm and so we safeguard ourselves by building “walls”. Think of the heart as an onion, layer after layer surrounding the soft, vulnerable center. As we

construct more and more layers it is as though the “inner heart” has less and less room to beat. We harden our hearts. The philosophy of the world tells us this is a sensible thing to do, a condition to survive in the real world.

However, as the followers of Jesus we need to break down, and remove these barriers. The world tells us that when hidden behind these constructed layers we will be unseen, closing ourselves off from others so that they will not hurt us, damage us or penetrate into who we rarely are. The world tells us to be sensible and build walls for this will keep us at a distance, removed from the needs of others.

Jesus says something opposite for He looks into our hearts not our actions. The words and actions of others causes us to be afraid, fearful of the hurt they may cause us so much so that we do not want others to know us, to see us as we really are. When we build up layers of defense, walls of protection we project images to others so that our fleshy center, our hearts do not become open to others. Think of how we behave towards different people, we behave differently towards parents, brothers and sisters, friends, co workers, strangers. We want to be liked, to be appreciated and above all to be loved. But the barriers we have built restricts us, think of someone gasping for breathe this is what happens when we have hardened our hearts, keeping others out for fear of being hurt. We don't like the pain. Also, the past reminds us that if others know us as we truly are then we will be rejected, left feeling worthless and not loved. So we project an image of who we would like to be or who we think others want us to be. We hope these projections will make us wanted and loved. Others will then love us not as we are but as we think they want us to be. Here is a simple exercise to do; think of your good points, talents and what you like about yourself. When you have a number then list all the bad things about yourself, what you don't like and would change. If you are like the majority of people the things you don't like will be the bigger number. This just confirms what we think we know, we are not loveable unless we change the way we look, the way we think and the way we behave.

This idea even reaches out to God, we project an image to God of who we hope He will like, that if He knows us as we really are even He will reject us. God couldn't love us as we are, sinners, weak people giving into temptations. yet we know God made us as we are, if He wanted us to be different He would have made us different. It is difficult for us to accept that God says to us “I love you as you are”. God does not reject us, Jesus never walks ways from us. He just says “I love you” for we are created in the image and likeness of God. Jesus is our brother and gives us the Holy Spirit to live within us. This is not our understanding of how we are treated by the world or others. So we become afraid, scared

to reveal ourselves because our experience in the world is that we will be rejected, cast aside, hurt.

It is Jesus who is the Divine Doctor, the one who will heal us, accepting your weaknesses, our sinfulness, our wrong doing and renewing us in his love. Look at the Crucifix, this is how much Jesus loves us. He was willing to suffer and dies for us. This is the greatest act of healing. In the Gospels when Jesus heals someone on most occasions He says “Your sins are forgiven”. So not only does Jesus heal but He forgives us and He left us the great healing Sacrement of Reconciliation as a sacrement that can break down the wall of protection we have built up. Yet we are afraid or ashamed to approach Jesus to be healed, healed in our relationship to ourselves, to others and to God, because we find it difficult to believe that Jesus just says “I love you” without conditions.

Think of the scene in the Gospel when Jesus is invited to the house of the Pharisee for a meal and the sinful woman appears washing his feet with her tears and pouring oil on Him. The Pharisees were up right people, they obeyed the law to the letter but they could not understand how Jesus treated sinners, those public sinners who were cast out, not even permitted in to the Temple. They could not grasp the love Jesus has for the sinner and that for Him no one is lost (think of the parable of the lost sheep). For Jesus forgiveness heals, forgiveness penetrates to the very heart of the person, not to reject but to accept. For Jesus forgiveness opens the heart of the sinner to the future. This is what Jesus does in the healing Sacrement of Reconciliation, He renews, refreshes and accepts us as we are made. For Jesus no one is unforgivable, look to the Crucifix, this is Jesus saying “This is how much I love you”. We look at the behaviour and actions of others and think “I cannot forgive you” but Jesus says “Be healed, you are forgiven now look to the future”. When we are healed and forgiven then we can reach out to others, with “soft” hearts to understand others and the circumstances and situations which have caused others to behave in the way they do and we can begin to forgive them.

And so with true hearts we can say the prayer Jesus our Bother gave us to forgive others as we are forgiven by God. When we have received the healing grace of Jesus in Reconciliation we can return to the world in all its harshness and not judge others, understand others, not condemn others but accept them. So often in the Gospels it is the “religious” man (scribe, Pharisee) who condemns, who casts out, who judges harshly. It is Jesus who saves in the Gospel, it is Jesus who brings back the sinner with rejoicing.

When we receive the healing grace of Jesus in the Sacrament of Reconciliation His forgiveness is the proof of His unconditional love for us. Jesus continues to forgive us for He keeps on loving us. But we become confused. We confuse forgiving with forgetting. As we cannot forget our sinfulness so we believe Jesus will not forget. But Jesus not only forgives but also forgets because this is what unconditional love means.

However, our confusion with forgiving and forgetting can hurt us. Forgiving others the hurt and pain they have caused us is an act of our will. But our hurts are like scars and so we bear them but only peace will come to us when we understand that it is through love that we forgive others, only love can break the circle of hurt, pain and resentment.

Because we are loved and forgiven, because Jesus has broken down the walls that restrict our hearts then we live with beating hearts and can reach out to forgive those who have sinned or hurt us. Then the peace of Christ will reign in our beating hearts, a peace the world cannot give for it is a peace coming from the knowledge and acceptance that Jesus loves me as I am and I can be unafraid to reach out to others.

Being a Disciple

Millions of people visit Rome every year. Many are pilgrims to see and hear the Pope, being at an audience the highlight. Also to visit many of the famous churches; St Peter's Basilica, St Paul's Outside the Walls, the Lantern Basilica and many more churches to see. However, for many of the visitors Rome is the Eternal City, one of the great historic centers of the world. A visit to visualise the center of the ancient Roman Empire and see the Colosseum, the Forum, the Pantheon. Yet for others it is the great works of art by Michaelangelo, Raphael, Caravaggio.

For the Christian tourist the sites of the Roman Empire are also places to visit as many are places of martyrdom for the earliest Christians. It is easy for all of us to imagine the torture, the suffering of those early martyrs when we see, for example, the Colosseum. Yet in our minds we think of these places as examples of how things were in a more brutal past. But even today Christians are persecuted, disadvantaged and discriminated against in our own time. It is not easy to be a disciple, a follower of Jesus in our own time. Persecution is not something of the past. Discrimination is part of the Christian life for many in our world in the twenty first century. There are many countries where persecution and violence is overt, typical and unpunished for many followers. The United Nations has lists of places where intolerance and persecution are common places. Also, in the world the idea of intolerance is common in more so called civilised countries. We live in the post Christian era, a time of science, technology and logic where the concept of God is vanishing or gone. In these more "enlightened" countries to believe is seen as superstition and a waste of time.

In our modern technologically advanced world the discipline is seen as "old fashioned" and out of step with the advances of science and modern thinking and should be ignored as superstition or rejected as myths. Progress in economics also tells Christians that "society" is unimportant, only the individual is important, happiness is found in "looking after yourself". So that the disciple is jeered, laughed at and ignored.

It is not easy to be a disciple. Jesus Himself tells us that persecution and rejection is part of the way for the disciple. So to be a disciple can be a struggle, a risk yet Jesus also told us to put into practice the values of the Gospel. Even when ignored or laughed at we must practice the Way of Christ. When His Word reaches into our hearts He will give us the grace, the means to follow Him more closely and be His witnesses for our world. His grace will transform us into ambassadors of the Risen Christ. This means that His way of

compassion, mercy, justice, peace, forgiveness, hope and love can be a shining light in the world of darkness and confusion.

The grace of Jesus will give us the strength to take the values of His Gospel, no matter the struggle, into our own communities. We have to be involved in the world in which we live. So the follower of Jesus must be involved in practical situations, involved in local affairs e.g. housing associations when good living accommodation is provide for people. We must put into practice the social feeling of the Church (the values of the Gospel). So we seek justice for all no matter ethnicity, culture or background. Justice and equality for women, equal pay for equal work. Justice for immigrants, and opposition to people trafficker's. The Christian should be involved in Trade Unions working for the poor, the conditions of work , stopping exploitation of the weak, the young and those less educated. The disciple is ale an environmentalist protecting the world in which we live. In the values of the Gospel the disciple must be involved in the struggle against racism, sexism and working on behalf of the less able.

In 1961 when Adolf Eichmann was put on trial in Israel for his part in the Nazi "final solution" he was interviewed by three psychologists who all, independently, agreed he was perfectly sane, rational and fit to plead. A normal person who ate well, slept well and saw his conscience was free. So the man responsible for the murder, death and inhume treatment of six million Jews, gypsies, and opponents of his regime was a perfectly sane and normal person. As Christians we must implement the Gospel values to counter act such "normality" in our world and communities. We must be peacemakers, opposing the injustice of war and intolerance even when others think of us as "mad", "unstable" and "strange".

However, it is easy to understand why the Christian is afraid of the struggle to implement the values of Christ or the social teaching of the Church based upon them. There is a huge risk that we may be rejected, persecuted, misunderstood and discriminated against. Being involved is a risk but if we are to be "workers of the Kingdom of God" we must be involved, to be the lights to dispel the darkness of hopelessness, of selfishness and destruction. We are the people of hope, a people who stretches out a helping hand and with a generous and open heart supports and affirms those around us. We are the workers for the Kingdom of God.

Jesus continually tells His disciples; "Do not be afraid". So as His followers in a world which has hardened its "heart" to His message and values "Do not be afraid", take the risk,

be involved in working for His kingdom, a kingdom of peace, of justice, a kingdom of grace in education, of equality. Creating a world, a community of mercy, compassion, understanding and forgiveness. A Kingdom where a persons worth is not about possessions they have, the position they hold in society, the power they can yield. As workers for the Kingdom of God we should not be afraid for Jesus tells us" I am with you" . he walks with us, at times He may even carry us so that we may know His guiding presence.

For the disciple, working for the Kingdom of God, Jesus tells us that he is a Brother and that we have a Father who gives is the Holy Spirit to strengthen and sustain us. So nothing that happens to us escapes the notice of our loving Father. He is a watchful Father and we are His beloved children when we are hurt and turn to Him he will heal us and renew us, He will refresh us with His grace. For His love for us will always triumph, His love transcends all. His love conquers all even death so when as workers, disciples we feel the suffering the world, the opposition of the world and its values the gentle hand of our Father is there to uplift us, the presence of our brother Jesus is there walking with us and the renewing Holy Spirit is with us to affirm, sustain and refresh us that we are not afraid to work for the Kingdom of God as the ambassador of light, pace and joy in our world.

The Great Sacrament of Marriage

Here is an old story. A husband and wife have an argument. The starts to destroy the character of her husband. She says he is lazy, selfish, self centered, thoughtless. She goes on and on. The husband sits, head bowed looking at the floor, saying nothing. Then she says "And another thing you never tell me you love me" At this the husband raises his head and speaks; "I told you twenty years ago I love you and if I ever change my mind I would tell you."

So this old tale tells us of the importance of communicating our love for one another. Love is something active and has to be shared or communicated. God showed his love for us by sending his Son as our Saviour. Jesus showed the depth of his love for us by His Passion and Crucifixion.

It seems a very basic concept but our love has to be active and communicated in words and actions. Yet the word love can be over used or misused. We use it when we mean like or use it when we really mean what we think. is in communication that we come to know each other, that we form relationships. The normal way this works is; think of a set of old fashioned pan scales. On each side there is an empty pan. When one person tells something of themselves it causes an imbalance. That persons waits until the other responds in a similar way. When the scales are balanced again there is a wait until someone revealed something to imbalance the scales. The other responds and this continues until both think the "know" the other.

The best known and perhaps most normal relationship between a man and a woman is marriage. O course in the Church this is a sacrament, the visible signor God in our world. If there is a difficulty it is in the word communicate. Each person has a picture in their head of what marriage means. For ones may be a cottage with roses round the door, for another it may be a sign saying "Home Sweet Home". No matter the picture it remains in the mind of the individual until it is communicated, that is until it is spoken and listened to by the other. Therein lies the problem. It is easier at times to speak than to listen. Was a relationship grows it is easy not to speak or not to listen, believing that we know enough about the other person. However, as we as individuals are constantly changing so our thought , our ideas change ad evolve with experience, knowledge and influences around us. For a marriage to succeed and be always developing communication mud be ongoing.

Of course in any survey when asked about marriage the great majority will say "marriage is based on love". This is evidently true. But what is love? For each person they may have a unique understanding of what love is. The idea is difficult to determine completely. The Church teaches that the secret of marriage is a "covenant", a love relationship between a man and a woman. It is possible to define "covenant" to define "relationship". The difficulty is to define totally and accurately what "love" means. For some it may be enormity, our kindness or caring or empathy. It is possible to go on and on with the definition. We have an example from the life of Jesus who loved us to the "The end". The very depth of Himself and giving Himself for the good of others. So a possible working definition may be; to seek the good of the other before one's own good. This leads us to a better understanding of the sacrament. Marriage is based on love, it is an exclusive relationship between one man and one woman. The "two become one flesh". The Church continues its teaching about the sacrament by telling us it aids an equal partnership which develops the mutual well being of the people involved. It is a vocation, the call of God for this man and this woman to help, assist and affirm one another on the road to salvation. It is through this sacrament that they receive eternal life. Although baptised individuals it is through the "Eucharist" that they journey together towards the eternal life offered by the Risen Christ. So it is a sacrament of hope for it looks to the future. It is a sacrament of happiness and fulfilment where through loving, caring, supporting one another they may achieve salvation as ONE. This entails a life of mutual communication and ever lasting. This communication is on four levels, physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual. When each is communicated with love then each is a source of grace from the Father who loves us unconditionally. For any one who lives in love lives in God and God lives in them.

The most obvious and perhaps least acknowledged and understood communication is the physical. Although thought of as the most accessible it is also the most intimate and for many the only real source of communication defining the relationship in an overt manner. For it is here that in a self-evident way the two become one. However, it is through affection, fondness, care, kindness, warmth and tenderness that the couple grow in love.

It is also through communication on an intellectual/psychological level that the couple grow in love. This psychological level can be a life principle but not that of people like Freud or Adler, rather the principal life value given to them by Jesus. Love one another, treat one another as you would like to be treated. It is Jesus who asks that the couple "understand" one another according to the values of the Gospel. This requires that they grow in

compassion, mercy, peace, forgiveness for one another. In this way by practical cases that the illustration of love grows.

The next step if communication is emotional. This can be the most awkward . The greatest gift one human being has for another is the gift of love. However, we are so fearful of rejection that we are afraid to reveal our selves on an emotional level for fear of being rejected or hurt. The result is that we do not want to expose ourselves. yet it is really only when we can be honest wit our emotes we can truly say we are communicating with one we love. It is on this level that we can say we love unconditionally. This means that a question like “ Why do you love me” is meaningless. If one say of your looks, what happens if these change. Do you stop loving. when we love and communicate openly, honestly and emotionally then we realise that love is an act of the will. We choose to love.

The good of the other takes precedent over our own good. Ina mutual relationship this works out. It is then that here is no selfishness, no self centeredness, no foolish pride only the good of the other. Then the couple become like Jesus an example an witness to love in the world.

The last area to be communicated; the spiritual. Yet it is not last it is the glue keeping all other together, It is an awareness of the love of God at the center of the relationship. A line froth Creed can sum up the sacrament of marriage. It is One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic. One for the two people are united in all aspect of life. Holy because God is at the center of their vocation. Catholic because it is a universal gift of God’s love for his children. Apostolic because the love of the married make Jesus present to the world through their love and so can attract other to Him.

Marriage is a most wondrous sacrament for it an heal, it is creative, it is a symbol of Jesus, it is a sacrament attracting other, it is everything, it is truly a gift from God for the whole Church and world.

A Busy World

A hospital chaplain when encountering a rotor, nurse or visitor was asked. "How are you?" always answered in the same way "I'm very, very, very busy" She was indeed a busy woman going about her ministry meeting patients, giving comfort and praying with the sick. In our modern world we often hear the phrases "time flies" or "not enough hours in the day". There is so much to do, so many people to see and not enough time even to sit down and relax. We have made a virtue out of being busy. In offices, schools, works we see people walking about with clip boards, papers, or sheets and they look so busy, so important. To have a full diary, a full schedule is to be merited. You have to be seen rushing around. You are only essential when you have so much to do. To sit about means you can be accused of being lazy, idle or unimportant. The inactive have no place in the modern world. It is seen as essential to schedule each part of our lives, so much so that we compartmentalise our days, our weeks, our lives. If you want others to think well of you or to be thought of as important we must have 'things to do', always busy. We think this makes our lives important so that others will appreciate the value of what we do. We make time for work, for meetings, for travelling, for shopping and for eating. We long to be free to sit down and relax. It is advantageous to our value as a person, in the eyes of others, when our time is occupied. The result is that we are so busy we can lose the sense of 'belonging' because there is always something else to do.

The consequence of a full, busy life is that we are distracted when we find a few moments of silence and so our minds race with what is still to be done. So we avoid silence. When our lives are so busy, so full, so distracted by the world it is easy to see that at times, perhaps through fatigue or tiredness, we wonder what our lives mean, we wonder why am I here? What am I living for?. Of course for parents they will say "For my children". Although this is true, due to the lack of reflection, due to the lack of silence, we do not have time to instruct or support them in knowing that which is truly important, namely the people in our lives. We wish that they will have a happy, busy and fulfilling life. A life that is worthwhile but as we have not spent time in silent reflection we do not know how to teach them, because we have been so distracted by "things". At times we are so busy and our lives filled with noise we are like people carrying a heavy suitcase that we are afraid will burst open and others will see the contents of our life spread out for all to see. So hurry, keep rushing about.

The world and the values of the world overcome us so that the most we can do is wish things work out well in the end. Those who are committed to a "cause", people who

are seeking a “better world” seem to be more content, more fulfilled. Yet there are so many “causes”, so many different and differing groups with contradictory options of what constitutes a “better world”. The onlooker becomes confused, even the participants can be confused. The values of the world causes us to question and ask “what’s the point”.

Soon even these enthusiastic people can loose heart or harden their hearts to what is happening as their once generous spirit becomes lost in a series of slogans and a lack of achievement. And so the idea of a better world is lost in a slow decline into oblivion.

But we are followers of Christ. We need to take away the distractions. Our values are the values of the Gospel. It is in those times of silence when we allow the Holy Spirit to teach us about how special we are to God. It is in those moments of silence we come to realise that we have to be about putting into practice the values of the Gospel. The values of peace, justice, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, understanding, and love. It is when we stop, sit down in silence that we come to understand that God calls us to His Kingdom, His values and that no matter what Jesus is with us. Give yourself a few minutes of peace, perhaps at the end of the day to sit, relax and allow the Spirit to wash away your distractions and allow you to cast your cares, your worries and concerns upon the Lord. It is when you offer to Jesus these things that miracles can happen.

The Rosary

The Rosary seems such a simple prayer that it is easy for us to forget its majesty and greatness. After all it is only a sequence of Our Fathers, Hail Mary's and Glory be to the Father. However, we also know it is an opportunity to meditate upon the 'Mysteries' and reflect upon the great events of our salvation through the life of Jesus and the life of Our Lady. This is a prayer which can deepen our relationship and friendship with Jesus and come to a better appreciation of God's redeeming plan for the world.

There is a close similarity between the Rosary and Lectio Divina, a deeper listening to God, a deeper awareness of the presence of Jesus, a deeper response to the Holy Spirit and so a deepening of faith and hope. The reflection on the Mysteries and the repetitive prayer can lead us in a movement from reflection to 'resting in the Lord' or from meditation to contemplation.

Our Lady is the example of how by her consent to God, her 'yes', and so entered into the very mystery of God. It is at the Annunciation we see Our Lady in those moments of silence moves closer to the Father under the power of the Holy Spirit to be 'still' and with gracious acceptance says yes to God. So our Lady and the Rosary can teach us how to move from vocal prayer to that silence where God is ever present.

Through praying the Rosary, meditating on the Mysteries we can achieve a place of 'still silence' where we know that what is important is not the quantity of prayer, rather the quality. It is the Holy Spirit who teaches us that to pray the Rosary can lead us to a true prayer of contemplation. The Holy Spirit will come upon you.

It is the very simplicity of the Rosary that leads us to know we can pray it anywhere, any time. We can pray the Rosary anywhere; on a bus, when jogging, washing the dishes, ironing, at work or in the privacy of our own room. Our Lady followed her Son every step of His way and so teaches us that she is a 'contemplative', but a contemplative who is active in the world. All of her actions are devoted to God. As one who was 'full of grace' so every moment was contemplative.

Our Lady carried the Body of Jesus then through her prayer would have taught him the Psalm, the prayers of the Temple, the Torah and how to listen to God. She continued to teach the Church after the Resurrection and is an example to us today.

Through the Rosary we ask the intercession of Mary, our Mother that we may, by the power of the Holy Spirit, may come closer to her Son. We ask Our Lady's intercession that we, like her, may walk with her Son and know that Jesus never leaves us but always walks with us.

Joyful Mystery of the Rosary

Monday & Saturday

The Annunciation of the Lord to Mary

The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth

The Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ

The Presentation of our Lord

Finding Jesus in the Temple at age 12

Sorrowful Mystery of the Rosary

Tuesday & Friday

The Agony of Jesus in the Garden

The Scourging at the Pillar

Jesus is Crowned with Thorns

Jesus Carried the Cross

The Crucifixion of our Lord

Glorious Mystery of the Rosary

Wednesday & Sunday

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

The Ascension of Jesus to Heaven

The Descent of the Holy Ghost

The Assumption of Mary into Heaven

Mary is Crowned as Queen of Heaven and Earth

Luminous Mystery of the Rosary

Thursday

The Baptism in the Jordan

The Wedding at Cana

The Proclamation of the Kingdom

The Transfiguration

The Institution of the Eucharist

All Souls

Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord and let perpetual light shine upon them
May their souls and the souls of the faithful rest in peace Amen

The Oxford English Dictionary contains and defines more than six hundred thousand words. This is the greatest number of words of any language in the world.⁴⁵ The words in the English language originate from many sources; Anglo-Saxon, Latin, Greek, French, Indian, even Chinese. Many words are archaic and no longer in common use yet each year new words are added to the total, especially modern technological terms. With such a multitude to choose from it would be easy to think that there is an apt and suitable word for every eventually and situation. However, there are times when it seems impossible to find the appropriate words to express our thoughts and feelings. The most obvious circumstance when the right words cannot be found is when we go to a home where a loved one has died.

Although wanting to express our sympathy at the time of someone's death nothing seems fitting. Our thoughts come from our own experience where no matter what is said it cannot ease or remove the pain and sense of lost the grieving people feel. When someone we love has died we cannot remember what others have said but we do remember their presence.

Death is the great, last taboo. It is about the only subject we do not wish to think of or take about as it reminds us of our own pain at the death of a loved one. It pulls us down as we recall the painful memories, our broken heart and the sense of emptiness and loss. No matter how hard we push away our feeling death seems always to be about to touch us.

Strange though it may seem, though, when we speak about the loved one who has died there seems to be a lightening of the pain, remembering the dead can help in our grieving process. An Aboriginal tribe in Australia says that a person is never truly dead when there is at least one person to remember and talk of them. We may think of this as a lovely sentiment but we are Christians. As the followers of Jesus we have faith and hope, Faith in Jesus as the Son of God, Lord and Saviour and hope in the Resurrection from the dead. As the followers of Jesus it is appropriate for us to speak of and relate stories of the one we love who has died. We recall happier times, celebrations when we enjoyed the company of the person who has died, to recount their love, their faith and their hope. As the Body of

Christ it is our faith that there is but one Body of Christ and we are united with the living and those gone before marked with faith.

Nevertheless there are those quiet moments when in loneliness our broken hearts emerge. Then questions arise in our minds; questions about suffering, questions about the devastating loss, questions about how life will never be the same. We seek answers, we need consolation, we search for comfort and relief from the pain we feel. We can turn to science, medicine, technology but these can only answer 'how' someone has died. To answer the 'why' questions we have to turn to Jesus.

It is in the life, Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus that we can find peace for our broken hearts. It is in quiet contemplation of the life of Jesus that we can understand our own life and death. Our faith tells us that Jesus is not some holy man, a prophet, a miracle worker, He is the Son of God, our Saviour, our Redeemer. His life is the pattern and model for the life of His disciples, His brothers and sisters. We know that Jesus experienced sadness and grieving in His life. We have only to read and meditate on the story of Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Jesus was so moved at the death of His friend that He grieved with sighs that came straight from His heart. Jesus wept. This may seem strange because He knew exactly what was going to happen, namely Jesus would raise Lazarus from the dead. So there must be more to the meaning of His weeping. Jesus is telling us that when someone we love has died and we weep, Jesus is there beside us weeping also. When our hearts are broken at the death of a mum or dad, a husband or wife, a child, a friend then Jesus stands in solidarity with us. When one member of the Body of Christ grieves the Jesus the Head is there. When one member of the Body of Christ feels desolate and broken then Jesus the Head walks with them.

Jesus walks with us even to the point of weeping with us. His suffering also teaches us that suffering will be part of the life of the disciple. Our suffering may be of a different order than His. Our can be physical or psychological or emotional but it will be part of our lives. The suffering of Jesus was an expiation for our sins. Although we will have to carry our own crosses like Jesus our suffering is not in vain for it makes up for what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ and His suffering is for the salvation of the world. Our sufferings, our crosses is for the salvation of others.

As the followers of Jesus we are the people of hope for we are the Easter people, the people of the Resurrection. This is our faith. For the disciple life is changed not ended. Still there are times when our pain can only be healed if we could only reach out and touch our loved one, feel their presence and talk to them telling what is in our heart. We feel lost, helpless not knowing what to do. For the follower of Jesus death is not an end rather a new way of living. Think of the child hidden away in the womb, think of how he/she is changed by the birth, each day this body is changing from baby, to toddler, to child, teenager, adult, old person, it is always changing yet remains the same person. But we are more than just a physical being, when our body fades, when we are even unrecognisable we are more. No matter how we may look there is someone who loves us, someone who sees beyond the physical to the spiritual person. When we are loved we see the not a body breaking down or suffering we see the beauty of the person we love. For it is when we love we open our hearts to see beyond to see what others cannot see or appreciate, . When we love and are loved we open our hearts to tenderness, compassion, forgiveness. Because of our open heart we continue to be in contact with the one we love. So at death we change into a new way of living, living in the Resurrection which Jesus came to bring.

As we continue our journey with Jesus this takes us through death. If we are faithful to Him He will be faithful to the promise made at our Baptism, eternal life. It is in the Eucharist that Jesus feeds us, sustaining us for the journey to the Resurrection. Here is a thought: when we receive Holy Communion the priest says "Body of Christ" and we are united in communion with Him. But more, we are the Body of Christ, the Church, and there is only one Church so when we receive the "Body of Christ" we are also united with those we love who have gone before us.

We must remember our loved one, we must speak with our loved ones for we are united in the Body of Christ, the Church. Although there may be sadness, pain and loss we are the people of hope looking to the future when we will be reunited with our loved ones in the glory of the Resurrection Jesus came to bring. As the brothers and sisters of Jesus, as the family of God we walk with Jesus for He has conquered sin and death and gives eternal life to those who follow Him.

Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord and let perpetual light shine on them.

May they rest in peace, Amen