

# TANGAZA COLLEGE

THEOLOGICAL CENTRE OF RELIGIOUS

## **HOMILIES ON THE SUNDAY**

## **READINGS OF LENT**

## **FOR CYCLE (C)**

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PRESENTED BY: ZYGMUNT LABUN, S.D.B  
PRESENTED TO: FR. DECLAN BROSNAN, O.S.A  
FEBRUARY 1999

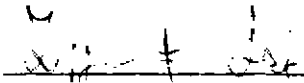
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Student's Declaration.

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for academic credit to any other Institution.  
All sources have been cited in full.

  
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Signed: Labun, Zygmunt SDB\*

## INTRODUCTION

Truth for many, who claim to be Christians, is found in the Bible. But along with truth and blessing that comes from reading Scripture, its heritage has also brought a conflict because of individualistic interpretations. How these interpretations can be and how they affect even the most intimate aspects of our lives can be seen in enormous numbers of different churches along our streets or in one squares.

To read the Bible is to encounter the Word of God and a word very different from our own. We believe that purely personal interpretation of the Bible from the viewpoint of our modern culture will inevitably miss the mark when it comes to capturing the full riches of God's revelation through these ancient writers. What makes people think that what the Bible says is secondary to what its writers thought they were saying ?

After having undergone the required studies towards ministerial priesthood I made an attempt to share the Word of God with other people and to interpret it for them according of the Church' teaching.

This essay contains 6 homilies on the Sunday Readings of Lent for Cycle (C) and their themes differ from each other but yet all of them create an atmosphere of sorrow, compassion and repentance.

The theological background and interpretation of the homilies is based on the most available Catholic theological-pastoral commentaries. As well as the theological books, there are also pastoral implications and thoughts. These pastoral implications are enriched by my own personal reflections as a result of my studies and religious formation.

The homilies are addressed to catechists and leaders who are involved in pastoral activities and need to undergo an annual formation and spiritual renewal in the Season of Lent. Each homily is longer than usual due to the requirement of the Long Essay. Therefore, it will be advisable to use them in a series of talks and not for preaching during Sunday Masses.

Above all, I have used different stories, styles and types of language in order to avoid a boring atmosphere in my homilies. The aim of the Long Essay is not to make high theological research but to bring understanding of the word of God to catechists and leaders who should apply it to the daily life of people's experience. We wish to encourage people to read the word of God and teach them how to interpret it in their own context. Otherwise, they will believe in a God who lives in the clouds and who is dead in their own life. We need to read the signs of the times and to make the word of God alive in us and others.

## FIRST SUNDAY

(Deut. 26:4-10 / Rom. 10:8-13 / Lk. 4:1-13)

Once again we are in the season of Lent. As usual we will be following Jesus as he goes towards Jerusalem. We will be with him in different circumstances. We will be listening to proper readings and sermons and participating in different penitential rites.

At the beginning of this time I should ask myself what I am going to deny myself of during this time of Lent? Will I abstain only from food and drinks? Perhaps this year I should take into consideration the whole of my being, my body and my soul.

Lent has various forms of living. It has been surrounded by an atmosphere of mourning, weeping, praying and fasting. Lent for many Jewish people is associated with fasting. In newly born Christianity fasting was recommended for a number of reasons. Repentance for sins was a way of preparation for reception of the Spirit, who would be a powerful weapon to fight against evil spirits. Fasting was also for self-discipline and self-denial. Nowadays we associate fasting with abstinence from food. However, fasting need not be only from food. Even more important may be penance through extra work, or fasting from seeking ways to be entertained.

Christians are called to live these days unlike any others of the year. This is so whatever economic condition we are in, whatever our work, whatever our family situation, whatever our educational background

In our journey to the Father we undergo rejection, loneliness, anger, desperation, misunderstanding, suffering, temptation and crucifixion. It is a difficult journey. Am I strong enough to reach the end? I need a strong dose of encouragement and self-denial. Where can I get it from? Jesus shows us the way of self-denial and victory over our

temptations and weakness. Fasting and cooperation with the Holy Spirit is one of the ways to conquer and defeat temptations. Do I want to take it on myself ?

However, not only Christians are invited to fast. Our Muslim brothers and sisters are also called to practise this. The Book of Koran orders fasting throughout the month of Ramadan. It is the month in which the Koran was revealed. During the time of fasting everybody is forbidden to eat, drink and smoke between sunrise and sunset. Sick people and travelers are exempted from it. However, they are expected to fast an equal number of days, whenever it may be convenient for them.

Why fasting ? Simply, it helps self-discipline, it deepens devotion, increases and expresses the Muslim faith. Above all it was desired and revealed by God. Fasting can be practised in any month of the year, but Ramadan is a month in which God wants every Muslim to be more than usually devoted to him. Fasting is also a means of expiation for manslaughter, a broken oath, or the killing of game while on pilgrimage.

Nevertheless, fasting must go beyond its physical appearance which is abstinence from food, feelings or promises. It must go to God himself and be filled with his presence. So understood, there should be fasting for the eyes from impure seeing; for the ears, from unsavoury listening; for the mouth from talking too much and gossiping. Such fasting is a pathway to divine knowledge and recognizing one's own vocation.

What is significant is the perception that human nature has higher needs than only bodily desire, that the body should be in the service of learning patience and endurance. From this perspective we can see that there is no doubt about the value of fasting in the Muslim tradition. Therefore, with all the emphasis on the importance of fasting in the Islamic world, we have to underline and clarify their view of life. It is not renunciation of this world. The good things of nature are God's gifts, which shouldn't be refused, but used. The reasonable desires and needs of bodily life - food, drink, sex and sleep should be properly and thankfully satisfied.

In today's first reading Moses encourages his people to make an offering to the God of Israel. He also recalls his ancestors' history. As we have heard, the Aramean was a refugee together with other companions in Egypt. This small group of refugees had grown into a big nation, which experienced harsh slavery, suffering and oppression. But in the midst of their misery and oppression they were able to find the way out. They called on the God of Israel. God the Father heard their cry and saw how they were oppressed. He helped them to come out of the hopeless situation and painful experience in Egypt.

We too are encouraged to look at our personal history and recall in our minds and hearts all the great acts and wonders that God has done for us. Perhaps some of us have never been foreigners or refugees. Nevertheless, we might have experienced "being a refugee" at different levels of our lives. How many times have we been refugees, foreigners, slaves within our own families and neighborhood? How many times have we been slaves to our selfishness and personal comfort? How many times have we been foreigners and aliens to God by living in sinful circumstances? Or by not being just to our brothers and sisters as far as their basic economic, financial and physical needs are concerned.

It is worthwhile to consider my personal attitude towards myself and others, especially during this time of retreating from excessive preoccupation with myself and my needs. Each and every one of us should ask himself or herself: Have I called in faith on the Lord's name to help me come out of the slavery of sin? Have I ever noticed the presence of God and his powerful hand in my life as my ancestors did? If I did so, what kind of impact did it have on my life?

In the Letter to the Romans we read: "The word that is the faith we proclaim, is very near to you, it is on your lips and in your heart." St. Paul in this statement invites us to

reflect on the issue of faith and its impact on our life. Simply, he says that faith is a gift from God. Our task is to respond personally.

It requires belief, confession and witness. We must believe not only that Jesus lived in Jerusalem 2000 years ago, but that he lives today as well. We can encounter Him in our hearts, families, homes, countries today. We must actualize our faith. To believe is to give an authentic example of it in our daily life.

Above all, our faith gives us a sense of belonging to the universal community of believers. This belonging is not limited to nationality, colour, tribe or sex, because God's mercy, goodness, love and concern is the same for everybody. St. Paul says "everybody will be saved who calls on the name of the Lord". We cannot rely on ourselves, we need to ask God for his help, for his gift of faith and his strength to live it out day by day.

The Gospel tells us that "filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness". After 40 days of fasting Jesus was tempted. This story is to make us alert to the presence of evil forces which are standing in front of the door of our hearts. It shows how to face and overcome them. What or who are these evil forces? Is it only an illusion or true reality? Where does it come from?

Let us recall for a moment the first pages of Genesis. In the first scene God appears as a giver of life. Adam and Eve are the receivers of life which is characterized by the submission of the rest of creation to them. Above all they received a beautiful gift of life that is freedom. However, in the mist of all the gifts there was only one request from God :

"You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die".

In the beginning our first parents Adam and Eve found themselves very much at peace, joy and happiness in the garden of Eden. Then one day something happened. They were so attracted by the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil that they wanted to be like God, always immortal, mighty, powerful and to be praised. This appeared to them as something good, wonderful and magnificent and they were tempted and lied to by the serpent - Satan.

Adam and Eve failed the test of temptation. It is remarkable that trial and temptation are not a consequence of the Fall. Since the very beginning this world has been a testing ground for humankind's fidelity to God. That is a fact of which each and every one of us must be well aware. The basic root of all the evil we find in this world is to be found in the human heart when it rejects God and disobeys his commandments.

Today we witness how Jesus faces evil. Jesus, as man, is tempted in a similar way to us. The object of temptation is the same - desire, self-glory, satisfaction and one's own will and mission. No, Jesus did not submit himself to this temptation. He really knew what he wanted and who he was. Although He was God, He was a human as well. Therefore, contrary to the first parents, he showed that all kinds of tests can be overcome when one relies totally on God. A strong relationship with God and knowledge of His will can make us steadfast in our life to choose.

In the first temptation Satan expected Jesus to use his divine power in order to satisfy his human feeling of hunger. Satan approached Jesus in a very interesting way. He makes Jesus aware of his Divine Sonship "if you are the Son of God". Jesus has already heard a voice calling him "Son of God" during His baptism. However, Jesus very quickly verified whether this voice and encouragement came from the same origin. His answer comes from the Bible, "People cannot live on bread alone." What does not agree with Scripture does not come from God. The words in which the temptation was

rejected have a wide application. We must be concerned with many things besides bread. There is always a temptation to use the advantage of social position one may hold or the economic one, in order to satisfy our needs and cause a sensation. However, the will of God should always take priority in all our actions.

In the second temptation, for wealth, power and false worship, Jesus teaches people not to go for a compromise with evil. All earthly possessions are good insofar as they lead to recognition of the true Master of all that exists. The answer again comes from the Scripture: "You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him alone."

In the third temptation Satan uses the Scripture to assure Jesus that he would be safe enough. "Do you not believe that God will perform a miracle for you?" But this is wrong use of scripture. It is twisting the text to suit a purpose. Again the will of the Father takes priority over all.

We may meet temptation in the same way as Jesus. Therefore our aim is to model ourselves on Jesus. We cannot dispense with temptation, but we can usefully steady our resolve by, like Jesus, fasting, meditating on our own mission, placing ourselves under the guidance of the Spirit and reminding ourselves of Scriptural values.

## SECOND SUNDAY

(Gen. 15:5-12. 17-18 / Phil. 3:17-4:1 / Lk. 9:28-36)

Last Sunday we witnessed Jesus' temptation and he how did not succumb to the temptation of Satan.

In the first reading today we could hear of the solemn covenant God made with Abraham which was the foundation of God's relationship with the people of Israel. Abraham makes an act of faith in God, who accounts him just. This righteousness is attained by obedience of faith. Abraham trusted the heavenly voice. He had such a strong faith in God that it kept burning and making his thought and will for God's use. This man became good not only because he was born so, but because he let the goodness of God take hold of him. He believed and it was counted to him for righteousness.

Abraham saw himself in front of God's glory as dust and ashes, therefore he trusted God completely. Hope comes when one turns oneself from "looking in" to "looking up." A mighty fortress is our God. Only in cooperation with God's grace, can we build and achieve our righteousness. Abraham is an example for us how we should walk in the steps of that faith of his.

Paul says to Philippians: "Listen to my words and follow my example". Become fellow-imitators with me in imitating Jesus Christ. Paul invites them not simply to listen him but also to imitate him. There were in the Church at Philippi men whose conduct was an open scandal and their lives showed them to be the enemies of the Cross.

Also, Paul invites the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord. At this point we must be aware that this joy has nothing to do with material things or outward circumstances. The secret is that real happiness depends not on things or places but always on persons. Many

people associated true happiness with possession of material things. Of course, it is a part of it and is good to a certain extent. We need certain things that help us organize our lives better. However, that is not all. One day all my material possession will perish and my happiness with it too.

Therefore, let me say that happiness is there, where you are. Even more. For us Christians, personal encounter with the Risen Jesus, experience of his intimacy, care, pure and true love, his concern for me, his true friendship, acceptance are and should be my real joy. Then, no matter in what circumstances we may find ourselves, the closeness with Jesus will always sustain and make us hope for better things.

In today's gospel we encounter revelation of Divine Glory in and through Jesus. We witness a transfiguration in which the Father reveals his glory in his Beloved Son. It is also a crucial step in the History of Salvation. The time of the Old Testament era is over and something that was expected is coming into being.

The meeting takes place on the mountain. The revelation's climax is surrounded by a cloud from which a voice is heard, as at the baptism of Jesus. There are also two significant figures from Old Testament. Moses a lawgiver and Elijah a prophet. They are the signs that in Jesus the Law and all the prophets are fulfilled.

The revelation of the OT finds its fulfilment in the NT and the NT fulfils the promises given by God to his people in the OT, precisely in the person of Jesus. What is best and central in the OT leads directly into the NT. Much in the NT could not be understood without the OT. In the Old Testament God reveals himself throughout the history of his people. Jesus is not only validating the Old Testament "Law and Prophets" but he is interpreting and constantly referring to it. The revelation of God in Israel is incomplete without the NT.

Transfiguration takes place while Jesus is praying. “ As he was praying the aspect of his face was changed...” What was the subject of Jesus’ prayer? Of course, the crucifixion which was to come. We may ask ourselves whether it was necessary for Jesus to die? Was it the Father’s will? Today we know that it was necessary for Jesus to die prior to our life. Perhaps we should ask why Jesus needed such transformation?

The Transfiguration is a prophetic preview of both the future glory and the true nature of discipleship. The two elements make up the primary motive in the transfiguration story, the revelation of the Son of Man and the vision of God. At the transfiguration, Jesus’ life appears no longer as it had normally appeared to his disciples. It is invested with heavenly light and power. The transfiguration is not illusion or distortion, but real. The transfiguration helps Jesus to come into touch with his true self, as the Son of God, as the chosen one. The experience of the glory of the resurrection involves the prior experience of the cross. The two are inseparable. The transfiguration is a preview of the glory which will eventually come.

The disciples were sleepy but they managed to stay awake. They failed to take the message about Jesus’ exodus, but they saw only the glory of Jesus. What did they really see?

The Apostles saw another face of Jesus. His inner glory shone through. It is easy to make a mistake of thinking that what the apostles saw was ‘the real Christ’, but to say that it was the real Christ implies that all the other faces He wore were not real, and if they were not real then they were false. The truth is that we and Jesus alike do not have one face, but many faces. And this is natural. It is a part of human being, part of life. Jesus, and we alike, at different times wear a face of happiness or sadness, courage or fear, peace or unrest, hope or despair, joy or pain...

There is nothing then to be ashamed of in all this. The only thing we should be ashamed of is a false face! These other faces are all mine. I am behind each of them. They are

real. But the false face tells a lie and may deceive. All the faces Christ wore were real. There was not a single one of them that was false. All faces keep a certain mystery. What lies behind a human face? We cannot tell unless the person lets us into the secret. At the deepest level every human being remains invisible to the rest of us.

The face that Jesus showed on the mountain was indeed a very special one, but it was not the only face of Christ. His countenance carried the splendour of his divinity: 'This is my beloved Son, listen to him.' In his full humanity God's divinity was also revealed.

After all that happened, Luke tells us that the Apostles kept silence. Jesus introduced them to a new Messianic concept, which was only understood after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Apostles faced fear, wonder, amazement, lack of words and understanding during the transfiguration. The inner silence is sometimes greater than the spoken word. The understanding may come later.

Divine glory was revealed to the disciples though it was not understood at the beginning. Peter wished to prolong it by providing tents for Jesus and Companions to stay in.

We may ask why such a record in the Bible? It was rather purely an experience for the Apostles. The event which is now recorded for readers of the Gospel is so that we may have a foretaste of the heavenly glory of Jesus and understand the meaning of prayer in our life. Jesus, although he was perfect, needed a special touch of God's love, presence and courage to carry out the mission. What about us?

Prayer is the appropriate posture for a divine revelation, although here the revelation is not to the one praying but to the accompanying disciples. In the same way we through our prayer can be the subject of revelation to others. The thought is rather that in prayer Jesus is caught up into the presence of God and hence the disciples are able to see him transfigured in the divine team. Jesus' departure; death, resurrection and ascension as

his departure to heaven. Probably the disciples did not hear the words and content of above mentioned conversation but simply later on it was disclosed to them by Jesus.

If we compare the agony of Jesus in the garden with the transfiguration we find some similarities. In both instances there were the disciples who felt asleep while Jesus was praying. The two events have a practical and important message for us today.

We too experience moments of ecstasy . Then, we feel so close to God that we feel we can reach out and touch him. During these moments we admire how beautiful life is.

We love everyone, we hug our friends and forgive our enemies their mistakes.

On the other hand, like Jesus, we also experience moments of agony. During these moments life looks so miserable. We feel that no one loves us. We find fault with our friends and we curse our enemies. We doubt whether God actually exists. When these moments of agony and ecstasy come we should recall Jesus' experiences at his high points and low points. We should remember what he did at these two moments.

Jesus responded to his experiences by prayer. If we do so we also will hear the words

“You are my chosen one” we will experience the Father’s transformation and healing touch to carry out our daily human, citizen and Christian tasks.

## THIRD SUNDAY

(Ex. 3:1-8. 13-15 / 1Cor. 10:1-6. 10-12 / Lk. 13:1-9)

In Kenya over 200 hundred people died during the bomb blast of 7th August 1998 in Nairobi. What would you say ? Were they bigger sinners than other people ? And also more than 5000 people were seriously injured and have suffered a lot because of that disaster, and some of them haven't yet recovered from it and never will. What would you say ? Were they bigger sinners than we ? Were all of them outstanding sinners ? Surely, No ! Simply, they were unfortunate victims of this disaster. Unlike the people caught in disaster, we are being forewarned to prepare ourselves and constantly be ready for some new surprise. For us there is still time, possibilities for change and improvement.

Just as at the beginning of Lent, we heard once again the call and invitation of Christ for repentance. To repent means to be converted. There are currents in life that will take us away from the love of man and God and then we need time for personal reflection, self-examination, coming to our senses and turning back to the original state. Conversion should be a joyful thing. It is good news; it is a call from the slavery of sin to a life of grace and freedom. It is a call from the life of barrenness to a life of fruitfulness. Conversion is the starting point of every spiritual journey and is a condition for becoming more human and godly. Apart from that, it should help people in their inner transformation by overcoming sin and strengthening their goodness.

The first part of today's gospel tells of two groups of people who had been killed by recent tragedies in Jerusalem. In the OT it was commonly held that disaster was a punishment for sin. Jesus rejects that and makes a clear distinction between sinfulness and sufferings. Some Galileans had gone up to Jerusalem to worship and had been put to death by the governor just as they were in the act of offering sacrifice. Jesus says it does not mean that they were worse sinners than others. The victims of tragedy must not be regarded as outstanding sinners. Disasters and accidents are not inflicted on

people by God as a punishment for sins. God does not use sadistic methods to bring us to acknowledge and follow Him. God wants people to turn to him, and discover their true selves.

Jesus goes on to speak of another disaster in Jerusalem; the eighteen people who had been killed when the tower in Siloam fell were not worse sinners than others. Jesus uses it to give a lesson and warning to his audience on the urgency of repenting. Jesus argues that everyone shares a basic similarity with those who were executed and those who suffered the accident. Everyone is a sinner who is in need of repentance.

The second part of the gospel tells about a fig tree that was planted inside a vineyard. A vineyard is an ideal place for fig trees to grow. If a fig tree could not grow there, it could not grow anywhere. It is illustrated in the parable. The owner has gone into the vineyard in expectation that this year the fig tree will have produced fruit. However, he meets with disappointment again. The tree is yielding nothing ; it is merely taking up useful space. The tree consumes but does not produce; it is a parasite and the owner has now run out of patience. The solution is to cut down the tree. The vinedresser plays the role of counsel for the defence, and pleads for a stay of execution.

Jesus presents a generous image of a patient God who is willing to wait, but in this world no human beings can wait, because their time is limited. Therefore human beings have to use their time for repentance now. Barrenness is no boast for a tree which exists to bear fruit, and sinfulness is no boast for a person who exists to be good. Jesus wants people to make the effort now to turn to God. The growth must come with them. Jesus says that in the present age good fortune and disaster are not indications of a life dedicated to the Kingdom. The time may even be extended for us, as for the fig tree, but ultimately the judgment will come.

The judgment will not be done by God, but by ourselves. We come to realise the contrast between the great love of God and our selfishness. This moment of realisation, coming to the truth about ourselves and God, will give us a pain of regret. The pain of regret will be our own judgment, which we will pass on ourselves, and our punishment.

It can be depicted by the following story : there was a man called Njoroge, who was working at Kenya Airways in Nairobi and a woman called Damaris, who was working as a hotel receptionist in Mombasa. Both of them they had known each other for quite a long time and they were good friends. They were very much in love and decided to marry in the near future. Everything seemed to them so beautiful and wonderful. They were so happy with each other. They had only one problem, the distance. One day Damaris got seriously sick and was taken to hospital. Another day Njoroge received news from Mombasa. This information came from a receptionist who had taken the place of Damaris : that his beloved Damaris had got a new job and a new man and she did not want hear anything about Njoroge. In the beginning Njoroge, could not believe that, but as the time was going on and on and there was not any news from Damaris, he decided to forget about her. In the course of a month he got another lady. Finally, after 6 weeks Damaris recovered from her sickness and came to Nairobi. One of the first things she did, was to visit Njoroge in his house and to her great surprise she found there the new lady. Damaris was shocked by her presence but yet managed to control herself. She asked for a minute of private talk with Njoroge. She explained to him everything that had happened to her in Mombasa and confirmed it with various papers and bills from the hospital. Njoroge kept quiet and could not believe himself what he had done. He felt ashamed of himself. He was regretting, regretting what he had done and could not forgive himself. He had come to know the truth about Damaris, about her faithfulness, about her love for him, and he also came to know the truth about his unfaithfulness and lack of love towards her. This realization, coming to the truth, gave him great pain and was already his punishment.

Now, we can draw a message from this story for ourselves that God does not punish us or pass judgment on us now or later. We are going to do it for ourselves. We are going to see the great love God had for us that we had rejected. This is going to give us the pain of regret, unforgiveness to ourselves, and this will be our judgment and punishment.

God calls on his sinners to repent, otherwise they will all likewise perish. Especially, it is required in today's world which is marked by envy, jealousy, suffering and lack of respect for human dignity. It implies that we recognize the presence of sin in our lives, in our villages, parishes, nations and our world. Perhaps the death of the Galileans gave them no time to repent but we have an opportunity to do so. Repentance is both a once for all event that shapes the whole course of life, and a day by day affair that keeps putting sin away. These two parables stressed the importance of repentance and also highlight the fact that the opportunity does not last for ever.

Now comes a parable that brings out two things: the need for repentance and God's slowness to punish. God does not punish here and now, but it does not mean that God approves of what sinners are doing, but that to the end God is patient and merciful. God's judgment is due but God's mercy holds. The experience of sin is common to all people and all need repentance. This is a self-evident element for Jesus in his view of man.

Jesus said: "If you will not repent, you will all perish" One thing is clear - he foresaw and foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened in 70 AD, and it is precisely what happened. The Jewish nation kept on seeking an earthly kingdom and rejecting the Kingdom of God, therefore they came to that end. The nation that chooses the wrong ways will in the end suffer for it. But the individual is in a very different case. Yet still he can be caught up in a situation that he did not make. His suffering is often not his fault. It is always dangerous to attribute human suffering to human sin, but always safe to say that the nation which rebels against God is on the way to disaster.

The report of a tragedy in Jerusalem, thought by Jesus' hearers to be due to the special sinfulness of those who had suffered in it, leads him to affirm that all his hearers are equally in danger of divine judgment and death.

In general, the Pharisees believed that calamity was a punishment for sin. The point, according to Jesus, is then that natural calamities afford no proof that those who suffer in them are any worse sinners than anybody else; far more important is the fact that all sinners face the judgment of God unless they repent. Why should an unfruitful tree waste ground that could be put to fruitful use? That is God's love and mystery. As long as the human heart beats, there is hope for a conversion and there is hope for a change and life with God.

The tree not only takes up space, but in fact exhausts the ground by taking nourishment from it. In our pastoral work we meet people who seems only to waste our time, spoil our name, our job and damage our life. But we should never give up helping them to find the right way of living as Christians. The tree may produce no fruit now, but fruit for the future - next year. Our Christians too may not show a sign of good will now, but their may improve in the future. We should not be the instruments of the limited love and mercy of God to our people. Let us leave it to God. The day of grace comes to an end, despite the intercession of the vinedresser, which could be only for limited remission of judgment. The parable of the fig tree may be viewed as a parable of mercy or perhaps even as a parable of crisis, containing a call for repentance before it is too late.

Although the Galileans were killed, Jesus does not criticize the Roman Prefect but instead he uses the incident to call for repentance. Jesus does not insist on the reason for their death but uses it as a challenge for those still alive to repent to undergo a reformation of life and to accept on faith the saving word of God that he has come to announce.

The parable of the fig tree drives home the critical nature of human existence. As a final period of grace is given to this fig tree, so Jesus summons to repentance goes forth in the short period of grace before God's judgment in the last hour. The fig tree will die expressly because of inactivity and unproductiveness. In the long run this becomes the greater sin than that implied by death at someone else's hands or unexpected calamity. Jesus stresses that the last period of grace has been granted to reform such procrastination.

The disaster is no punishment, but a warning and challenge. Jesus said that Israel was privileged like a fig tree in a vineyard. It had a sunny slope, and rose high above the vines: the sky was all its own. Israel had the covenant of God, the lineage of the prophets and the commission to make God's way known on earth. It was failure on the side of Israel's people. Three years refers to and means a long time, sufficient time. Israel has only a short period left for repentance. The dresser -Jesus- makes intercession for us. Always he said man can make a new start. Man or nation can turn again, and by act of faith receive power for a creative life. A merciful God has given us all a second chance. Let us respond with gratitude and renewed dedication.

Some of us may say we have no sins, at least no serious ones; we haven't poisoned or killed anybody ! So why should we repent ? But what about our sins of omission ? What about the good we could do, but which we don't do ? What is the fig tree for, if not to produce figs? The owner is disappointed with the tree, not because of any poisonous fruit it has produced, but because it has produced no good fruit. It is judged and found wanting, because of what it has failed to do. Christians rarely ask themselves the question : what have I failed to do ? The call to repentance is not merely a call to turn away from evil, but a call to produce the fruit of good living. We may not be guilty of great evil but yet we can be very selfish, demanding from others, totally inconsiderate and impolite. Now, we are being called from being self-centred, to become other-centred and God-centred.

The parable of the fig tree is directed to two different groups of people at different times. The People of Israel were given especial choice, a place in God's plan and he took special care of them. But they did not bear fruit. In spite of their failure, God will be patient with them a little longer. He will give them a second chance, like the fig tree. Jesus' parable also applies to us and calls for a change in our way of life. Now, life for us as Christians must be marked by a constant struggle, a steady effort to grow in Christ. God has given us a special place in his plan and he has taken special care of us. His love empowers all growth and his presence makes the reform of life a joyful process. God expects us to bear fruit. If not, you will be given a genuine opportunity to repent. If you do not repent, then, like Israel, you will perish.

Christ was the gardener who asked that the tree be given another chance. Let us pray that all those in authority in this country of Kenya may be kind and merciful towards those they serve. May we, as leaders and catechists, be more kind and patient to the people we are working with. Let us rather punish our impatience than our catechumens or faithful. We rather need to pray for all those whose lives are barren and empty of the deeds of love, than condemn them. We need to form and catechize their minds in order to change their bad behaviour.

However, it is not something that is done once and for all. It calls for growth and development. It calls for a spirit of understanding and fostering. If we fail to accomplish acts of love in our daily work, produce the fruits of humanity, patience, forgiveness, generosity and peace, then all our good intentions will remain merely daydreams and a waste of time.

## FOURTH SUNDAY

(Josh. 5:9-12 / 2Cor. 5:17-21 / Lk. 15:1-3, 11-32)

This is the story of a father and two sons that speaks to us of the boundless mercy and understanding of God. Jesus uses this story as a response to the scribes and Pharisees who have been complaining about Jesus' attitude towards sinners: "This man receives sinners and eats with them" The story is told of a father who has two sons and who loses them both: one is lost in a far country and the other is lost in the wilderness of his own hostility.

In this parable the younger son is presented as dissatisfied and distressed. He wishes to change his life, to leave it. The younger son yearns for a life different from the experience at home. And indeed he leaves his father's house, to experience independence, love, freedom and self-realization. The son's leaving is a heartless rejection of the home in which he was born and nurtured.

He is a photograph of a common phenomenon of every human existence. The man wants freedom and thinks, many times, that God takes it away from him. He begins by leaving the Father, whose love he does not understand and whose presence has become a burden to him.

Leaving home is a denial of the spiritual reality that I belong to God with every part of my being, that God holds me safe in an eternal embrace, that I am indeed carved in the palms of God's hands and hidden in their shadow. Leaving home is leaving as though I do not yet have a home and must look far and wide to find one. When Luke writes, "and left for a distant country" he indicates much more than the desire of a young man to see more of the world. He speaks about a drastic cutting loose from the way of living, thinking and acting that has been handed down to him from generation to generation as a secret legacy. More than disrespect, it is a betrayal of the treasured values of family and community. The "distant country" is the world in which everything considered holy at home is disregarded. Leaving home is a selfish decision,

the height of ingratitude and irresponsibility. After having wasted the heritage, whose value he does not appreciate, he loses his honour and becomes the slave of others and of shameful actions. Let us now look at our life's journey.

Everybody, in many more or less subtle ways, has preferred the distant country to the home close by. Over and over again each one of us has left home. We have fled the hands of blessing and run off to faraway places searching for love. This is the great tragedy of our lives. We left home desperately hoping that we would find somewhere else what we could no longer find at home

The younger son runs out of money and runs into famine. He is a long way from home, and from the fulfilment of his dream. Having become aware of his slavery, he convinces himself that Father has a better destiny in mind for him, and he begins the road back to his home. He left home and discovered that his promised land is a barren hope. He thought back to the fine life he had at home. He thought of the kind and loving father he had. Then shame, remorse and guilt arose within him. He realized that he had done a terrible thing to his father, he came to the decision to return home. His experience of failure becomes a turning point of life. He reflects on his hopeless situation, admits his mistake and makes the journey of return.

Upon returning, he discovers that the father is very different from the idea that he had formed of him: The Father is waiting for him and runs to meet him, restores his dignity, erasing the memory of the lost inheritance and there is a celebration of the feast to which Jesus refers so many times. The immense joy in welcoming back the lost son hides the immense sorrow that he had experienced.

The moment arrives when we feel prisoners of a given situation, and we wish for a change. There are times when we feel surrounded only by indifference and solitude. Actually we are not. A loving Father is still waiting. A return to the Father's house is

still an option. God is the hope of the anguished. Trust in life is restored to the dissatisfied children of God. God embraces them. He is our hope.

The younger son becomes a self-confessed failure. His journey appears fruitless and he ends up where he started. In a geographical sense the starting and ending point is the same but the traveller is different. The journey has been a profound learning experience for the younger son and he is a man of new insight at journey's end.

Everybody is a prodigal son or daughter when we search for unconditional love where it cannot be found. Why do I keep ignoring the place of true love and persist in looking for it elsewhere? Why do I keep leaving home, where I am called a child of God? Leaving home is almost as if I want to prove to myself and to my world that I do not need God's love, that I can make a life on my own, that I want to be fully independent. Beneath it all is the great rebellion, the radical "no" to the Father's love

Not only did the younger son, who left home to look for freedom and happiness in a distant country, get lost, but the one who stayed at home also became a lost man.

The lostness of the elder son, however is much harder to identify than the one of his brother. He was obedient, dutiful and hardworking. But when confronted by his father's joy at the return of his younger brother, a dark power erupts in him and boils to the surface. Suddenly he becomes proud, unkind, selfish and a resentful person. The elder brother does not move to welcome his brother and rejoice with his father. He stays in the "no-go area" where self-righteousness reigns. He obeys the will of his Father, but with a closed heart, understanding none of this. He did his duty, worked hard every day, and fulfilled all his obligations, but became increasingly unhappy and unfree. He has served with the hope of being rewarded or at least the hope of being seen as superior to others. So he is not able to welcome sinners or to participate in the feast, because in fact he does not know how to love. For him obedience and duty have become a burden, and service has become slavery. He refuses the Father's compassion and forgiveness. His self-esteem is painfully wounded by his father's joy, and his own

anger prevents him from accepting this returning son as his brother. With the words, "This son of yours" he distances himself from his brother as well as from his father.

In response to the Pharisees' complaint, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them," Jesus confronted them not only with the return of the prodigal son, but also with the resentful elder son. They finally had to face their own complaint and choose how they would respond to God's love for every human being who is caught in resentment and tempted to settle in a complaining way of life.

The father does not love the younger son more than the elder. In the story the father goes out to the elder son just as he did to the younger, urges him to come in, and says, "My son, you are with me always, and all I have is yours." The father does not defend himself or even comment on the elder son's behaviour. The father moves directly beyond all evaluations to stress his intimate relationship with his son when he says: "You are with me always." The father's declaration of unqualified love eliminates any possibility that the younger son is more loved than the elder. The elder son has never left the house. The father has shared everything with him. He has made him part of his daily life, keeping nothing from him. "All I have is yours," he says. There could be no clearer statement of the father's unlimited love for his elder son.

Can the elder son in me come home? Can I be found as the younger son was found? How can I return when I am lost in resentment, when I am caught in jealousy, when I am imprisoned in obedience and duty lived out as slavery?

The parable of the prodigal son expresses the boundlessness of God's compassionate love. The story deals not with the human love of an earthly father; what is meant and represented here is the divine love and mercy in its power to transform death into life. The Father hopes against hope for the return of his lost child. He represents God our Father, who never discriminates among the children of God and never tires of awaiting the return of wandering children.

The joy at the dramatic return of the younger son in no way means that the elder son was less loved, less appreciated, less favoured. The father does not compare the two sons. He loves them both with a complete love and expresses that love according to their individual journeys. He knows them both intimately. He understands their highly unique gifts and shortcomings. He sees with love the passion of his younger son, even when it is not regulated by obedience. With the same love he sees the obedience of the elder son. The return of the younger son makes him call for a joyful celebration. The return of the elder son makes him extend an invitation to full participation in that joy.

The Father who welcomes his son is so glad, because his son “was dead and has come back to life, he was lost and is found”. At last we understand that God is Father. He did not put us on earth to collect merits and rewards but to discover that we are his children. Moreover we are in fact born sinners. We are born sinners from the start of our life, we are led by our feelings and the bad example of the society in which we have been raised. There is still more; as long as God does not take the initiative and reveal himself to us, we cannot think of freedom other than in terms of becoming independent of him.

God is not surprised by our wickedness since in creating us free, he accepted the risk that we might fall. God is with all of us in our experiences of good and evil, until he can call us his children “I have sinned against heaven and against you” Sin goes against Heaven and, that is, against God, who is truth and holiness. But God is also the Father concerned for his son, who has sinned before the one who draws good from evil. Such is our God and Father, the One who creates us day after day, without our being aware of it, while we go on our way; the one who seeks whom he can fill with his treasure.

See the father’s attitude: He runs to welcome his son. He is free in his love. This love overshadows the sinfulness and guilt of his son. Forgiveness and acceptance have

entered in; there is no space and time for speeches. The father is busy to restore the dignity of his son: the best status(robe), authority(the ring), and freedom(sandals).

The story of the prodigal son is the story of a God who goes searching for me and who does not rest until he has found me. He urges and he pleads. He begs me to stop clinging to the powers of death and to let myself be embraced by arms that will carry me to the place where I will find the life I most desire. Although God himself runs out to us to find us and bring us home we must not only recognize that we are lost, but also be prepared to be found and brought home.

## FIFTH SUNDAY

(Is. 43:16-21 / Phil. 3:8-14 / Jn. 8:1-11)

The Sister-in-charge, in one of the houses meant for street and troubled girls, after consulting with other Sisters had to call one of the girls to send her away. Before doing so she asked the girl:

“Alice, you have to leave this house. It is no longer possible for the other girls and us to stay with you, you cause so much trouble. But before you leave this place I would like to ask you for a favour. Can I?”

“What is it, Sister?”

“Alice, make me a promise that you will pray every day with these few words: ‘Jesus make me see myself in the way you see me.’ Can you do it?”

“I think so. I will try” replied the girl.

After four years, on a very sunny afternoon, a beautifully dressed girl visited the same house, asking for the Sister-in-charge. When the Sister came, the girl said:

“Good afternoon, Sister. My name is Alice. Do you remember me? I came to say thank you for the prayer you asked me to pray when I had to leave this house. I no longer hate myself. Jesus transplanted into my heart hope for new life, life without fear. Then I understood that fear is useless; what is needed is trust and it works.”

The Sister could not say a word but Alice noticed on her face a gentle smile and tears of happiness and joy coming from her eyes. They embraced each other in silence and stayed like that for a long time.

“Neither do I condemn you”. The narrative of the episode of the woman taken in adultery is very effectively revealing of Jesus’ attitude towards sinners.

In order to interpret this text properly we have to keep in mind how the people of that time reacted to the teaching and deeds of Jesus. Many of those who had followed him with enthusiasm in the beginning were now getting more and more disappointed. He

was not exactly the type of Messiah they had expected. Still they continued to ask themselves: "Who is this man?" On the other hand, the priests, the scribes and the Pharisees, who were zealous defenders of the Law, were not only disappointed but were also up against Jesus and had decided to kill Him. The reason? Jesus was too straightforward with them. He was denouncing their hypocrisy above all. So they considered him a false prophet and a dangerous man who had to be denounced. They had made up their minds. There was only one thing to do: prepare a plot in which he would be trapped and give scandal to everybody. Then it would be easy to condemn him.

These were the thoughts that filled their minds when they came to Jesus with a woman who had just been caught in the very act of committing adultery. For a Hebrew woman this was reason enough to be condemned to death. The trial was very short. Sometimes there was no trial at all. Such a woman would be dragged to a public square in the view of all. A fault of this kind did not deserve much discussion: the woman would be stoned to death.

The angry, judgmental crowd gathered round this lonely woman must have thought that they had Jesus caught perfectly. Jewish Law permitted an adulteress to be stoned to death under certain circumstances, but the Roman authorities forbade Israel from carrying out such punishments. Whatever answer he gave, Jesus would violate somebody's law and give them the opportunity they needed. But his response disarmed them. First he ignored their anger, by turning away and drawing in the sand, waiting maybe for the angry clamour to stop. And then He changed the whole situation by speaking directly to the hearts of everyone present. He did not deny the woman's sin, or ignore the call for punishment. But this challenge spoke volumes: only those without sin had the right to throw the first stone. Then He turned back to the sand and allowed everyone to search their conscience alone. In that quiet, not one person could live up to

the challenge. In his wonderful compassion Jesus had liberated the woman to live a life free from both condemnation and sin.

“Neither do I condemn you.” It was not the answer the crowd expected from Jesus. They probably already held stones in their hands ready to throw them at the prostitute but there was not a stone that would fit in Jesus’ hand. It was because Jesus looked at the troubled woman in the way that differed from the way the crowd did. His attitude was completely different. Jesus used his own criteria in dealing with human misery.

Therefore it was his first principle that only the man who is without any fault has the right to judge others’ mistakes and faults. But still, Jesus gives us a warning in the Gospel of Matthew (7:1) “Judge not, that you be not judged.” He knows that each one of us struggles with our own problems, weaknesses; there is no one free from making mistakes in this life. But so many of us are so eager to judge and set very high standards for others, while we ourselves never, or hardly, try to meet them in our own lives. Most of us would condemn faults in others but excuse or justify the same faults if it happened to be our own reality. It is not knowledge that qualifies one to judge, for all of us know what is wrong and what is right; it is rather making use of this knowledge in day-to-day life in order to live a better life. To eliminate what separates one from God and others so that one could experience and achieve greater peace and true freedom - this is a lifelong ongoing process and none of us is perfect there. Hence it is only God who has the full right to judge; we ourselves are not good enough to claim the right to judge others.

Jesus teaches us also that our first feeling with regard to anyone who has made a mistake should be pity. When we go to the doctor we do not expect him to shout at us because we got sick but we want him to help us, to bring consolation, to heal our wounded part.

When we are confronted with someone who has made a mistake, our first emotion should not be that of the Old Testament, “Tooth for a tooth, eye for an eye” but compassion and love. Probably many of us have witnessed the so-called, “Mob Justice”. What was my attitude then to this, perhaps, a poor and powerless street boy, struggling to get something to eat? Did I ask myself, “What can I do to help him?”, or rather did I pick up a stone and was ready to throw it at him because he stole some little money for his survival? Did I try to see in him a human being, a person like me? Did I try to look at him in a way that Jesus would? We should never forget that we must always extend to others the same compassionate pity we would like to get from others when we find ourselves in trouble.

While stressing Jesus’ attitude towards sinners, we should not get the wrong impression that for Jesus sin does not matter and therefore we can do whatever we want in our lives, even if it is wrong and immoral.

There are number of things involved in Jesus’ attitude to sinners. It always involves the second chance. As long as we are alive there is a possibility of change. Jesus did not say to the woman from today’s Gospel, “Do not worry; it is all right” he said, “Go and sin no more” which means, “Go and change your life. May your future be not like your past. I know that your life is right now in a mess, but your life is not finished yet. Go and prove that you want to sin no more, I will always be with you to help you to do better.” That was precisely the message Jesus addressed to the woman.

The great difference between us and Jesus is that we are primarily interested in what a person has been and done, while Jesus, being aware of the past events, always looks at the person from the point of view of what the person could be. It is not that our past, with all its sins and broken laws and hearts, does not matter. It does. It has its own influence and impact on our present life, but Jesus knows that every person has a future as well as a past.

Jesus' attitude to sinners involved also a challenge. "Go and sin no more" was a challenge for the woman to replace her sinful life with a sinless one. Jesus did not say to the woman, "It is O.K. Do not worry. Other people are even worse than you are, so just go on with your life." It was not an easy forgiveness. It was a challenge for the woman to realize her dignity and turn from evil to good. The more one is involved in evil things, the more Jesus insists and points out the good that can be achieved by one who reads the signs given by Jesus, reflects upon them and makes use of them for one's personal conversion and liberation from sin. The biggest pity is when one achieves such a state in one's life where one is deaf and blind to any challenge.

Jesus' attitude to sinners shows a strong belief in human nature. When Jesus said to the woman, "Go, and sin no more;" he believed that this woman, with his help, could change from a great sinner to a great saint. Jesus knows human nature, therefore he did not say to the woman, "You are a miserable creature. Human garbage that puts me off." That was not the way Jesus treated sinners. He would not achieve anything with the method of humiliating and blasting people with the knowledge that they were miserable sinners. Jesus shows us rather the things we are not aware of. Instead of pointing out our misery, He inspire us with the great discovery that each one of us is a potential saint.

Jesus' attitude to sinners involves also a warning. When he said to the woman, "Go, and sin no more;" he invited her to a new life. But the choice still must have been made by the woman; either to go back to her old ways or to begin the new way proposed by Jesus. The invitation of Jesus implied a warning, in the sense that whatever choice she made, she had to be aware of the consequences of her choice.

Jesus forgave the adulterous woman. He touched her deeply. She went forth a new creation because of her personal encounter with Jesus. She met him person to person, heart to heart and that was the greatest power and meaning of this meeting. The story of the adulterous woman from today's gospel illustrates the purpose of Lent. The woman

was living a life that was going in the wrong direction, but she encountered the forgiving Jesus who transformed her by that meeting.

How can we respond to this story? We need to remember that we also are sinners, dependent on the grace of God for our redemption and freedom. We should look therefore at other sinners, not with harsh judgment, but with the mercy and love Jesus shows us. We have a wonderful opportunity to proclaim to anyone caught in sin, and to those who condemn them, that Jesus does not wish to condemn anybody, but enables us all - accused and accusers - to leave our life of sin and to have a new life in Him. Jesus does not call for condemnation but for repentance.

“Lord, you forgive my sin and enable me to live a new life in you. Fill me with mercy and compassion for people whose sins are exposed to public judgment. Help me to uphold such people with love. May they come to see that you do not condemn them but free them from sin.”

## PASSION SUNDAY

(Is.50:4-7 / Phil.2:6-11 / Lk. 22:14-23:56)

Today we begin the week called Holy Week - the week in which Christ died and rose. He died because of sin. Sin brought suffering and death to the Son of God and it continues to bring sufferings and death to the children of God. There is a lot of suffering in the world today and surely in the life of each one of us. Suffering is what people fear most. Christ showed us we should accept them freely and out of love. Sacrifice and suffering are useless if they are not related to love. It was not Christ's sufferings that saved the World but it was his love. It is not suffering that redeems us and the world, but love. Sufferings give the opportunity to learn compassion but many of us waste this opportunity. Self-pity is the first and accepted reaction to suffering. Self-pity robs us of the benefit of our suffering, takes away from us courage and destroys our capacity to love.

Love can cause the greatest pain of all but it can also cause the greatest joy of all. Love needs to be shared, because it is a mutual exchange of gifts. It was illustrated and expressed throughout Jesus' ministry and especially highlighted in a meal as an occasion of fellowship and forgiveness. Jesus offered table-fellowship to outcasts and sinners. In the context of the meal Jesus brought sinners to righteousness, to discovery of God's love and an understanding of their worth before God.

At the end, Jesus expresses a desire to share the Passover meal with his chosen few apostles. In sharing the cup, the apostles share in the fellowship which Jesus offers them; but how much they are aware of what that fellowship involves will be shown soon, "A dispute arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest". Jesus replies: "The greatest among you must become the youngest, and the leader one who serves". Jesus rebukes his apostles for wrong understanding of things, which reflects the way of the world, not the way of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus admits that the wisdom of the world recognizes the one seated at table to be greater than the one who serves; but he asks his apostles to notice the reversal of that in his own life. He is the greatest in their company, yet he comes among them as the one who serves. In their wisdom they should not do less and this should be the model of true discipleship for them. Now, which kind of disciples are we? We, as leaders and catechists, which type of leadership do we follow, the dictator who wants all people to serve him or the model of Servant leader who shows concern and care for others ?

Where do we fit ?

Jesus points to the significance of the bread and wine and interprets them in the light of his death. Focusing on them, Jesus is focusing on himself. He speaks about them in a sacrificial sense; the bread is his body, the wine is his blood and both will be offered for others as a gift. Thus offering table-fellowship to his apostles, Jesus is not asking them to share in his absurd mission which has collapsed in his Death, but continues even after. Jesus sees a purpose in his mission, which his death does not negate but somehow confirms. Jesus did not die by a natural death: he was put to death precisely because of his mission, his message, his priorities, his values, his claims. Jesus' death is the price he has to pay for the kind of life he led and he accepts his death willing and freely.

Jesus is telling his disciples : "Do this in remembrance of me", not by celebrating the Passover, but by recalling his interpretation of these events in this kind of meal. Jesus' sufferings and death have redeeming meaning and value. He dies for others out of love.

World history tells us that already so many people have been born into this earth, some of them died because of old age, others because of a particular suffering or sickness, including AIDS, some died in a natural calamity( floods - El Nino in Kenya), some died

from tribal clashes ( Lakipia, Njoro), some died in road accidents and others died willingly and freely giving their own lives for others.

The evident example of this heroic type of love was St. Maximilian Kolbe, from Poland, who was a Franciscan Friar. During the Second World War he was taken to the concentration camp and persecuted there like so many other Poles and Jews. One morning, the security men brought 10 people who were to be executed in the presence of the prisoners. Among them was a father of 6 children who shouted loudly : “Please don’t kill me, I have a wife and 6 children and I have to take care of them”. When Maximilian Kolbe heard this, he came forward and asked the man in charge of the execution to kill him instead of the father of 6 children. Jesus says, “There is no greater love then to give one’s life for others”. Kolbe died like Jesus, willingly and freely out of love for others. What about us ?

After the meal Jesus and his disciples went to the Mount of Olives to pray. When they arrived at their destination, Jesus encouraged his disciples to pray in order not to be lost in the coming trials which they had to face : “Pray that you may not enter into temptation”. Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed : “Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine be done”. Jesus has just implored his own disciples to pray, and now he implores his own Father to remove from him the cup of grief and agony, but if it is really needed, if it is the will of his Father, he is willing to take part in this great drama of human sin and God’s love. The man who rises from prayer is different from the man who knelt in prayer : between the kneeling and the rising, there is the resolution to accept the future as the will of the Father.

Jesus suffered the pain of being let down by friends, of being betrayed by Judas, of being tempted in the Garden, of being left alone in agony; he suffered the pain of being arrested and tested, of being falsely accused by the Pharisees and beaten by soldiers.

Finally, he took upon himself the shame of dying as a common criminal. What would you say, where was God that time when Jesus, his only Son, was undergoing all this suffering? God was suffering with him in him in order to make his love more visible more acceptable to all people.

The disciples of Jesus, his friends, followed their Master - the powerful miracle-worker - wherever he was going or in everything he was doing. They followed him when everything was going well, smoothly and for their advantage. Once their Master was in trouble, they all disappeared, including Peter, the future head of the Church, and hid themselves in a secure place.

Judas was a disciple of Jesus who betrayed and sold his master. The pain of the betrayal was so great, his faith was so small, that he failed to see God's forgiveness and mercy. He committed suicide because he did not see a way out. In human history there have been so many Judases, who betrayed and sold Jesus for a little money, for a few shillings, for a good position in the parliament or society and a good name. Some of them finished like Judas, because they failed to see God as a loving Father who is waiting for them in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and they decided to kill themselves, whereas others realized their mistake, admitted their fault and gained God's forgiveness.

Thomas is an example of one who shows disbelief in his master, Jesus, in the beginning, but after encountering him, having experience of him, he professes his faith in him.

We too very often show disbelief at the beginning of our Christian journey, and then, after encountering Jesus in a concrete situation or event, we profess our faith in him and admit our belonging to him.

I would think that the story of the disciples' life goes on and on and all of us have got the experience of each disciple. How many times have we denied Jesus by our words

and deeds as Peter did ? How many times have we cried bitterly for what we have done to our close friends, as Peter did for his friend Jesus ? In this way we can go on and on to mention all the names of the other apostles and find ourselves in their stories.

## CONCLUSION

Before we can attempt to interpret the Word of God, we must know the basic theological elements of the particular passages of the Bible. Any commentary on Scripture may aim either to present the historicity of the events and teaching recorded, or it may aim at exposition - making clear the religious message which the writers wished to convey to their readers through their narratives.

However, apart from the theological knowledge the minister of the Word is expected to expose his or her natural ability and talents to make this message very relevant. From afar, preaching may seem to be something simple and easy. But that is often an illusion.

The homily is one of the important ways through which God speaks and remains present among us. He is indeed with us every day through the Church. However, God wants to speak to us and he does it through the Bible and his ministers.

After having written these homilies I can say that a good homily is not easy to write, if it is to be taken seriously. It may seem that the knowledge of the theological elements are enough to build up the homily. Of course they are important, but apart from that, the minister should develop and learn different methods of conveying the message. To do this his natural gifts and talent will be very helpful. Also in order to make the homily relevant and have a living impact on Christians, it requires of a minister the knowledge of the people to whom it will be addressed. Above all, personal prayer should be a source of each homily.