

DIDACHE

DAILY BIBLE REFLECTIONS FOR CATHOLICS



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didache

Daily Bible Reflections for Catholics



SHEPHERD'S VOICE

didache

Daily Bible Reflections for Catholics

DIDACHE (dee-da-ke), the Greek word for teaching, is a Catholic daily Bible reflection guide published annually. It wishes to encourage the use of Sacred Scriptures among Catholics. It also wishes to reach the entire Christian people.

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SHEPHERD'S VOICE

Inspiring You to Live a Fantastic Life!

MAKE YOUR DAY!

Ella (not her real name) was hesitant to go to a family reunion. She didn't want to see a relative who had offended her. But in the morning of the reunion, Ella read her copy of *Didache* during her prayer time and read the reflection for the day. By coincidence — or divine design — the reflection was about the writer's struggle to forgive a relative who had wronged her, and how she was able to forgive when she heard one of my talks on forgiveness.

"Wow," Ella exclaimed, "I felt God was talking to me through *Didache!*"

She attended the reunion and found a way to reconcile with her relative.

Ella's story is among the many that I hear on how *Didache's* daily reflections have spoken to readers directly about a situation they face.



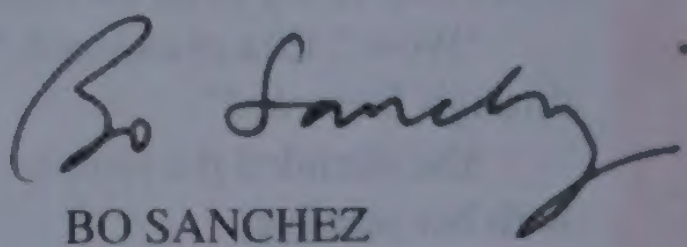
Their stories no longer surprise me. While we *Didache* writers are ordinary people who sin and fail, the Holy Spirit uses us to communicate His message for you today, at this time of your life. God's Word may have been written ages ago but it's always timely. Isaiah 55:11-12 says:

Just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to the one who sows and bread

to the one who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but shall do what pleases me, achieving the end for which I sent it.

So don't go through the day without first reading your *Didache*. The Bible passage, reflection or prayer might be just what God wants you to keep in mind to make your day.

May your dreams come true,



BO SANCHEZ

P.S. Most *Didache* writers attend The Feast, the weekly prayer gathering of the Light of Jesus Family, which is held in key areas in Metro Manila, the Visayas and Mindanao, and in some cities abroad. The Feast is the happiest place on earth so if you haven't attended one, you don't know what you're missing. Log on to **www.BoSanchez.ph** for details about The Feast and our other ministries. You can also sign up for my *Soulfood* Letter each week. Just leave your name and email address at **www.BoSanchez.ph** and receive inspiration every week.

Numbers 6:22-27 • Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8
Galatians 4:4-7 • Luke 2:16-21

THE POWER OF WORDS

The Lord bless you and keep you! — Numbers 6:24

Two altar boys lived in two different cities, serving in two different churches, but both of them wanted to become priests. Both of them had the exact same experience.

One altar boy was late for Mass. Because he was in a hurry to do everything he needed to do, he accidentally hit the chalice that contained the wine.

After the Mass, the priest called the boy and shouted, "Get out of here! You'll never serve as an altar boy again!"

At another church, the other altar boy was also late for Mass. And he, too, hit the chalice that contained the wine, pouring it onto the red carpet. After the Mass, the priest, who happened to be a bishop, called the altar boy and said, "Hey, everybody makes mistakes. I'm clumsy, too. And you know what? Maybe you'll become a priest, too," and he chuckled.

Thirty years later, the second altar boy became Archbishop Fulton Sheen, one of the most loved religious leaders in America. And the other altar boy? He became Joseph Tito, an atheist and the ruthless dictator of Yugoslavia.

Words are powerful. They can heal or bless. They can encourage or destroy. This year, start the habit of blessing others with your words and be blessed, too. For what you give, you receive. *Bo Sanchez (bosanchez@kerygmafamily.com)*

Reflection: Do your words bless others or destroy them?

Bless my thoughts, Lord, that I may speak only words that bless, not destroy, others.

1 John 2:22-28 • Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4
John 1:19-28

'KAP'

"I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" – John 1:23

The project manager disappeared from the crowd during the inauguration of the new distribution center. He had been summoned by "Kap."

When he returned, I quizzed him, "Who is Kap? What did he want?" After some prodding, he disclosed that Kap, a nickname for the local government official, was soliciting P20,000 for the event. This was on top of the P100,000 he wanted for a business clearance.

I was appalled! I asked if he was able to record their conversations with his mobile phone or had anything we could pass on to a TV show that could expose this corruption and hopefully stop it. It was so naïve of me to even ask. Nobody dares strain ties with local officials and make it even more difficult to do business than it already is.

We all whine about the lousy system but very few of us are willing to take a stand. We clamor for change but we don't want to take the responsibility that goes with it. Most of the time, we are fence sitters passively watching our core values get eroded. May God grant us the grace to get out of our comfort zones and raise our voices against the "Kaps."

Marie Franco (mariefranco_pie@yahoo.com)

Reflection: Each of us may be sure that if God sends us on stony paths, He will provide us with strong shoes, and He will not send us out on any journey for which He does not equip us well. (McClaren)

Lord, give us the courage to speak up and stand up in Your Name.

1 John 2:29-3:6 • Psalm 98:1, 3-4, 5-6
John 1:29-34

WHOSE CHILD ARE YOU?

Beloved, we are God's children now... – 1 John 3:2

For a long time, I had repressed my temper because I saw its negative effect in my family's history. But age has a way of making one more accepting of oneself. So a time came when, instead of reining in my temper, I let it go. It was liberating for a time but it was tiring too, not to mention the hurt I caused others. I found myself praying, "Lord, please give me the grace to control my temper. I can't do it on my own."

God did, in the way He knows how. I'm a regular Bible reader and His Word is important to me. One day, as I was reading my Bible, the words "Blessed are the peacemakers for they are called children of God" leapt out of the page. *If peacemakers are called children of God, then what do you call those who cause quarrel and conflict?* I thought. *Oh no! Children of... oh no!*

I prayed, "Lord, help me to control my temper from now on. I don't want to be anyone else's child but Yours."

Our life must reflect our belief if we are to be truly called children of God. I had to face that truth on that day and I continue to do so with the choices I make every day.

Joy Sosoban (jsosoban@gmail.com)

Reflection: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Dearest Jesus, I find my strength in You. Help me to live out my faith.

THE GRACE OF OOPS!

In this way, the children of God and the children of the Devil are made plain; no one who fails to act in righteousness belongs to God, nor anyone who does not love his brother. – 1 John 3:10

Driving to work one morning, a brother from my community was so uplifted by a praise song, he sang along in worship. Suddenly another car cut into his lane. Jolted by the near accident, he stuck his head out the window and shouted at the careless driver, "Idiot!" Oops!

Another member is a mother with grown-up children. Like any mother, she is pained when her children are wronged. One incident drove her to scream and curse at a person who had caused her son grief. Her son asked, "Shouldn't you be able to forgive this person since you belong to a religious community? If I can forgive the one who hurt me, why can't you?" Oops!

Both these people shared that they immediately realized that what they did was wrong.

Belonging to a Charismatic community doesn't mean we've become fault-proof. It only means that we are a work in progress, walking on the path to righteousness with God's grace.

Because we are His children, God helps us up, dusts us off and points us in the right direction when we say, "Oops!"

Lella M. Santiago (mirellasantiago@yahoo.com)

Reflection: Have you slipped up? Did you realize your mistake? Remember, it's never too late to correct it.

Merciful Father, forgive us our sins and lead us onto the path of righteousness.

OBEY NOW, ASK LATER

Jesus decided to go to Galilee, and he found Philip. And Jesus said to him, "Follow me." – John 1:43

"Where are we going today? How will we go there? Are we taking a taxi or riding the bus or walking?"

I paused as my eight-year-old son Jason asked me these questions. He stared at me, waiting for my reply. We were on vacation and I noticed how much he had changed since our last holiday two years ago. Before, he would just hold my hand and tag along wherever we went. Now, he never seemed to run out of questions before we went somewhere. It was as if he needed to know everything we had planned out for each day.

I tried my best to answer all his questions. There were times when I got impatient and replied, "Just follow me. Ask questions later and I promise you a great time."

Sometimes in our Christian life, we also have a lot of questions. "Why do I have to serve in the Church? Why can't I bribe the traffic officer when most people do it anyway? Why do I have to pay my taxes honestly when a portion of my payment will just go to corruption?"

In today's Scripture reading, Jesus encourages us to simply follow Him. He came so that we may have life to the fullest. Let us follow His teachings faithfully with no questions asked. *Alvin Fabella (alvinfabella@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: We may never be able to understand fully the methods or motives of God; but we are not required to understand them, simply to trust them. (Woodrow Kroll)

Lord, teach me to obey You, especially during the times when I don't understand.

Isaiah 60:1-6 • Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6 • Matthew 2:1-12

A DIFFERENT KIND OF CONCERT

They all gather and come to you. Your sons come from afar.
– Isaiah 60:4

It couldn't have been any better: a dark sky, amazing fireworks, a canopy of stars overhead and thousands of people standing within inches of each other in a wide open field. It was the presence of warm-blooded individuals that actually made the difference, and what made the entire night most memorable.

This wasn't a concert or a pyrotechnic competition. It was God's presence manifested at the Kerygma Conference Grand Feast 2011.

Throughout the event, there were moments when I just found myself marveling at the sight of God's people coming together and praising in unison. I imagined God smiling from ear to ear, pleased at seeing His children.

As I looked around, I told myself that these are thousands of people who may have failures and ongoing difficulties, who may have broken hearts and broken relationships, and who may still have unfulfilled dreams and unanswered prayers. But they are also thousands of people who still choose to praise God in the midst of the trials they face.

Such thoughts compelled me to remain an avid fan, a loyal follower and a firm believer of the God of the universe, my loving Father. *Osy Erica (osy.erica@gmail.com)*

Reflection: If you can shout, dance and sing at the top of your lungs for your favorite artist, how can you not do the same for your God?

Lord, You are the Greatest Artist. Yours is a work of unconditional love and compassion. Instill in me the heart of a loyal follower.

1 John 3:22-4:6 • Psalm 2:7-8, 10-11
Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25

TRUE OR FALSE

Beloved, do not trust every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. — 1 John 4:1

Three fully made-up and identically dressed contestants enter the stage. A male celebrity guest will try to guess who the real girl is among the three. If he guesses correctly, he wins the cash prize; if not, the prize goes to the contestant whom he thought was a girl. The three contestants employ different tactics to deceive the celebrity. They change their voices, act and walk in a weird manner, and give silly answers to serious questions. This surely gives the celebrity a big headache. There are times when the celebrity-guesser picks the wrong contestant.

"Our world is filled with voices claiming to speak for God," a Bible commentary says. We may be deceived by the eloquence of their words, not noticing that their lives speak of a different gospel. St. John reminds us to "test the spirits to see whether they belong to God." Do they walk their talk? What are the fruits of their ministry? Do they point towards God and not to themselves? Is the message they proclaim consistent with Jesus' teachings? Be vigilant and see if they pass the test. *Judith Concepcion (svp_jmc@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Do you accept everything that you hear or see as absolute truth? Be discerning lest it lead you into a trap.

Lord, grant me a discerning spirit that I may not be led astray.

THE GENOGRAM

Everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God.
– 1 John 4:7

In marriage preparation or in marital counseling, one of the tools used to help the couple know one another better and heal family relationships is the genogram. They are asked to draw their family tree, which includes not just the names and dates of birth and death, but also detailed information about relationships, traits, illnesses, achievements, disorders and significant life patterns.

Knowing these would help each partner know where the other is coming from, cut trans-generational negative patterns that could affect their union, and many other benefits.

When I did mine as a course requirement for the Pastoral Counseling course I took at the Center for Family Ministries, I noted how I took after both my father and mother in terms of talents. I got from my father my analytical mind and my love for writing. From my mother, I got her heart — her compassion, her strength of spirit and quiet countenance.

Now I wonder, if we put God at the topmost of our family genogram, what traits would we discover that we inherited from Him? After all, He created us all in His image and likeness. *Tess V. Atienza (svp_tvatienza@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What traits did you inherit from your ancestors? Are they godly traits?

Dear Father, thank You for creating me in Your image and likeness. Help me to become more like You each day of my life.

HYPOCHONDRIA

There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.
– 1 John 4:18

"Look at my eyes," commanded Tommy, my boyfriend then. "Do you think they're puffy?" He was in third year medical school, reading tons of books about every disease known to man.

I studied his eyelids and commented that they did look a bit puffy. He shouted, "Oh my God! I have kidney disease!"

Call me cruel but I ended up laughing in his face. I thought he was being ridiculous until I found out that all medical students undergo similar hypochondriac tendencies. Apparently, absorbing too much information about diseases makes you more fearful of being sick.

I find the opposite to be true when I learn more about God. The more I understand His love for me, the less I fear loneliness, suffering, sickness or even death. There are just too many good things to focus on, which makes the bad things seem trivial in comparison.

Absolute forgiveness of all sins, abounding graces, unconditional love, life everlasting and His unrelenting faithfulness — what is there to be afraid of when you have all these things and more? *Cecil Lim (cez_lim@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Is fear getting ahead of you? Look up to Jesus. He will calm the most violent storms for you. His love will see you through.

Protect us from all anxiety as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

DONE DEAL

For whoever is begotten by God conquers the world. And the victory that conquers the world is our faith. – 1 John 5:4

"Don't worry, it's a done deal," my friend assured me when I followed up on my sales proposal for their company. I was young and inexperienced in sales and my friend volunteered to help me. I wasn't sure if it was my lack of self-confidence or the lack of trust in my friend's ability and convincing power that made me doubtful if we could really close the deal. So I was surprised when he handed me the signed sales contract.

"You really didn't think I could help you close this deal, did you?" he asked. I shook my head, embarrassed. He just smiled and said, "I wish you'd have a little faith in me."

I wonder how many times God must have said the same thing to us. Oftentimes, when we are in trouble, we pray not really to seek for guidance but to ask why we have to struggle and suffer. We tend to be easily defeated by doubts and fears that we fail to realize that He has already won the battle over evil and has claimed victory for us. This means that nothing can defeat us if we hold on tight to God. However great our problem is, no matter how difficult things may seem, God has promised to help us get through it. We just have to have faith in His power and claim our victory. It's a done deal. *Jane Gonzales-Rauch (mgr516@gmail.com)*

Reflection: There is no struggle greater than God's power to help us overcome them.

Lord, as I strengthen my faith, may I also strengthen my confidence in Your saving grace. Amen.

CHOOSE TO BE HEALTHY

Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I do will it. Be made clean." – Luke 5:13

In December 2011, I had the privilege of interviewing people who were healed through natural and alternative healing methods. Many of them simply changed their eating habits — from an "eat anything" diet to a plant-based one.

One was a pancreatic cancer survivor who drinks guyabano tea as her water. Another one drinks pure, fresh calamansi extract every morning as his maintenance for a stronger immune system. From near-death, most of them are now enjoying their second lives.

But what I realized from their stories is that our health is in our hands — not in the doctors'.

We can choose to be healthy or unhealthy, depending on what we put into our bodies. And this is what I am guilty of. Although I try to eat less meat and more fish and fruits, I still do eat a lot of sweets and chips, and drink soda.

But as the Lord said to the leper in the Scripture passage today, "Be made clean," I believe that, with God's grace, I can make a turnaround.

So for this year, I promise to myself and to the Lord that I will nourish myself only with healthy food, not only physically but also spiritually, emotionally and mentally.

Tess V. Atienza (svp_tvatienza@yahoo.com)

Reflection: What do you want to be healed of? Ask the Lord to heal you.

Lord, I present to You my unclean self. Make me clean again

CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER

We have this confidence in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. — 1 John 5:14

As I write this reflection, my family is waking up to a brand new day in a brand new house. We just moved in yesterday to the home we had been praying for.

For many years, we had been asking God for a house of our own. Three years ago, the Lord blessed us with a 300-square-meter lot. We had dreamt of a big house built on it. We had imagined how it would look as we visited many interior design galleries.

But God had the best plan. Early last year, someone bought the lot from us at a profit of over P1 million.

In exchange, we were able to buy an old house and lot in cash, which we have fully renovated and furnished.

It is God's will for us to live an abundant life. His Word is clear in John 10:10 — "I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance."

That's why when we asked for this house, we asked for something our own pockets couldn't afford. We claimed the life of abundance He had promised.

Now it has come to pass! Alleluia! *Danny Tariman (dtariman.loj@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Are your prayers in accordance to His will?

Lord, thank you for you word. Give me the courage to bring all my needs and desires to my Father in Jesus' name.

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7 (or Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11)
Psalm 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10 (or Psalm 104:1-2, 3-4, 24-25, 27-28, 29-30)
Acts 10:34-38 (or Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7) • **Luke 3:15-16, 21-22** (or Luke 3:15-16)

A TEXT MESSAGE... FROM JESUS

The people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ. – Luke 3:15

When I started working on my *Didache* assignments, my computer went haywire. The PC clinic near our place was already closed. There was no way I could have the computer repaired. "God, help!" I moaned.

Just then, somebody knocked on our door. It was Mon, our neighbor. He told my husband, Ed, "I was on my way home, so I just dropped by to answer your text message."

"Text? I didn't text you," Ed said, knitting his brows together.

"Here," Mon said, showing his phone to Ed, "there's a message here from *Ed*. That's not you?"

"I don't need anything from you, really," Ed said, still puzzled.

"I do!" I said, jumping out of my seat.

Mon happens to be a computer expert. In a jiffy, he solved my problem! But neither he nor we could solve the text puzzle.

In today's Gospel, the people during John the Baptist's time were puzzled, too — about who the Savior really was. But now we know it's Jesus. And I'm sure He's also the one who saved my computer just when it needed fixing. *Cynthia U. Santiago (cusantiago@gmail.com)*

Reflection: God is never late. His answers always come on time.

Lord, I have no doubt that You know my needs even before I realize I have them.

A SMALL YES

"Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men."
– Mark 1:17

I heard this call way back in 1980 and with God's grace, I said, "Yes, Lord." In more than 30 years, I do testify that Jesus was able to "fish men" through me in various ways — in my counseling, my writings and reflections, and in the various ministries I embarked on, especially in my parish ministry as coordinator of the BEC (Basic Ecclesial Communities).

Our zone leaders here are simple folk and some did not even finish secondary education. But the Lord used their *yes* to serve as leaders in building BECs to "fish men" in the parish areas. There are those who were unchurched before but are now potential area leaders. Their weekly Bible sharing sessions give Jesus a chance to speak to them, direct them and mold them as Christians. Some of them have already whispered a *yes* to the Lord, too.

My life has taught me that our small *yes* to the Lord, faithfully lived, is all He needs to build His Church and fish men — the children whom He longs to be with forever. Our positive response consequently fishes other *yeses* for the Lord, bringing in more and more fishers of men for the Kingdom. *Cristy Galang (cristy_cc@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Listen to the Lord in prayer or through Scripture or in the silence of your heart. Whatever He tells you to do, say yes.

Lord, I want to say Yes to You. Help me to say Yes to You all the time. I surrender myself, Lord, that You may be able to use me for Your greater glory. Amen.

KNOWING GOD

"I know who you are — the Holy One of God!" – Mark 1:24

If you read the entire story in Mark 1:21-28 you would know that the one who proclaimed he knew Jesus as the Holy One of God was a demon, an unclean spirit.

Yes, even demons know who Jesus is. Yet, they continue to be demons.

Why? Because even though it's important to know God, it is not enough.

In one of my trips abroad, I once encountered someone who knew so many things about God, the Church and the Catholic faith. With much awe, I asked if he was a priest or a pastor. To my surprise, he said he was an atheist. He doesn't believe in God despite his vast knowledge about Him.

On the other end of the pendulum are many people who do believe in God yet do not obey or follow Him.

If you truly know God, then you will love Him, and serve Him by obeying, above all, His commandment of love.

Otherwise, you'd be no better than the demon who proclaimed Jesus yet remained as he was. *Alvin Barcelona (apb_ayo@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Does your knowledge of God lead you to love Him and others more? Love someone today and prove that you really know God.

Dear Jesus, by Your grace, let me know You more, love You more and serve You more. Amen.

FIRST

Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed. – Mark 1:35

It was a day of many firsts. The first work day of the year, the first day of work for our participants and their first time to work. It was the first time that I was in charge of that training, my first time to see it run.

I admit that I was nervous and wanted to do well. There were a lot of things that could go wrong, a lot of things to check. I had assigned tasks for each team member and they knew what to do. I was tempted to take over. Yet I knew I had to do something more important first. I'd been in similar situations before when I chose to veer away from my routine — my prayer time. So I prayed.

After my quiet time with the Lord, we went about our work. Everything went fine. There were a few kinks here and there, and we could definitely improve on many things. Yet, we were grateful that our first training run went smoothly. I had a sense of peace and tranquility since I had prayed earlier.

Prayer settles. Prayer calms.

For me, it's also prayer first. *Jun Asis (mabuting.balita@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Is prayer a priority in your life?

Lord, grant me the grace to prioritize my prayer time that I may always listen and draw life from You.

HARDEN NOT YOUR HEARTS

If today you would hear his voice, harden not your hearts.
– Hebrew 3:7-8

Five years ago I heard the voice of the Lord calling me to serve in our community. The council asked me to discern if I really wanted to take the position as one of the leaders. Hesitation filled me as I discerned. Questions like, "Am I capable? Am I worthy of that position?" besieged me like waves testing my boat of faith.

Almost a month had passed when I finally came to a decision — I passed my letter of intent to the coordinator. I said yes to the Lord.

Looking back, it's a good thing I listened to His call. During my years of service, He revealed His plans to me. I expanded my territories, enhanced my speaking skills and created new relationships.

Maybe God is asking you to make a decision right now. Or maybe you are being pushed beyond your comfort zone. Your mind is uncertain, doubtful if you can do it. But, friend, if the Lord calls you to do something, trust Him with your all. "If today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts."

Jan Carlo Silan (jan@makatifeast.com)

Reflection: God calls every single one of us to do His will. Have you freely opened your heart and soul to His voice?

Lord, grant me the courage to say yes to Your call and the faith to strongly believe that You are with me every step of the way. Amen.

HEALING POWER OF FORGIVENESS

"Which is easier to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, pick up your mat and walk'?" – Mark 2:9

My two-year-old daughter was tumbling about on her bed when her forehead hit a corner of the bed frame. Blood quickly oozed from the gaping wound. I tried to stop the bleeding but an hour after bandaging her wound, it looked like it was still oozing. Worried that her wound might not heal properly, I took her to the emergency room.

I was amazed at how quickly she healed. When they removed the bandage I had applied a couple of hours earlier, her gaping wound looked like a tiny cut! No stitches needed.

More than my children's ability to heal quickly, I'm even more amazed at how fast they can forgive and forget. I watch my two-year-old get clobbered by her older sister and, like a cat and a dog, they get into a brawl. They kick, bite and scream at each other, but a few minutes later, they're back to being the best of friends.

Many of us lose that childlike quality to easily forgive as we grow older. No wonder Jesus asked the question in the passage above. It was as if He was saying that it is easier to perform a miracle by making the lame walk than to forgive. What we don't realize is that when we forgive, we heal quickly as well. *Rissa Singson-Kawpeng (justbreatherissa@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Resentments hurt you, not them. Always forgive people, even if they never ask for your forgiveness. Don't do it for them – do it for you. (www.marcandangel.com)

Lord, make me a person who is quick to forgive.

SPECIAL

"Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners." – Mark 2:17

A family gathered every Sunday evening for dinner. Apart from a gourmet meal, special care was given to the table setting. Bone china plates, crystal goblets, linen napkins and silver flatware were carefully arranged on the table. Because dinner with loved ones should always be special.

One Sunday, however, Grandmother discovered some old plates on a shelf as she rummaged for a gravy server. One was stained, another was chipped at the edge, while one was scratched. With a knowing smile, Grandmother cleaned the dishes and set them at the dinner table. One of the children asked why the old plates were being used. Grandmother explained, "Those plates reminded me of good memories during the time I had used them. They may be old and worn out but they'll always be special."

Like the old plates, we may be battered and worn out by our sinfulness but we remain precious in Jesus' eyes. It is sinners like us that He calls to share in His mission to build God's kingdom and invites to the eternal banquet that awaits us in heaven. *Dina Pecaña (dpecana@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Do you know how special you are to Jesus?

Lord Jesus, grant me the grace to see myself through Your loving eyes that I may come to know how precious I am to You. Amen.

Isaiah 9:1-6 • Psalm 98: 1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6
Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18 • **Luke 2:41-52**

FINDING PURPOSE AND PEACE

And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" – Luke 2:49

In 2006, my older brother vanished without any warning or explanation. We had an inkling that stress from his corporate life was the cause. For many months, we searched for him but to no avail. Every so often, we would hear sightings of him from friends of friends, as if he were a Sasquatch or an extraterrestrial. It wasn't until two years later that he reemerged. Looking disheveled and detached, he told us of his adventures in Mindanao and how he managed to find his place and purpose in this world.

My brother's face, once chiseled with undefined sadness, is now a picture of peace and happiness. He founded a movement that has evolved into an open community that seeks to heal Mother Earth by opening one's conscious connection with the world. He has found his calling.

Mary and Joseph were frantic because they couldn't find Jesus. When they finally found him at the Temple, He was so calm and at peace that He even questioned why His parents were distressed. No need for them to worry because He was in His Father's house fulfilling His purpose.

When we find our purpose, it's like being in our Father's house where we are safe at all times. *Audee Villaraza (avillaraza@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Today, pray that God may reveal His purpose and plan for your life and that you surrender your life to His will.

[illegible] keep me safe as I journey towards finding my purpose

PRAY, FORGIVE AND BLESS

He is able to deal patiently with the ignorant and erring, for he himself is beset by weakness. – Hebrews 5:2

I often share that one of the litmus tests of being a true Christian is when we pray, forgive and bless our enemies.

The Lord challenged my words a few years ago — if indeed I would walk my talk. Some people were trying to destroy my integrity and I struggled with being patient with them. It was painful to see them seemingly winning in their erring ways and glorifying in their perceived triumph.

I realized later on that I was going through a learning experience, a test. God was reminding me that if I claim to be not just an ambassador for my country but also for God, then I should make sure I am worthy, especially of the latter title or responsibility. He showed me that I was indirectly contributing to the situation I was in through my own mistakes and weaknesses. He validated His message through the readings in the Bible and other daily devotionals.

That made me forgive and bless my detractors but not to trust them. God was reiterating that in this world, we should indeed be wise as serpents but gentle as doves. *Grace Princesa (grprincesa@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Patience is concentrated strength, not weakness. It is easier to give in to anger than to choose to love.

"Make me a channel of your peace. Where there is hatred let me bring Your love. Where there is injury, Your pardon, Lord."

AN OVERLOAD OF GUILT

God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love you have demonstrated for his name by having served and continuing to serve the holy ones. – Hebrews 6:10

I could sense she was distraught just from her text message.

She told me her story as soon as we sat down. She was burdened by heavy personal problems and her spiritual disciplines, instead of being a source of refreshment, only served to weigh her down even more. Attending prayer meetings had become an obligation because she feared the judgment of others if she didn't show up. She kept a list of her debt to the Lord in the form of tithes she had not been able to turn over because of her financial woes. She felt that if she didn't continue with her spiritual obligations, the Lord would stop blessing her. But I knew she loved the Lord sincerely.

I felt sorry for her. She was carrying a load we were not meant to bear. She was weighed down by Pharisaism.

I assured her that our God was not a cosmic pot-bellied policeman ready to whack us with a club for every misdemeanor. Our God is the Prodigal Father in the Parable of the Lost Son. He is the One who runs to us with open arms and clothes us with His robe even if we have sinned.

Even if our own hearts make us feel guilty, God is infinitely greater than our hearts, and He knows everything (1 John 3:19-20). *Rissa Singson-Kawpeng (justbreatherissa@gmail.com)*

Reflection: There is nothing you can do that will make God love you less.

Lord, correct my image of You. Amen.

HAVE A SEAT

"Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?" – Mark 3:4

I saw a picture on Facebook that touched my heart. It had 179 comments and 2,083 shares, including mine. It was a photo of a guy waiting in a terminal with a woman, a very old man — probably his father — and their baggage.

So, what was so moving about it?

Without any chairs to sit on, the guy sacrificially squatted on the floor and let the old man sit on his lap as he secured him from falling by embracing him. It was not a comfortable position for the guy, but it gave relief to the old man as they waited for their ride.

The guy's good deed toward the old man is a good example of Jesus' compassion and love. Their picture brought hope and it inspired me to be kinder even through simple acts. I'm pretty sure those who liked and shared this FB post felt the same.

In spite of persecutions, Jesus healed people even on the Sabbath, giving comfort and love to those in need. He planted hope and inspiration in the hearts of people.

This 2013, don't let time, place, people or situations stop you from being Jesus to others. *Ma. Luisa De la Cruz (theessence_byluisa@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: How can you ease someone's suffering today?

Dear Jesus, unite my heart, mind and soul with You. Help me make my life a fragrant offering to the Father.

POWER IN JESUS' NAME

Whenever unclean spirits saw him they would fall down before him and shout, "You are the Son of God." – Mark 3:11

I saw an interesting video that someone posted on my Facebook account. It was a robbery captured on video by a CCTV camera of a jewelry shop in the US.

A masked man entered a jewelry store and held up the store owner and a customer at gunpoint. Without even a hint of panic, the store owner firmly told the robber, "You get out of my store right now in the name of Jesus!" She spoke those words again firmly, commanding the masked man to obey her.

True enough, the robber was rattled and didn't know what to do. The lady's words made him back away and exit her store.

I was stunned with what I saw on the video. I even thought that what the store owner did was insane because she could have been shot. But I realized that she did the right thing at the right time. The name of Jesus held more firepower than the gun that was aimed at her. His name was more powerful than the evil spirit that caused the man to commit the crime. This woman stood her ground and allowed the power of God to take over. *Monty Mendigoria (montymendigoria@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13)

Jesus, I need Your protection from the hands of men. Let Your Mighty Name be my weapon in times of battle. Amen

Memorial of St. Francis de Sales, bishop and doctor of the Church

St. Francis de Sales, bishop and doctor of the Church, pray for us.

NOT NOW

"For you will be his witness before all to what you have seen and heard. Now, why delay?" – Acts 22:15-16

There's someone I know — let's call him Dax — whom I invited to join my former Catholic community. For a while, he gladly listened to the talks and even participated in the activities.

One day, Dax stopped attending. He reasoned that although he saw and believed that God changes lives, he wasn't ready for his own turnaround.

"I want to live the good life first," said Dax. "I'm not ready to be a saint."

Many people like Dax think that it's no fun to have God in their lives. They equate uprightness with boredom, and think that the so-called "good life" has more adventure. What they forget, however, is that no man lives forever, and that all of us may die at any time.

As God's witnesses, He calls us to be holy — to preach the Good News with our lives. It's tough, I know. But don't we always say that life is short? If it takes only a short lifetime to reach that state of holiness, then we better start the journey early. Why delay? *Nova Arias-Sevilla (nova.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Why choose to live the good life when you can have the best life in the company of God?

Lord God, grant me the courage to lead others to You... now.

2 Timothy 1:1-8 (or Titus 1:1-5) • Psalm 96:1-2, 2-3, 7-8, 10
Luke 10:1-9 (or Mark 3:20-21)

Memorial of Sts Timothy and Titus, bishops

Sts Timothy and Titus, bishops, pray for us.

THE MISSION

Appoint presbyters in every town as I directed you. – Titus 1:5

Several years ago, Bo Sanchez presented a vision to us preachers of the Light of Jesus Family. "We want to have a Feast within every five minutes of driving time." Wow. Honestly, I was slightly skeptical. Perhaps because I was such a big Bo Sanchez fan that I doubted if people would attend a gathering regularly unless Bo was the speaker.

I was wrong. So wrong. We grew from 4,500 weekly attendees to 10,000 weekly attendees in just one year. Why? Because Bo multiplied himself. He must've had the verse above in mind. We were each given a Feast to build in different places. He trusted and believed in us.

We, in turn, trusted and believed in our servants in the ministry. As of this writing, we have over 200 Feasts all over the world. Just less than 800 to go before reaching the goal of 1,000 Feasts worldwide.

But for me, the miracle is not just how many people are being blessed as attendees, but how many are being blessed as servants. Because of the mission, people are stepping up. People are volunteering. People are believing in themselves because the leaders believe in them.

In what way is God calling you to serve Him today? Will you respond positively? Remember, He believes in you, too.

George Tolentino Gabriel (george.svp@gmail.com)

Reflection: Ever think that you don't "qualify?" Jesus took 12 ordinary men to be on His first team.

Lord, use me today for Your glory.

Nehemiah 8:2-4, 5-6, 8-10 • Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 15
1 Corinthians 12:12-30 • Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. – 1 Corinthians 12:18

Do you know that the smallest bone in the body is no bigger than a grain of rice? It's called the stapes and it's one of the three tiny bones in the middle ear. It's so tiny, almost insignificant in size, but if anything happens to it, we lose our ability to hear clearly.

Sometimes we can also feel insignificant compared to those who have more important roles. Or maybe, if we're on the other end of the pendulum, we may feel that we are more indispensable than other people.

Each one of us has specific roles to play that are equally important in the grand scheme of life. Jesus was anointed by God for a special purpose. Although He was born in a stable and worked as a carpenter, who would have imagined that He was destined to be the Savior of mankind?

All of us have appointed parts to play in God's beautiful tapestry of life. It doesn't matter if you're onstage to be seen by all or at the backstage hidden from men's eyes. What's more important is — are you doing what you were anointed to do? *Ronna Ledesma (ronna_ledesma@yahoo.com.ph)*

Reflection: If you were called to play the part of Romeo and you instead memorized Juliet's lines, do you think the play will still turn out well?

Lord, use me, mold me, lead me, guide me — but first, please help me hear Your instructions correctly.

Memorial of St. Thomas Aquinas, priest and doctor of the Church

PARABLE OF THE GREAT DOCTOR

"But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an everlasting sin." – Mark 3:29

A mysterious incurable disease swept through an entire continent. Mankind was at the brink of extinction. The United Nations commissioned one great doctor who could make diagnoses by merely staring at the individual. He discovered the antidote serum. He went around telling people they were sick, then they'd come to him and they'd get well. But not everyone received him though. Some said, "No. I'm not sick. And I don't believe your good intentions. I think you were sent by this corrupt government to extort money from us, the poor!"

Was the disease incurable? Certainly not. But many still died because they wouldn't take the cure.

The Holy Spirit says, "You're sick," and points us to the Great Doctor, Jesus. But there are those who blaspheme against Him and say, "You are evil. I don't need anything from you!"

Is there an unforgivable sin? Certainly none! God can forgive all our sins! However, refusing the invitation of the Holy Spirit to receive God's forgiveness, my friend, is the only "unforgivable sin." *Jon Escoto (faithatworkjon@gmail.com)*

Reflection: What has the Holy Spirit been speaking to you about that you find hard to respond to?

Father, I am sorry for the times I've grieved Your Holy Spirit. Help me to attend to what He is saying to me. Help me to be docile to His promptings.

St. Thomas Aquinas, priest and doctor of the Church, pray for us.

THE ONLY WAY TO LIVE

"Whoever does the will of God..." – Mark 3:35

I applied for a position at a university in Baguio City. I knew I was qualified because of my college and master's degree. My vast experience in the academe also added to my confidence that I was going to be hired.

During my job interview, the personnel manager found out that I had a seizure disorder, an illness I've had since birth. I surmised that this was her basis for rejecting my application.

My world crumbled because I wanted the job badly. My wife and mother consoled me by saying that God's plans were better for sure. They said the job was most probably not meant for me. I chose to believe in what they said and entrusted everything to God.

Weeks later, I applied for a position in another university. I was hesitant at first because of my recent experience. But with a faith-filled heart, I gave them my resumé.

Guess what? I got the job! I'm happy at work and I get along well with my co-teachers and other work mates. The students are cooperative. My workload is light.

I learned from this experience that the only way to live is to give everything to God — to say a heartfelt yes to His divine will. *Dho Rimando (dougsterrimando@yahoo.com.ph)*

Reflection: Do you want to be happy? Say yes to the Lord always.

All to Jesus, I surrender. All to Him I freely give.

NO GRUDGES

I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds... Their sins and their evildoing I will remember no more.
– Hebrews 10:16-17

The children in my third grade Christian Living Education class will be receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time. Preparing them for the big day has been interesting and heartwarming.

Here are some things my students have asked over the course of our preparation: Is there any sin that God won't forgive? If someone commits a mortal sin, and years later decides he wants to be with God again, will God forgive him? What if someone commits a sin over and over, but then wants to be with God later on?

It's wonderful to be able to tell them what a loving and merciful God we have. I get teary-eyed when I share that, unlike us, He never holds grudges. He's always ready to forgive and forget. When I say these things to my eight-year-old students, smiles break out and eyes light up in awe. A bit of the nervousness that comes with First Confession melts away.

As adults, we sometimes forget what a happy occasion Confession really is. Remember, once we come to Him, no matter what we have done, He forgives us and remembers our sins no more. *Geraldine G. Catral (teachergeegee@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: When was the last time you went to a priest to confess your sins? Celebrate God's healing love today!

Lord, thank You for the Sacrament of Reconciliation that You make available to us. Through it, we receive Your healing grace.

LISTEN

"Anyone who has ears to hear ought to hear. Take care what you hear." – Mark 4:23-24

I have this knack for listening to a voice and identifying the celebrity it belongs to. I see this useless skill as one of the quirks of my good sense of hearing.

On New Year's day each year, I put my "hearing" skills to work in a special way. On this day, I listen for the voice of the Lord speaking to my heart. I ask Him about the year that's before me, and I also seek a message from the Bible to confirm His leading. I'm OK with Him knowing all His plans for me, without revealing to me what those are right away. It's my position as His child to listen for His cues as His plan unfolds. How well my year will play out will depend on how I listen to His leading and voice each step of the way.

How does one hear God? Through careful listening, as Jesus Himself points out in today's Gospel. Hearing God's voice means paying attention to circumstances, counsel, and that sense of peace that surpasses all understanding. When all of these mesh well, we can move forth to follow God's command for us, with the assurance that we've heard Him right. *Martine De Luna (the.dainty.mom@gmail.com)*

Reflection: How "well-tuned" are your listening skills when it comes to hearing what the Lord has to say?

Dear Jesus, open my ears that I may hear You clearly each day.

SHOWING JESUS

And the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how.
– Mark 4:27

When I was in college, I had a friend with whom I had lunch almost every day for two years. Let's call him Bill. During those lunches, I'd share my faith with him. But no matter how much I tried, I couldn't seem to convince Bill to follow Jesus. He said he had a lot of doubts. He had many other problems and he wasn't ready to commit. But even if we didn't agree about spiritual things, we enjoyed our friendship.

We talked about sports, girls, cars, girls, music, and... did I mention girls? (After all, we were college guys!)

When I dropped out of college, we lost touch.

And I never heard of Bill again.

Eleven years later, I was walking in a mall and guess who I saw — Bill! I asked him how he was, and he gave me the shock of my life. He said he was a Christian missionary!

I couldn't believe my ears.

He then said five words that made my heart leap for joy: "Thanks for showing me Jesus."

For those two years that I had lunch with the guy, it seemed like nothing was happening.

But what showed him Jesus?

Our friendship. *Bo Sanchez (bosanchez@kerygmafamily.com)*

Reflection: Have you shown Jesus to anyone? Why not start now?

Malachi 3:1-4 • Psalm 24: 7, 8, 9, 10
Hebrews 2:14-18 • **Luke 2:22-40**

MY FIRSTBORN

As it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord." – Luke 2:23

After our wedding and honeymoon, my husband and I took off for Chicago because of his job. There, I was transformed from a once vibrant operations supervisor into a plain housewife left alone in an apartment day after day. It was the middle of a cruel winter and I'd be bored waiting for my husband to come home late at night. I was depressed and felt nauseated. My uncle, a family doctor, suspected that aside from cabin fever, I could be infanticipating.

I visited an obstetrician. In his clinic, I had the most unbelievable experience and felt such inexpicable joy! For the first time, I heard the heartbeat of my baby. At that moment, I closed my eyes and whispered, "Lord, I offer to You my son."

For 24 years, I have strived every single day to be the best mom despite my imperfections — not only in showering my son with love, service and discipline, but in raising him up as a true Catholic. Much as I have loved and protected him, in my heart, I never owned him. My son belongs to God and I am only His faithful caregiver. *Marie Franco (mariefranco_pie@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Do we consider our children as our treasures because they can lift us out of poverty, continue the family legacy, or be our caregivers in our old age? Or do we see them as new soldiers of God to spread goodness in this world?

Grant every parent a pure heart and the means to raise their children in Your name.

Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19 • Psalm 71:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 15, 17
1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13 • Luke 4:21-30

NOT ANY LESS GREAT

So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love. – 1 Corinthians 13:13

It was supposed to be our pre-Valentine outreach with streetkids from He Cares Foundation. Along the way, they taught us their definition of love.

"Why don't you want to take a bath?" one of the volunteers asked a young girl. "Because this is my sister's dress," the girl replied.

"I promise not to curse anymore," said one boy, when we discussed what to do as our Valentine promise.

"Why do they ask for cellophane when they sit down to eat?" I asked Daryl, the housefather. "Because they want to bring the food to their mother," he said.

If we judge the topic of love by the amount of attention it gets in songs, movies, books and everywhere else, we can easily conclude that it is the greatest. But "greatest" is not necessarily popular. So on that day in February, I learned the various ways of showing love.

And it wasn't any less great for being different from what I am used to. Just like Jesus — who offered His life for love of me. *Joy Sosoban (jsosoban@gmail.com)*

Reflection: God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Hebrews 11:32-40 • Psalm 31:20, 21, 22, 23, 24
Mark 5:1-20

HANG IN THERE!

Some were tortured and would not accept deliverance, in order to obtain a better resurrection… – Hebrews 11:35

I have a confession to make. During the 2011 Kerygma Conference Grand Feast, I bailed out from the choir midway through the program. The heat had triggered my dizziness. Wind couldn't squeeze through the four rows of singers in front of me and about six rows at my back. The sight of people jumping up and down and the swaying of the stage made my head whirl all the more.

I also pitied the people around me. Every time I raised my hand in praise, I accidentally bopped the girls in front. When I stepped back, I crushed someone's toes behind me. To give them more space, two friends and I snuck out during the break. We continued singing to the Lord on solid ground, fanned by a cool breeze.

As I watched the choir onstage, I was filled with both admiration and shame. Through all that discomfort, there they were singing with joyous abandon!

We face many trials when we serve. The servants who don't buckle under are the ones who win over many souls for the Lord. *Lella M. Santiago (mirellasantiago@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Are you experiencing service burnout because of difficulties? Focus on the reason why you serve.

Lord, when things get tough in my service to bring others to You, help me to take it one soul at a time.

SPREAD GOOD NEWS

He gave strict orders that no one should know this. – Mark 5:43

"Former AFP chief commits suicide!"

I was surfing the Internet when I came across the news bulletin. It was early morning and I wanted to share the shocking news to my friends. I was surprised when I logged on to my Facebook account and saw multiple posts about the same news item. Apparently, I was already late in reading the shocking news.

Even the security guard who opened the door for me at my next meeting asked if I had heard about it. He had no access to any media but he said that someone had texted him with the news.

News spreads fast, especially if it's shocking and the characters involved are popular personalities. Technology has made it even easier and faster to disseminate information.

I believe that technology, which is a result of man's creativity, should be used for God's work. If bad news can spread fast, we Christians should harness technology to spread God's Good News even faster.

What type of news are you spreading? Are you using technology to spread ordinary news or the extraordinary Good News of the Kingdom? *Alvin Fabella (alvinfabella@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed. (Hudson Taylor)

Lord, help me to always be aware that Your Good News must be spread, not my bad news and bad news

A KING WHO BELIEVES IN ME

Endure your trials as "discipline." – Hebrews 12:7

I was asked long ago how one should face the many trials we encounter in the world. As we all know, being a Christian is not a bed of roses. I answer the question through a poem I wrote entitled "Bravery":

Ahead of me is a battle
Created for me to fight
Thousands of foes will attack
I will be hit, they won't be light
My face will touch the ground
My spirit will shout in pain
But my trembling knees won't give up
I will not die in vain
For inside me is a great desire
To finish the battle within
Though wounded, I will stand up
I must conquer, I must win
I do this not for my sake
Nor for arrogance or pride
But for a King who believes in me
Who knows that I could fall, but will not hide.

I still use this poem to remind me that I should press forward, even in the midst of trials and failures, because I have a King who believes in me. *Emmanuel Calayan (emmanuel_calayan@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: How is the Lord disciplining you right now?

Lord, thank You for disciplining me that I may share in Your holiness.

TEAMWORK

Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two. – Mark 6:7

Many years ago, I enrolled in a weight-gain program of a popular fitness center. Initially, I was motivated to go to the gym because I wanted to add some pounds to achieve my ideal body weight. But after four sessions, I stopped. After several years, I bought an exercise equipment. After trying it out a few times, I abandoned the idea of exercising and left the equipment in a corner, collecting dust.

I didn't stick to my exercise program because I did it alone. Based on statistics, people who exercise with a buddy are more motivated and successful at exercising consistently.

The same is also true in doing God's work. In today's Gospel, Jesus sent His disciples out on a mission, not individually, but by twos. He knew the importance of people working as a team. This way, they can provide support and encouragement to one another, especially when they experience laziness, frustration or rejection.

We get more things done effectively when we work with a team. As you serve Christ, don't try to do it alone.

Judith Concepcion (svp_jmca@yahoo.com)

Reflection: Are you suffering from burnout? Learn to delegate.

Lord, help me to realize that it is impossible to do everything by my own power. Grant me the grace to share the work with others.

AMONG SISTERS

Let brotherly love continue. – Hebrews 13:1

Into each life, some rain must fall, so the saying goes.

The year 2011 wasn't easy for my sisters and me.

There were trials — big ones, small ones — in the areas of health, finance, business and work.

Through it all, we carried one another's burdens.

And we survived, by the grace of God.

2012 came, and right on the first day of the year, my nephew and his young family got involved in a road mishap. Fortunately, they were not hurt.

On the second month, a niece got into a car accident, too.

Each time something happens, all of us, seven sisters (sometimes six, because we don't bother our sister in the US for minor problems), would be busy with our cell phones, texting and communicating with one another for comfort and strength. We would pray for whoever is in trouble and be present to whoever is in need, even if not always physically.

And during such times, I'd remember my deceased mother.

She was the one who taught us, by her example, how to love one another, how to be strong for each other, how to give and share whatever we have — as Jesus had told us.

Today's first reading says, "Let mutual love continue."

I pray we're doing it right. *Tess V. Atienza (svp_tvatienza@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: How do you show mutual love for the people God has put in your life?

Lord Jesus, thank You for showing us the way to love.

A GREAT BEGINNING

Through Jesus let us continually offer God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. – Hebrews 13:15

It was New Year's eve. Junette and her family were on their way home when they received news of a fire. The unthinkable was confirmed. They saw their house and their business burn to the ground. A firecracker had set some dry leaves on fire and the blaze spread quickly.

I was worried. How was Junette? Where would they stay? She must be terrified. What a way to begin 2012!

But amazingly, she had a different attitude.

She was thanking God that no one was home when it happened. She was so happy God had protected them. Had they been home earlier, something more tragic could have happened. A house they can always rebuild. A business they can always start anew. But lives can never be replaced.

She could have easily questioned why God took their house and business from them. Instead, her lips overflowed with gratitude that God had saved her family. The result? She and her family remained happy and at peace, truly believing that the start of the year began great. *Carlo Lorenzo (carloflorenzo@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: In every circumstance, we can choose to dwell on the problem or focus on the blessing.

[redacted]

Isaiah 6:1-2, 3-8 • Psalm 138:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 7-8
Luke 5:1-11

YES, LORD!

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send?" "Here I am," I said, "Send me!" – Isaiah 6:8

I remember my first service for the Lord. I held the light for the cameraman covering a prayer event and followed him wherever he went. It was a big deal because: 1) it was a privilege to do God's work and honor Him; 2) I was the one chosen among many; and 3) I said yes!

Unfortunately, not all respond as enthusiastically as I did. Some are fearful, falsely believing they are not skilled or talented enough. Many are too busy and do not have time to engage in ministry work. Worse, there are those who are indifferent, claiming that serving God is not for them.

Matthew 22:14 says, "For many are called, but few are chosen." I believe few are chosen because few respond to God's call. The Lord invites us to have an intimate relationship with Him, and this includes serving Him in whatever capacity He calls us to.

The service could be as simple as being a greeter in your community event, or leading the prayer in your caring group.

The key is availability, not ability. Once you say yes to God's call to serve, He will honor you and use you mightily for other works. *Erwin Roceles (erwin_roceles@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: When the opportunities to serve the Lord present themselves, will you have an excuse or are you ready to be used?

Lord, I make myself available to You. Use me as You please. Bless me with the skills and gifts I will need and empower me with Your Spirit. Amen.

Genesis 1:1-19 • Psalm 104:1-2, 5-6, 10, 12, 24, 35
Mark 6:53-56

WORKING FROM HOME NO MORE

Evening came, and morning followed. – Genesis 1:19

As I write this reflection, I am in the middle of discernment — whether to continue working from home or go back to the regular five-day work schedule at the office.

For the first two months of 2012, I tried the first scheme, working from home and reporting to the office only twice a week. The transition was hard. Home was normally a retreat place for me, so I found it hard to work, especially at the start of the day. Other things would catch my attention and I'd only be able to start working late in the morning. Thus, I'd end up working late into the night, sometimes up to midnight, because once I gained momentum, it'd be hard to stop. But on the days that I felt I didn't work enough, I'd feel guilty.

So which is which for me? The story of creation in today's first reading gives me the answer. God first formed the world, put a structure to it, before He filled it up. He did His work in an orderly fashion. He worked during the day, but when evening came He stopped. And on the seventh day, He rested.

I believe that's what I need — a sense of order so I could "create" more. I am a "structure" person but also an "artist" by nature, an engineer yet also a writer. Now I realize, God must have purposely designed that mix in me, my left brain as active as my right brain, so I could carry out His mission for me. *Tess V. Atienza (svp tvatienza@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What helps you to be more productive?

Lord, help me to be productive in my own time.

MORE THAN LIP SERVICE

"This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." – Mark 7:6

How many times have we said certain things but contradicted our words with our actions?

We tell our spouses that we will love, honor and cherish them "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and health, until death do us part," but when the going gets tough, oftentimes we wish we were "going" too! *(Gulp! I'm guilty of this!)*

We tell our kids that they're important to us, but we don't look at them when they're talking to us or pay attention when they're showing us their latest "masterpieces." Instead, we're focused on our cell phones or computers. *(Guilty here, too!)*

We tell our God that we love, honor and worship Him alone — but we get distracted by other "gods" in our lives — our work, worries, material things, desire for success, the media, etc. *(Ahem... guilty again!)*

What a great reminder we have in God's Word for today! Bearing in mind His words, let's commit ourselves again to really honor God with our hearts, and to practice what we preach. After all, actions really *do* speak louder than words.

Tina Santiago-Rodriguez (teachermamatina@gmail.com)

Reflection: Today, offer to the Lord your heart, hands and life in prayer and worship.

Lord, please take me back to the heart of worship – it's all about You, Jesus! Use my words and actions — my whole life — to glorify Your name.

Joel 2:12-18 • Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14, 17
2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2 • Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

TERRORIST IN THE PRINTING PRESS

Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God. For gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment. – Joel 2:13

I used to follow a strict, sometimes unkind, work ethic to get things done.

Later, I would find out, I had so terrorized people that they don't easily forget me — and my tyrant ways.

Like Jess who printed a magazine I edited some 30 years ago.

Last year, I met Jess again because he was printing another publication I was editing for a client. And the moment Jess and his staff saw me, they looked like they were seeing a monster.

Yes, they hadn't forgotten the "terrorist me," who behaved so far from the Lord's ways as enumerated in the first reading.

When I received the assignment to write this reflection last year, I was so busy that I got to look at the readings only three days after — guess what — exactly on Ash Wednesday! And, would you believe, I just came from church where I had lined up to receive ash on my forehead!

So now I rend my heart and pray that I can be as kind as the Lord. Because I am working again with Jess and his staff on another printing project. *Cynthia U. Santiago (cusantiago@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Lent is here. Be kind.

WINTER

"He must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me." – Luke 9:23

It's freezing cold outside in Hoboken, New Jersey, where our family spent Christmas with our son, Peevee. Six blocks is quite a walk to the nearest church when it's -8°C. "We can do this," my husband, Raul, assures me as I put on five layers of clothing. I must have weighed at least 10 pounds more with my winter coat, boots, leather gloves and muffler. This has been our daily morning routine since we arrived.

It doesn't end there. Once inside the church, we have to take off the outer layers one by one, only to put them back on again before we head back home after Mass. But once we step into Peevee's apartment, the "unlayering" takes place yet again.

This is what happens when we make Jesus the Lord and Savior of our life. Out of our immense love for Him, we shed off our old self and put on a new way of life to please Him. It is not easy and we stumble along the way. But loving Him means taking up our cross daily until we finally reach home to be with our Heavenly Father, free at last from the layers of our past. *Mari Sison-Garcia (mari_sison_garcia@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What cross do you bear? This Valentine's Day, offer it with love to the Lord.

Lord, serving You is not easy but You call us to persevere and endure things in life to get to the place You want us to be.

POSITIVE FASTING

"This, rather, is the fasting that I wish." – Isaiah 58:6

I have personally found fasting a truly effective way of spiritual discipline. In fact, it is also a very practical way to detoxify the body.

Yet, I discovered long before that real fasting should lead you to love and serve more. I believe that fasting is depriving yourself so that others may gain more. Otherwise, you may simply be going on a cleansing diet.

Read how the verse above continues:

"...releasing those bound unjustly...
Setting free the oppressed....
Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry,
bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your house;
Clothing the naked when you see them,
and not turning your back on your own flesh?"

At the start of this season of Lent, complete your "negative action" of denying yourself with "positive acts" of charity, mercy and love for others, especially those who are truly deprived. *Alvin Barcelona (apb_ayo@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Are others gaining from your denying of yourself? Love and serve someone today.

Dear God, I give thanks for the essential discipline and obedience to my religious obligations that lead me to the point of "all ... to love You and others more. Amen

DECISIONS

Then the Lord will guide you always. – Isaiah 58:11

My wife, Gina, retired from her school job in 2008. We went through a long discernment process that included many consultations with our pastoral leader, superiors and spiritual director. We decided that she retire and take care of the family full-time. It was something we desired and were at peace with.

In 2011, I had to choose: Should I transfer to a job that was familiar, a comfort zone, or should I stay on with my current function with more tasks added, Saturday assignments and late nights?

Easy choice, right?

But my discernment led me to choose the harder path. It was not logical. With the change, I found myself tired, going home late and frantic with my additional job functions. Yet I felt God was guiding me throughout. There were bumps on the road yet the Lord was on top of everything. I knew that whatever happened, my obedience to His will comes first.

Bring your decisions to the Lord so He can guide you and bless you. Follow His command, whatever it may be. Decide to obey His will. Once you follow His leadings, He will never lead you astray. *Jun Asis (mabuting.balita@gmail.com)*

Reflection: In making decisions, don't decide and then expect Him to bless your decisions. Ask Him to show you His will and then obey.

Lead me, Lord. I surrender to Your holy will.

FAVORITE

For there is no distinction… the same Lord is Lord of all, enriching all who call upon him. – Romans 10:12

Is it true that God plays no favorites? Because I've read inspiring stories of others overcoming their challenges after praying to God while He seems to be taking His time when it comes to my struggles.

And then I ask myself, as a parent, do I have favorites among my children? I love my kids equally, yet, like any parent, I would prioritize the one who needs me most on a given day. I also consider who among my kids is able to cope with a task at hand with less assistance and support from me.

Just as a mother like me, who believes in what my kids can do for themselves, maybe our Heavenly Father believes there are things that I can handle with less intervention right now and will provide me with the answers to my prayers in some other way. As today's readings say, I need to believe in what I can do and have more faith that God will answer my prayers in His perfect time. *Mae Ignacio (maemi04@aim.com)*

Reflection: Do not give up on your heart's desires. Keep on praying. In God's perfect time, He will give you the perfect answer to your prayers.

Lord, You know my heart's deepest concern. I pray that You answer my prayers in the right time through Christ Your Son.

ANGER MANAGEMENT

Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your fellow countrymen. – Leviticus 19:18

Phinehas Gage was a capable and efficient railroad construction foreman. But in 1848, he had a freak accident where a rod pierced through his skull above his left eye. His recovery was miraculous but the damage to the front lobe of his brain caused Gage to be angry, short-tempered and unsteady.

Many point to his case in illustrating the role that our frontal lobe plays in controlling our anger. Scientists say that this part balances the amygdala, the portion of our brain dealing with our emotions that goes crazy when we're angry. This whole balancing act can take as little as two seconds to control our anger. That's why there's great wisdom in counting to 10 before reacting when we're infuriated.

God has equipped our bodies with systems to control our emotions. We don't need to be a slave to our feelings; instead, we can be their master. But more than the physiological mechanisms He has built into us, God also gives us His power to bear the fruits of patience and temperance.

So the next time you feel like bursting with rage, remember: God has already given you what you need to control your anger. Then start counting to 10. *Rissa Singson-Kawpeng (justbreatherissa@gmail.com)*

Reflection: For every minute you are angry you lose sixty seconds of happiness. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Jesus, teach me to master my emotions. Amen.

ASK AWAY

"Your Father knows what you need before you ask him."
– Matthew 6:8

One of the things Mom taught us while we were growing up was to ask permission before getting food from the refrigerator. I wondered why, when we owned the ref and everything in it. Mom said it was to teach us to do so out of courtesy.

Today's Gospel teaches us that God knows what we need even before we ask Him. Do we still need to pray to Him? Yes, we do! Because more than doing so out of respect for Him, we affirm our dependence on His provision and trust in His faithfulness. Asking for what we need in prayer also reminds us to be humble; we are, after all, but creatures of a magnanimous Creator. Prayer is our lifeline to the Life Giver Himself.

We will not survive a day in this life without asking God for our needs. So ask away. And receive not only what you need but the best He can give. *Dina Pecana (dpecana@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Do you ask the Father for all that you need or do you just wait for Him to bless you?

Heavenly Father, You taught us to ask and ask for much. Teach us to trust in You for all that we need. Amen.

MEGAPHONE

So Jonah made ready and went to Nineveh, according to the Lord's bidding. – Jonah 3:2

I've always had the passion to present God in a cool, relevant, and contemporary way. I enjoy introducing modern Christian music to my friends. Whenever I'd share His Word, I try to use present-day examples so that those listening can easily relate to it.

Because God is cool. His love is hip. God's Word is always in-style. He transcends all trends. God is everything but boring. He's the greatest person ever — yesterday, today and forever. (Hey, it rhymes!)

Now, I believe God calls us to present Him to the world in the same way. Especially today, when we're competing against the Internet, movies, MTV, Lady Gaga, and so much more. We have to fight for His Word to stand out and be heard! So that those who are far away from Him, people who are lost and hurting, will come to know love personified — Jesus.

Friends, God is giving us a megaphone today to speak to this generation. Our message is the Gospel. Our platform is the marketplace, our office, Facebook, Twitter, our friends, our family, the strangers we meet. Let's broadcast the game-changing story of Christ! *Mike Viñas (mikemichaelfcv@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: How will you tell the world that Jesus lives?

Father, empower me to amplify Your message of grace every day.

Esther C:12, 14-16, 23-25 (or Esther 4:28, 30-32, 39-41)
Psalm 138:1-2, 2-3, 7-8 • Matthew 7:7-12

LUPANG HINIRANG

"You, O, Lord, chose Israel from among all peoples." – Esther C:16

The title of my reflection is our national anthem, which means "a chosen nation." Indeed, we are the only Christian country in South East Asia blessed with abundant natural and human resources. Expectedly, we should be spiritually and materially wealthy. But sadly, we are not.

Just like another chosen people, the Israelites of the Old Testament, we have not walked our talk as a supposedly faith-based nation. We have sinned and destroyed our natural wealth.

During one Ash Wednesday, Fr. Troy, our Filipino priest in Abu Dhabi, reminded us in his homily to go back to the basics, to God, during the Lenten season. If we do so, we can claim God's promised blessings.

I believe that our lasting heritage as a *"lupang hinirang"* — a chosen people enjoying the fulfillment of God's promises — can happen if we all repent and believe in the Gospel. *Grace Princesa (grprincesa@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Do you believe and claim that as a baptized Filipino Christian, you are chosen to spread the Good News to the ends of the earth?

Pray God, let me claim my heritage as a favored child of a chosen nation.

BE A JESUS LOOK-ALIKE!

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" – Matthew 16:15

My first outreach was at the Golden Acres Home for the Aged. I was new in the Charismatic Renewal and my elder asked me to ballroom dance with the *lolas* in the social hall.

Just my luck, my partner was a grandma in her second-childhood stage. And the dance was on. Then my partner spoke words that rocked my world, "You're Jesus!"

In a split second, my past sinful life flashed in my mind like a parade. I was so convicted that I was poles apart from being a Jesus look-alike.

I spun her once. She repeated what she just said. I spun her three times and ended with a dip. Yet she was consistent. "You're Jesus!"

I ran out the hall and into the chapel. In front of the altar, I agonized, "Am I really Jesus to others?" In the midst of sobs, my heart's answer was a clear no!

Because of my sinfulness, I was frequently manifesting evil.

But that second-childhood *lola* changed my life forever.

Now, should anyone say, "You're Jesus!" I will humbly answer, "No, I'm just a look-alike." *Obet Cabrillas (kpreacherobet@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Live in such a way that, when others meet you, they will be fully convinced that Jesus was for real. (Mother Teresa)

Lord, let my life reflect You in everything I do.

OBEDIENCE

"This day the Lord, your God, commands you to observe these statutes and decrees." – Deuteronomy 26:16

When I first became part of a Charismatic community in 2003, this verse was one of God's messages that spoke to my heart. He also said that I should love Him with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind and with all my strength (Mark 12:30). It was one of my favorite verses that I got to memorize first.

But more than merely memorizing the verse, I strove to live it after my first Baptism of the Holy Spirit. After all, love spells obedience.

I made God first in my life. I even consulted Him in the minute details. Before, I thought He was just concerned with my major decisions. But now He wanted to be a part of every single detail in my life. I even managed to give up my preference for romantic films and novels just to prove that I also loved Him with all my mind. My life has been centered on service ever since I decided to love Him with all my strength. After all, service is love put into action.

Ems Sy Chan (havenofleeanne@yahoo.com)

Reflection: How do you obey God? How do you show your love for Him?

Father, you know I love You at all times even though it's often inconvenient. May I always show my love for You through my thoughts, words and actions.

Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18 • Psalm 27:1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14
Philippians 3:17-4:1 • Luke 9:28-36

I BELIEVE IN GOD

Abram put his faith in the Lord, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness. – Genesis 15:6

One of the first prayers taught to us when we were kids was the Apostle's Creed. "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord...." This has been one of our regular prayers until now. But do we really mean what we say?

Oftentimes, we doubt God's omnipotent power, no matter how many times we've been told to just go ahead and trust in Him. We have our misgivings, especially when we encounter situations which to us seem hopeless and impossible to solve. We bombard God with our prayers, but do we really believe?

Just like Abraham, there will be different magnitudes of problems that would make us worry, despite the assurance that God will never abandon nor forsake us.

Amidst all these seemingly insurmountable trials, let us believe in God, the Father Almighty. He will always make a way.

He *is* the Way. *Dr. Henry Yu (henrio_md@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: The same God whom we used to believe in when we were kids is here today. He is the same God yesterday, today and tomorrow. He cares for us. His love is everlasting and knows no end.

Father, remind us always to believe and trust in You with all our hearts and minds – to never doubt, no matter how rough the roads are and how hard life becomes.

BITTEN HAND

But yours, O Lord, our God, are compassion and forgiveness! Yet we rebelled against you. – Daniel 9:9

Celine was angry with her nephew, whom she helped raise. He spoke to her disrespectfully when she expressed her disappointment to him over something wrong he had done. Her nephew remained defiant even after she explained why she was displeased. The result: Celine stopped talking to her nephew, while the latter continued to be unmindful of his aunt's feelings.

"Never bite the hand that feeds you," Celine maintains.

I cannot blame Celine for her anger, more so because the nephew never apologized for his actions. But to harbor this anger for an extended period of time hardened Celine's heart, and she became indifferent to her nephew.

Imagine if God were like this towards us. To have an indifferent God means to be stripped of all blessings, big and small. What a miserable life we would all be living! But praise God that He is a God of compassion and forgiveness, no matter how difficult we can be. It is His unconditional love that melts hardened hearts.

Celine admits she has a lot to learn about love and forgiveness. For now, it's good enough that she is aware of it. God is surely at work. *Nova Arias-Sevilla (nova.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Are you harboring ill feelings at the moment? Lift them up to God.

[illegible] you to be compassionate as you. Bless I pray today, O God. Amen

HENNA TATTOO

"Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow, though they be crimson red, they may become white as wool." – Isaiah 1:18

Have you ever gotten a tattoo? I hear it's quite painful and almost impossible to remove. I never imagined I'd get one until I went to Phuket during my honeymoon. But mind you, it wasn't a permanent one. It was just a henna tattoo — the temporary kind that lasts for about two weeks. (Mine lasted for only two minutes because they didn't finish it and it was washed away by the rain.)

This got me thinking about how I used to brand myself as a jerk because I always broke up with my girlfriends. I couldn't seem to make a relationship work. I pounded myself for my mistakes and called myself a failure. I believed I was permanently doomed to hurt people and never have a successful relationship. Mercifully, God showed me that my failures don't define me. I was able to conquer my fear of commitment and I am now very, very happily married.

Our sins are not permanent. Our failures are not permanent. They may have stained us but they're only henna tattoos, washed away by His blood. What is permanent is God's mark of ownership on us. We are His children, made in His image and likeness. Nothing can wash that away. *George Tolentino Gabriel (george.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Have you sinned? Failed? Made mistakes? Confess. Get back up. Move on. His love is greater.

Lord, thank You for Your mercy and forgiveness. Thank You for Your love that never ends.

Jeremiah 18:18-20 • Psalm 31:5-6, 14, 15-16
Matthew 20:17-28

MAMMA MIA

She answered him, "Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your kingdom."
– Matthew 20:20-21

According to a research by Prof. G. Turner, intelligent men owe their brains to their mothers. Genes associated with intelligence are found on the X chromosome, the one which men inherit from their mothers. Thus, the gene, whether an intelligent one or not, can be inherited by the son from her, determining his basic intelligence, character and looks. The professor concludes that if a man wants smart sons, his best bet is to marry a smart woman.

The mother of James and John may seem to be a pushy or ambitious woman by asking Jesus to give her sons prestigious positions, but she must have done something right in producing two "sons of thunder," who are known in history as two of the 12 Apostles and one of the four Gospel writers.

To all mothers out there (including dads, too), may your influence in your children's lives be one that will leave a positive impact. May our children be the living testimony of the kind of parents we are. *Ronna Ledesma (ronna_ledesma@yahoo.com.ph)*

Reflection: The future destiny of a child is always the work of the mother. (Napoleon Bonaparte)

Lord, when You behold my children, may I hear from Your lips, "Well done, my faithful servant"

THE BIG DIFFERENCE

"Remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented." – Luke 16:25

A man went to the slums riding a sleek, lowered-chassis, latest model Mercedes Benz. One boy, who recognized him, boldly asked, "Can you take me for a ride in your car?"

Perfect! This was just the situation the man had been waiting for to top his bragging expedition. Before he could even answer, the boy ran away then returned with his polio-stricken brother on his back. They both quickly hopped in.

"Where did this car come from?" the boy wondered. "I have an extremely wealthy employer and he bought this car for me," the man replied.

"Cool!" the boy said. He then closed his eyes, and was silent in prayer for a minute. When the boy opened his eyes, the man asked, "Did you pray that you may become like me and have a nice car like this?"

"No," said the boy, "I prayed that I be like your boss, so I could give this kind of car to my brother."

You don't have to wonder who among the two enjoys the heaven of sleeping soundly at night, relishing simple joys, savoring the warm embraces of love.

The rich man in the Gospel is in hell not because he is rich but because he didn't love. *Jon Escoto (faithatworkjon@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Do you want a dose of heaven now? Love the Lazarus that God puts in your path today.

Lord, let me recognize the Lazarus You are putting in my path today.

Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13, 17-28 • Psalm 105:16-17, 18-19, 20-21
Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46

DON'T GIVE UP ON YOURSELF

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."
– Matthew 21:42

One day, there was a little girl who planted a rose plant. She watered it daily until a little bud appeared.

She was so happy! The little red bud had so much promise, and she wondered when the bud would blossom into a rose. But upon closer examination, the little girl saw that the rose plant was growing thorns — sharp, ugly, prickly thorns. She liked the rose but she hated the thorns. So she decided *not* to water the plant anymore. And the rose bud never bloomed because the plant died.

I thank God that He isn't like that little girl.

There's a beautiful rose within you. It's just covered with thorns. But despite those thorns, God knows better. It's part of who you are.

And with patience, He will water you — until that rose blossoms. And then He will get the rose and cut the thorns — and put it in a vase — for all the world to see your beauty.

Right now, you may feel as though nothing is happening in your life, that none of your dreams are coming true.

Don't give up, because God doesn't give up on you.

Bo Sanchez (bosanchez@kerygmafamily.com)

Reflection: Do you always stumble? Do you feel that nothing's happening in your life? Be patient. God is at work.

Heavenly Father, I trust You. Even if it seems like nothing is happening, You are doing something beautiful in my life.

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20 • Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

FASTING OR FACADE

You will cast into the depths of the sea all our sins. – Micah 7:19

It was Ash Wednesday. My officemates and I attended the 6 p.m. Mass at a nearby parish.

As expected, the church was jam-packed with the faithful. There were no seats left. We had no choice but to stand by the doorway.

During the homily, the priest presented and blessed the ashes, then imposed them on our foreheads. But right after the rite, we noticed that the crowd was slowly thinning. It was obvious that some of the people just came to be marked with ash on their foreheads but didn't finish the Mass. Worse, a man hurrying to the exit even cursed someone standing by the door near us.

This saddened me and made me ask: Is this really fasting or a façade?

This season, let's check our intentions for observing our Lenten practices. Are we truly repentant and sincere in our desire to get closer to God? Or is it just a façade to show that we are holy and religious Catholics?

May we all take this time as an opportunity to show our sincere love for our Creator, who showed us nothing but compassion and pure love. *Erika Pauline Mendoza (epaulmendoza@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Do you fast to show love or fast for a "show"?

Lord, help me to be mindful of my intentions this season of Lent. Teach me Your sincere ways, Father.

Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15 • Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8, 11
1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12 • Luke 13:1-9

THE ROCK ON WHICH WE STAND

They drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ. – 1 Corinthians 10:4

December 18, 2011 was a very busy Sunday for me. I had volunteered to serve during the two healing Masses of our Catholic community as one of the pray-over servants. With a series of Christmas parties a few days before, leaving early from the house, and a full day ahead, it was late in the day when someone asked me, "Have you heard the news?" It was only then that I learned of the devastation called Sendong. It struck the people of Cagayan de Oro and neighboring areas, surprising residents while they were asleep.

Sendong has become one of the Philippines' worst natural disasters in two decades, with more than 1,000 people killed and the same number still missing. It was also considered the worst storm of 2011.

Life is uncertain. You never really know what kind of storm will wallop you from somewhere. But for as long as our spiritual foundation is Jesus, as long as He is the rock on which we stand, we can declare that though the foundation of the earth may be moved, still we can stand strong. *Joy Sosoban (jsosoban@gmail.com)*

Reflection: God is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in distress. Thus we do not fear, though earth be shaken and mountains quake. (Psalm 46:2-3)

I declare on Rock of Ages, if You are with me, though the earth be moved, O Lord.

2 Kings 5:1-15 • Psalms 42:2, 3; 43:3, 4
Luke 4:24-30

FEET OF CLAY

The man was also a valiant warrior, but he was a leper. – 2 Kings 5:1

In my blog, *My B.A.G. of Miracles*, I started a series entitled "Manual for Servant Leaders Who Insanely Love to Serve God Despite Harassments and Frustrations." The working title is just for fun, but you get my drift.

The guidelines on servant leadership were inspired by my own foibles and experiences. As the art of managing fellow servants is quite different from corporate management, I thought recording my observations and reflections might help others who are anointed to lead.

Servant leaders have a big heart for the Lord and brave many challenges in the course of service, but we are far from perfect. We are sometimes afflicted by "leprosy" or human flaws that impair our leadership. When people look up to us, they get a peek at our feet of clay.

But, imperfect though we may be, we are not hopeless cases. Just as the Lord healed Naaman of his leprosy when he obeyed Elisha, He also corrects our flaws when we follow His guidance. Are we called to be more humble, loving and considerate? As we wash our sins in His river of forgiveness, we are made clean. *Lella M. Santiago (mirellasantiago@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Do you love to serve or do you serve to be loved?

Lord, as I go into the battlefield, let me be mindful of Your commands.

Daniel 3:25, 34-43 • Psalm 25:4-5, 6, 7, 8-9
Matthew 18:21-35

QUICK TO FORGIVE

Peter approached Jesus and asked him, "Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?"
– Matthew 18:21

"Papa, I left my Game Boy inside the movie theater!" my son Jason said. It had been almost 10 minutes since we left the moviehouse. We ran back to the theater. The next batch of moviegoers were already filing in. I was anxious we wouldn't find his Game Boy anymore.

We rushed to the place where we had been seated but we only saw empty seats. My emotions were shifting from anxiety to anger when Jason said, "Papa, please forgive me for losing my video game."

I didn't know how to react. I just replied, "Don't worry, it's just a toy." Then, as if on queue, the maintenance man approached us and asked if we were looking for a video game. He told us to proceed to their office so we could claim it.

Jesus teaches us to forgive repeatedly because God is always willing to forgive us. His concept of forgiveness is very different from ours. We are choosy about who to forgive while He forgives all who return to Him. While we take longer to pardon, God forgives immediately. God's great love for us will always surpass our sins, whether big or small. *Alvin Fabella (alvinfabella@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: When you ask God for forgiveness, do you also remember to forgive those who have offended you?

Lord, when I am tempted to withhold forgiveness, remind me that You forgive my sins even when I don't deserve it.

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9 • Psalm 147:12-13, 15-16, 19-20
Matthew 5:17-19

LAWS AND COMMANDMENTS

"For what great nation is there that has gods so close to it as the Lord, our God, is to us whenever we call upon him?" – Deuteronomy 4:7

The sign on the highway said, "No crossing. Pedestrians have died here." Still, pedestrians continued to cross even at the risk of their own lives. It was unconscious suicide! Traffic enforcers even had a heyday punishing the offenders by making them publicly sing the national anthem with a megaphone.

Just as human laws are made to protect lives, God's commandments were given to us to preserve our lives and enable us to live more abundantly. His laws show us at least three things: (1) a sign of wisdom to non-believers; (2) a sign showing the close relationship God has for His children; and (3) a sign of a Father's great love for us. Did you notice, though, the difference between human laws and God's commandments? Human laws are made to implement order but God's laws are given because He loves.

More than the sacrifice required by our religious obligations during this time of Lent, let's offer our obedience expressed out of a hunger in our hearts to return God's love for those He died to save. *Rod Velez (rod.velez@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Heroes shed their blood to make this nation and its laws great. But Someone greater than a hero gave His life that we may live ours more abundantly. How obedient are we to Him?

When I do not see the logic in being obedient, Lord, increase my faith, grant me serenity, and teach me to hope, that I may follow out of love.

ALLY OR ENEMY?

"Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." – Luke 11:23

It was a few days before performance night and each group of performers and production people were busy rehearsing their assigned scenes. During one of the dry run nights, a group walked out in protest against their director who had verbally abused them. With one group missing, how could the play push through? Later, they were able to patch things up and the play ran smoothly.

In today's Gospel, the Pharisees accused Jesus of driving out demons by the power of the devil. But Jesus tells them, "If Satan is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?" It's absurd to think that Satan will drive out his allies, the demons. For a particular cause to be successful, unity among the members is important. If not, nothing gets achieved.

As believers and followers of Christ, we need to be united. We need to be of one mind and heart. The enemy is always on the lookout for dissension for he can use this as a way to thwart God's plan and purposes. In the fight between good versus evil, there is no neutral ground. It's either we are for Christ or against Him. *Judith Concepcion (svp_jmc@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Are you the cause of division or unity in your group?

Lord, forgive me when I [illegible] Teach me to work towards unity.

Hosea 14:2-10 • Psalm 81:6-8, 8-9, 10-11, 14, 17
Mark 12:28-34

BEARING FRUIT

Because of me you bear fruit. – Hosea 14:9

More than 15 years ago, my life was in a drought. It was dry and empty.

I had a business, yes, but there was no life in it despite the daily busyness.

Our shops were just in front of the church, but I rarely went to Mass.

I read a lot, but I failed to read the life-giving Word of God.

In that emptiness and dryness, God spoke.

He called — and I unknowingly listened to His promptings in my heart.

Because I listened, things started to come alive in my life.

After several retreats, recollections, a life-changing pilgrimage to the Holy Land and community life, I was ready to bear fruit for Him.

Service to God took several forms in the beginning — counseling, teaching, facilitating workshops — until finally He led me to that one thing that I could do best for Him: writing.

And only because of Him do I bear fruit in what I am doing now. *Tess V. Atienza (svp_tvatienza@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Does your life bear fruit now?

Continue, Lord, to make my life fruitful for Your glory.

RITUALS

For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. – Hosea 6:6

My cousin called and relayed the sad news that my aunt had just died. Then she asked, "Do you know a priest who can help us?"

When I clarified her intentions, it turned out that she wanted her mom to have the last rites. I explained that it was a sacrament for the living, not a rite for those who have died.

It's so sad when Catholic practices are reduced to mere obligation or even superstition. There are some people who go on a pilgrimage to Manaoag, dance at Obando or do a barefoot procession at Quiapo as a desperate entreaty to get God's attention — as if otherwise He never looks in their direction. Nothing's wrong with these practices but our devotion is misplaced when we think we can bribe God to grant our prayers just because we did these things.

The truth is, no ritual can replace a daily prayer time. No *panata* or pledge can replace sharing His gifts to others in need. No pilgrimage will ever replace making our own body into a temple that God can call His home. The observance of customary practices is meant to enhance our relationship with God, not reduce it to mere rituals. *Cecil Lim (cez_lim@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: God does not seek the grandiosity of your actions. He yearns for the faithfulness of your daily living.

Lord, grant me the desire to seek You daily so that I can see You more clearly in every ritual that I do.

Joshua 5:9, 10-12 • Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7
2 Corinthians 5:17-21 • **Luke 15:1-3, 11-32**

DESERVING A SECOND CHANCE

"Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends." – Luke 15:29

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the father gladly welcomes his penitent son. The elder brother is astonished. "What? That brat gets a party instead of getting punished? What about me?"

We can understand the older son's feeling of being unappreciated. But love is not logical. A father doesn't divide portions of his love between a worthy and an unworthy son. Just as God the Father does not differentiate mankind accordingly. We are all sinners yet God gave His only begotten son to save the world.

I know of a friend whose brother was a drug user. No matter how many times he fell astray, she would intervene and bring him to a rehab clinic. Thankfully, he was able to kick his habit because his sister never wavered. Her love for her brother was real and unconditional.

Even if we deserve punishment from society, we are still God's creation. When we are truly sorry for our sins, surely we deserve a second chance. *Gina Verdolaga (mgjver@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Do you practice compassion?

Lord, if I must truly love, let me not cast the first stone. Teach me to be humble.

Isaiah 65:17-21 • Psalm 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11-12, 13
John 4:43-54

REFRESHED AT A RETREAT

The things of the past shall not be remembered or come to mind. Instead, there shall always be rejoicing and happiness in what I create. – Isaiah 65:17-18

It was one of the dreams I had written down for that year and it was so close to being fulfilled. It was a women's retreat I had organized, entitled after my second book, *Discover Your Inner Beauty Queen*. But as the days drew near to the retreat, panic began to set in. The retreat was scheduled on the same weekend that another community activity was taking place. People were telling me that they wanted to attend but were already committed to the first activity.

Even as I fretted about overhead costs that we thought we would be unable to cover, I told the Lord, "Even if just one soul gets touched, it'll be all worth it."

The Lord didn't disappoint. Around 50 women from different walks of life gathered for a life-changing weekend with the Living God. Wives of some Kerygma preachers —who normally do not speak in public — gave talks, testimonies, or shared their wisdom during the panel discussion. Everyone's hearts overflowed as the Lord ministered to us all. Just hearing the sharings of the attendees confirmed that my dream had been the Lord's dream all along. *Rissa Singson-Kawpeng (justbreatherissa@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Thanking God in the trials may be difficult, but when you do, His purposes and presence will illuminate your path and carry you through. (Charles Stanley)

Lord, [illegible]

HIS PROVISION

Fruit trees of every kind shall grow; their leaves shall not fade, nor their fruit fail. For they shall be watered by the flow from the sanctuary. – Ezekiel 47:12

It was another dry season. Almost seven months of job hunting for me. Over 180 applications sent. No offers, no job.

But having been soaked in God's goodness, this time around my family and I were not afraid. We had confidence that the Lord would provide for us, just like the tree planted near a river in today's reading.

We continued to enjoy the life the Lord had given us despite my lack of employment. Instead of focusing on the problem, we focused on His promise. We took a vacation at a beach in Batangas, enjoying the money that was pouring in through our stock market placements.

On another day, a man offered to buy our property even if we were not selling it. We profited over P1 million from that.

During this dry season, we were also able to upgrade our car. We took a tour of northern Luzon and enjoyed many scenic places like the Bangui Windmills, Pagudpud Beach, the Callao Cave in Cagayan and the Rice Terraces in Benguet.

Our God supplied our every need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). And before long, I got a job. A much better one, too! *Danny Tariman (dtariman.loj@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Are you in a dry season? It is just a *season;* it will pass!

Lord, forgive me for focusing on my problems instead of Your promises. I claim Your promise now, and I thank You in advance for my answered prayer.

WHAT BENE DOES

"For what he does, the Son will do also." – John 5:19

During a fellowship of the leaders of The Feast, the Sunday prayer gathering led by Bo Sanchez, people swarmed around Bo for picture taking.

A group of ladies waited excitedly for the photo opportunity. But the wait seemed to take forever. Then, Bene, Bo's eldest son, happened to pass by.

One of the ladies exclaimed, "Why don't we just have a picture with Bene!" So they asked Bene for a photo-op, and he gamely posed with them.

Bene is only 13 years old, but already, he has done some of the things his father has been doing. He has given a talk at The Feast. While Bo hosts *Kerygma TV*, Bene hosts *Mustard TV* for kids. Like Bo, Bene is venturing into entrepreneurship. He used to sell dried *bangus* (milkfish) when he was five.

In today's Gospel, Jesus affirms that He does what He sees His Father is doing. That, to me, is so comforting especially because in the first reading, God promises, "In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you" (Isaiah 49:8).

Rejoice! Jesus continues to fulfill His Father's promises today! *Cynthia U. Santiago (cusantiago@gmail.com)*

Reflection: God is working and Jesus is working for you — to this day!

HIS OWN WITNESS

"These works that I perform testify on my behalf." – John 5:36

I needed an architect for a construction job at home and my friend recommended his pal. "He'll do a good job because he owes me a lot. He'll be ashamed to foul up the job," he said. Although I had two other choices, it was my friend's assurance that made me choose his architect.

Unfortunately, his friend did a bad job. He used the wrong pipe size. His men were not well supervised and wasted time and materials. Worst of all, he overcharged. And to think he knew that I was paying him with borrowed money, which at the time I didn't know how to pay up!

Yes, it's what we do that speaks of us, more than what other people say about us.

In the Gospel, Jesus tried to explain that what John and other people said about Him are already worthwhile testimonies. Yet, He continued, "I do not accept testimony from a human being.... But I have testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father gave me to accomplish, these works that I perform testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me" (John 5:34, 36).

Jesus is not just "a friend's recommendation." He is everything that people say He is and more. If we open our hearts and our minds to what He does, we will know He is for real. *Cristy Galang (cristy_cc@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Do you experience how Jesus is moving in your life?

Jesus, I want to experience You more and more.

CRITICS

The Jews were trying to kill him. – John 7:1

You know who your critics are? They're people who think they know you, but they don't. They think they own you until they find out they don't. They want you to do their bidding — to think and act like them. But you won't.

So they will try to destroy you, malign you, curse you, and, if possible, kill you.

Jesus stayed in Galilee. It was a place of people who weren't "pure Jews." In fact, a "Galilean" may mean an "outsider," a "non-traditional Jew." And there, people believed Him. At the beginning of His ministry, He didn't wish to travel to Judea (then the Pharisaic center of Judaism, along with Jerusalem), because the Jews there were trying to kill Him, which they eventually did. Why would Jesus be hated by His own "brother-Jews"? In fact, why should it be difficult for a prophet to be honored in his own country, by his own people?

Simple. Because your own people think they know you. But they don't. They think they own you until they find out they don't. They want you to do their bidding — to think and act like them. But you won't. So... they will try to kill you.

Jews in Jesus' time. Critics in our time. *Alvin Barcelona (apb_ayo@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Who are your critics? Do they genuinely care for you and want to help you become a better person? Or are they simply out to destroy you? Ignore them if you can. And pray for them.

Dear Jesus, grant me the grace to be like You in forgiving my critics.

PREJUDICED

"Does our law condemn a man before it first hears him and finds out what he is doing?" – John 7:51

One of my weaknesses is interrupting my kids in mid-sentence, especially when I'm accusing them of wrongdoing. Tesa would begin, "You see, Dad, I sort of...." And I would finish her sentence for her reprovingly, "Forgot again?" Or even before Iani could start, I'd say, "So you're sorry, again?" Only to find out later that they were not really at fault.

Presumptions and biases are the waterloo of many people. It's so easy to judge others based on first impressions.

Once, a woman who had an imposing stature asked me a question with force and an air of authority. My immediate thought was that she was a hard woman, one who wouldn't take no for an answer and would always insist she was right. I concluded that she was the type of person who'd make things difficult for others. But minutes later, I discovered how pleasant she was. She had a positive and happy disposition with a flair for theatrics. She was funny and laughed at herself, too. She was a person with a good heart.

I was completely wrong.

Do not let outside appearances, past experiences or critical talk from other people lead you to pass negative judgment on others. *Jun Asis (mabuting.balita@gmail.com)*

Reflection: How often do you catch yourself putting down a person you barely know?

Lord, teach me to see with Your eyes and love with Your heart.

KEEP ON MOVING

"Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not." – Isaiah 43:18

Everything is going well in your life. And if you were to grade your spiritual life, you're confident that you'll receive a good mark on your performance. But you just can't shake off this feeling that you are in a rut. That you feel bored and are undergoing a dry spell. And no matter what prayer (or even worship) you do, it just feels that it does not cut it for you anymore, like it used to.

Here is a powerful secret to life: never stop growing. Keep on challenging yourself. Let us not cling to the past events of our lives.

If your past is filled with hurt, then forgive and move on to build a more loving future.

If your past is filled with mistakes, then learn from them and move on to build a stronger future. Even if your past is filled with blessings, then be grateful for them and move on to build a greater future for you. Never rest on your past successes. Cherish them but strive for bigger goals — ones that will continue to inspire you and the world around you.

Orange V. Garcia (orange_garcia@hotmail.com)

Reflection: Insanity is to expect a different result while doing the same things over and over again. Don't cling and get stuck to the past. Keep on moving.

Lord, may I be always grateful for all of the good in my life but never be content so as to be complacent. May I keep on striving higher even when struggling.

Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62 (or 13:41-62)
Psalm 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6 • John 8:12-20

A LOVE LIKE NO OTHER

"Eternal God, you know what is hidden and are aware of all things before they come to be..." – Daniel 13:42

I intercepted our priest right after the Mass at our office. I had been burdened with a sin I had committed and wanted to confess it immediately. We sat on two chairs in the garage and I sheepishly began my confession, "Father, it's the same sin I confessed last time."

Because this priest had been my spiritual adviser and had been hearing my confessions for some time, he knew me quite well. So I was surprised when he said, "I don't remember what your sin is and I'm not allowed to remember it."

I was floored by his compassion. It made me reflect that if a priest, a human being, can be this gracious when it comes to my sins, how much more my Merciful Savior?

God knows all things. He sees what was, what is and what will be. He knows our thoughts from afar. Even before a word is on our lips, He knows it completely. And even though He knows that we will sin, He still offers His love to us unconditionally. And He gives a fresh supply of His mercy every morning.

My puny, rational mind cannot comprehend a love like this. But I realize that I need not understand totally to accept God's love completely. *Rissa Singson-Kawpeng (justbreatherissa@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)

Lord, I receive the fullness of Your love and mercy today.

2 Samuel 7:4-5, 12-14, 16 • Psalm 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29
Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22 • **Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24** (or Luke 2:41-51)

WHERE HE SHOULD BE

"Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"
– Luke 2:49

My friend Dang was frantic with fear as she realized her little girl was no longer beside her. She called out her name and rushed from one store after another, hoping to find Danica in the midst of the bustling shoppers at the mall. Where could she be?

Two hours into the search, Dang, together with the mall security, finally found the precocious Danica at her favorite toy store, seated atop one of the mini slides. Dang rushed towards her daughter and hugged her, tears of relief rolling down her face. "Where have you been, Mom? Didn't you know I've been waiting for you here for a long time?" Dang could only smile at her indignant daughter. Danica wasn't lost — she had merely gone to the place where she loved to be.

Just as Danica upped and went to her favorite toy store, Jesus intended to go to the temple as soon as the Passover festival was over. I believe Jesus did not mean to cause His parents to worry; He merely went to the place where He knew He should be — in the presence of His heavenly Father. Such is the divine bond between Father and Son.

Dina Pecaña (dpecana@yahoo.com)

Reflection: Do you love being in the presence of the Father, away from the maddening crowd?

Lord Jesus, grant me the grace to draw near to the Father and abide in His presence always.

FREEDOM

Jesus answered them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin." – John 8:34

There was a man who was trying to cast out the devil from a possessed woman. He raised the crucifix in front of the woman but at the same time, he was fearful that the evil spirit would overpower him. "What? You expect me to be affected by that?" scoffed the woman. "You yourself don't believe in the person on the crucifix. How will I be afraid of that?"

The devil continued, "You're afraid that I might possess you? Ha! Get real! With everything that you think, say and do, I don't need to possess you. I already have you!"

Truly, the mildest form of possession is when we let evil enter our lives. When we entertain temptation. When we sin.

Admittedly, I have experienced not just entertaining sin but letting it rule me... oftentimes cluelessly. You see, it's so easy to miss something you are not consciously trying to avoid. I thank God that He gives me the grace to wake up and see how my sinful habits fool and enslave me.

We cannot hide our darkness from God. He sees right through us. But as He knows us through and through, we can be assured that we can open up to Him. It is in this stark honesty that I let His light consume my darkness. In Him I am set free. So will you be, if you let Him. *Jonathan Yogawin (jyogawin@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Today, make yourself vulnerable to the Lord. Be totally honest with Him. Let Him save you, heal you, love you.

Lord, You know me more than I know myself. I lay all my cards before You. Forgive me of my sins, Lord, and set me free.

Genesis 17:3-9 • Psalm 105:4-5, 6-7, 8-9
John 8:51-59

YOUR STORY WILL CONTINUE

"You are to become the father of a host of nations."
– Genesis 17:4

I'm turning 30 soon, and about to be a dad for the second time. It's an understatement to say that having children has changed me. I feel reborn, with the opportunity to see the world through fresh eyes as I live vicariously through their brand new experiences.

My kids help me look past the struggles of life, the difficulty of earning a living, the temptation to compare myself with people who are richer or more successful. Though a child is simple, she says so much to her parents: there is hope for the future; your story will continue.

At 99 years old, Abraham received an audacious promise from God: a son, and descendants. Abraham received hope. His story would continue. And his story foreshadowed what Jesus would accomplish.

Thanks to Jesus, our story will not end in defeat. The worst could happen in life, yet if we are in Christ, there is only ultimate victory for us.

Death does not have the last word. God's promise punctuates our life story. *Kiddo Cosio (twitter.com/kiddocosio)*

Reflection: What areas of your life need fresh hope?

Father, give me the eyes of a child filled with faith and hope for the future.

THE WORKS

"If I do not perform my Father's works, do not believe me!"
– John 10:37

I've seen miracles greater than the dancing sun, the blind regaining sight and the dead rising to life. The greatest miracles for me are changed lives!

Behold my miracle list: A drug addict transformed into a person spiritually "high" in the Lord. A person who sold his soul to the devil transformed into an evangelist. A bloodthirsty man transformed into a godly peacemaker. A near-zombie, passive bum of a man transformed into an enthusiastic Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. A suicidal transformed into an all-out servant leader of a big community. A homosexual transformed into a living spiritual refuge for people struggling with same-sex-attraction. A gambler transformed into a passionate fulltime missionary of the Pearl of Great Price.

You may ask, how did these miracles come to be? Because of one hard-hitting influence. One life-changing witnessing. One story of transformation.

Because your personal history is His Story.

You were changed by One.

Now, go into the whole world and change another one.

Obet Cabrillas (kpreacherobet@gmail.com)

Reflection: Are you swayed by "worldly" history? Be His Story! Witness about God with your very own life!

Lord, let my life be a testament to Your amazing grace

UNFAIR!

He did not say this on his own, but since he was high priest for that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation.
– John 11:51

I was diligently working on a project that I felt was being ignored by my boss and the rest of the staff. But I kept going and progressed. When it was time to present the accomplishments, I was required to travel abroad to meet with my foreign counterparts. It was a welcome consolation for me, considering the seemingly lack of local support.

But as I was preparing for my trip, my boss suddenly re-assigned my project to a colleague. What's more, he took the trip away from me. Arrrgh! My mind was all set to rebel. Everyone around me, including the other managers, told me to complain. I was upset, but thank God I didn't do anything drastic.

There are times that God uses "unfair" people to execute "unfair" situations to carry out His purpose and will. Today's Gospel reading is a classic example. Although Caiaphas was a corrupt leader, he was still the high priest and God used his pronouncements to prophesy His will.

My boss may have been in the wrong but he still had the authority. Ironically, he was the one who recommended me to be promoted a few months later. The blessing was great, but God's lesson to me was priceless. *Ariel Druz (adruz77@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Do you respond well to the unfairness around you?

Lord, help me to [illegible] what is the [illegible] about [illegible] and [illegible] that [illegible] You are transforming me. Amen

Isaiah 50:4-7 • Psalm 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24
Philippians 2:6-11 • **Luke 22:14-23:56** (or Luke 23:1-49)

IT IS FINISHED

When He had said this He breathed His last. – Luke 23:46

I use a planner. There I list everything I need to do. And whenever I finish something, it feels good to check it as done.

On the Cross, it was as if Jesus took a big pen and drew a huge check over all the things God had called Him to do when He said, "It is finished."

Three words that marked the end of the greatest act of injustice. At the same time, three words that signaled the completion of the greatest act of love.

In other words, mission accomplished.

Jesus completed His mission, and we can, too. Believe it or not, God has the same fantastic purpose for our life!

So, I encourage you today to seek that purpose and strive to fulfill it. Find ways to do what you were made to do and work towards fulfilling that call every day.

In doing these, you will see how God can use you and bless your life.

Friend, let's carry out our mission. So that at the end, when we come home to heaven, we can proudly say, in all victory, "Father, mission accomplished. It is finished."

Mike Viñas (mikemichaelfcv@yahoo.com)

Reflection: What is God's amazing blueprint for your life?

Father, reveal to me my marching orders and empower me to step into my destiny every day.

Isaiah 42:1-7 • Psalm 27:1, 2, 3, 13-14
John 12:1-11

OPPORTUNIST

He (Judas) said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief and held the moneybag and used to steal the contributions. – John 12:6

Typhoon Sendong wreaked havoc in southern Philippines days before Christmas 2011. Filipinos and the international community immediately put together efforts to give aid to its victims.

A friend posted on his Facebook wall, asking people to recommend to him a reliable organization through which he could course his donations in kind. *That's a good question*, I thought. Because there were reported instances in the past wherein relief goods never reached the donees in calamity-stricken areas. What happened? The goods were most likely intercepted by the Judases of today.

It is disquieting to know that there are people who take advantage of dire situations for their own benefit. Thank God that there are those who keep watch, securing the interest of those in need.

This Holy Monday, as we begin reflecting on the passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, may we also share in His compassion for the needy without wanting anything in return.

Nova Arias-Sevilla (nova.svp@gmail.com)

Reflection: Do you share your resources with the needy wholeheartedly?

Lord Jesus, teach me to extend my arms to our less fortunate brothers and sisters. Amen.

RIPPLE EFFECT

"I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." – Isaiah 49:6

I once rode a yacht to Batangas. When we were far out at sea, I happened to glance backward and noticed that our boat had created a huge wake in the shape of a letter V. I can imagine that from the top view the waves had already probably stretched very far from their origin.

Using the ripple effect theory and the principle of inertia, if there were no loss of momentum and no friction of atoms, those waves would keep going on and on and until they reach the other side of the globe — maybe even go full circle.

The prophet Isaiah is telling us that God wants us to become His light to the nations so that His salvation will reach the ends of the earth. I believe this is possible simply through our loving acts. When we perform a loving act to someone, it compels that person to love as well — because love begets love. And when that person performs a loving act to another, that other person in turn is encouraged to do the same to another. Just like a ripple effect, the small act of kindness you do can create a wave of love that goes far beyond our reach. For all you know, your loving act may have already reached halfway across the globe. *George Tolentino Gabriel (george.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: When was the last time someone made you feel loved? When was the last time you performed a loving act?

Lord, may I never cease doing good and loving others. Use me to create ripples and waves of love.

DOWRY

Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" – Matthew 26:14-15

A dowry is money, goods or estate that a woman gives her husband in marriage in certain cultures. Sometimes, when the groom demands a large sum of money and the dowry given is not sufficient, the groom or his family resorts to burning the bride and reports it as suicide or accidental burning. This is a modern-day crime that takes place in countries like India, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

If the family is wealthy, they give a huge dowry. This is to ensure that the couple will have a good start, or, if anything happens to the husband, the wife and children will have ample provision.

God, in desiring to have a relationship with us, gave the very best dowry of all time — His only Son. He wanted to make sure that we would be well provided for and have the best life ever with His dowry offering, if we accepted His proposal.

If you're not yet having the best life, then maybe you haven't accepted God's dowry yet. *Ronna Ledesma (ronna_ledesma@yahoo.com.ph)*

Reflection: God has already given everything to you — signed, sealed, delivered. Have you accepted the package already?

Father, thank You for giving me Your very best. May I always give You my utmost also.

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14 • Psalm 116:12-13, 15-16, 17-18
1 Corinthians 11:23-26 • **John 13:1-15**

THE CHOSEN

"If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet." – John 13:14

In a timeworn monastery in the woods, there were only five old monks remaining. The religious order was dying.

One day, a wise rabbi pitched a hut close to the monastery. The humble abbot took advantage of the chance to receive counsel from the wise rabbi. "God has chosen one of the brothers to be the real savior of this congregation," the rabbi advised. "Serve him with all of your heart. Then miracles will happen to the monastery. The Order will flourish again."

"But who is this chosen one?" asked the abbot.

"Nobody knows. But all of you will, when the time comes," replied the rabbi.

When the abbot shared this news with the brothers, each in his own mind decided a fail-proof strategy: "Serve each brother with my all. This way, I won't miss serving 'the chosen.'" Suddenly, all of the brothers were radiant with happiness. Their ministries became vibrant and that caught the attention of visitors. Many were again attracted to their order. Life came back, not just to the monastery, but most importantly, in the monks' hearts.

Now they know: The one who serves is the chosen one. The real washing of the feet is nothing sentimental. True humility is service. Period. *Jon Escoto (faithatworkjon@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Who in your circle can you serve, even in little things?

Jesus, You loved Your disciples to perfection. Let me experience this today so I may serve the way You do. Amen.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 • Psalm 31:2, 6, 12-13, 15-16, 17, 25
Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9 • **John 18:1-19:42**

WHAT MATTERS MOST

"I thirst." – John 19:28

When Matthew and I go to a coffee shop, we contentedly sip coffee, feast on a sandwich, and then sometimes, watch people.

Once, we saw a white-haired, elderly couple with wrinkled brows sweetly sharing a meal. Sigh. How nice to watch love that's been tested by time blossom. Then there was also a couple with misbehaving kids who were giving their parents a hard time. We wonder how we would have handled the situation if they were our own kids. Further on, we saw two friends seated across each other. They were ceaselessly tapping their fingers on the keyboard of their laptops, logged on to Facebook, while busy doing other stuff. Even if these two friends were together, it made me wonder, why would they rather talk to other people in cyberspace and not to each other?

How sad, we thought, as my husband and I held hands and took a ride home.

Gone are the days when people talk to friends and look them in the eye. Our relationship with Jesus and the people around us are what matter most in life, but sometimes technology has not helped us much in this area.

Many are thirsty for our love and attention. Have we become too busy to give it? *Marisa Aguas (jojangaguas@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: This Good Friday, hug a friend. It doesn't take much to share Jesus' love.

Jesus, I [illegible] relationships that You have given me.

Good Friday

Blessed Ludovico of Casoria, pray for us.

KENOSIS

You too must think of yourselves as being dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus. – Romans 6:11

Death. Emptiness. Nothingness. I used to think negatively of these words. They denote cessation and voidness after all. But as I journey towards spiritual maturity and grow wiser in my faithwalk, I suddenly see these words in a more positive light.

I know that I need to empty myself and die to my selfishness, unforgiveness, hatred, anger, bitterness and apprehensions — so that the fullness of Christ can dwell in me.

One of my first learnings in my first community is the acronym of CHRIST-I-A-N. It can either mean without CHRIST, I Am Nothing or with CHRIST, I Act Now.

I decided that the old me should die so that I can have room for Christ in my heart. It's a tough decision I have to make every day.

This Lenten season, let us be reminded that our lives are but borrowed from above and our bodies are not our own. The moment we accept Christ into our lives, the old self is gone. We have now become new creations in Christ. *Ems Sy Chan (havenofleeanne@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:24)

Father, help us die to ourselves every day so that Christ can gain a foothold in our lives and dwell in our hearts forever. Amen.

Acts 10:34, 37-43 • Psalm 118: 1-2, 16-17, 22-23 • **Colossians 3:1-4**
(or 1 Corinthians 5:6-8) • John 20:1-9 (or Matthew 28 1-10)

EASTER EVERY DAY

Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. – Colossians 3:2-3

As a newborn, my son thoroughly enjoyed bath times. Today, at two years old, he still loves them, but I find that I've got more grime to clear off when he bathes. Since he plays outside and gets really filthy, I have to work extra hard to get him scrubbed and clean. But I don't mind, because at the end of every bath, he's a sweet little boy all over again, smelling fresh and clean as he did when he was a newborn.

This Easter Sunday, our Heavenly Father looks at us in the same way: sweet, clean and new, like a newly bathed baby. Why? Because today, we celebrate the wisdom of God's ultimatum: Jesus paid for our sins, and now all is new.

But what if we fall into sin and beat ourselves up with guilt? What if the world lures us away from our so-called "holy" life? This is the Good News of Easter. Christ is risen, and His Holy Spirit dwells in us, because of what happened that first Easter Sunday. So let's claim our power and use it, in Jesus' Name, to live each day as the new creation Christ made us to be. *Martine De Luna (the.dainty.mom@gmail.com)*

Reflection: The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you. (Romans 8:11)

Thank You Jesus for what You did for me. I will spend my life living for You

Easter Sunday

St Stephen of Mar Saba, pray for us.

Acts 2:14, 22-33 • Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11
Matthew 28:8-15

DO IT AFRAID

Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid." – Matthew 28:10

In my preaching ministry, I had to "do it afraid" many times.

The first time I had to talk to 10,000 people at the *Araneta Coliseum,* I was afraid. I was 16 years old. While waiting for my name to be called, I was literally shaking in my knees. My heart was pounding so loudly, I wondered if the people beside me could hear it.

I asked myself, "What am I doing here? What was I thinking saying yes to give a talk to this humongous crowd? For crying out loud, I'm 16 years old. I have nothing to tell them!"

But I remember telling myself that day, "I'm here to love them, not to impress them. Let them laugh at me. Let them boo me off the stage. It's OK. I'm here to love them."

My name was called. I stepped on stage. I did it afraid and loved them. Before I knew it, my fear was gone.

That wasn't the last time I did it afraid. And here's what I noticed. God expanded my ministry to the degree I was willing to "do it afraid."

It's the same with life. Your life will only grow in direct proportion to your willingness to "do it afraid."

You can't even follow God if you won't "do it afraid."

Bo Sanchez (bosanchez@kerygmafamily.com)

Reflection: Is God calling you to do something that you are afraid to do? Face your fear. God is bigger than your fear.

Make me courageous, Lord, to follow You wherever You may lead.

A BLESSING TESTIMONY

Mary went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord."
– John 20:18

My genius friend is an addict.

A "God addict," that is.

He is such an addict that he started this Facebook group called: "*Anong Blessing Mo Ngayon?*" ("What's Your Blessing Today?") As I write this, it already has 1,084 members, and counting. And the best part is, the 1,084 are already God addicts, too.

Obviously, your post should answer the perpetual question: "*Anong Blessing Mo Ngayon?*" And you'll be surprised at the various answers written there! Some could be as deep as "Thank You, Father God, for making me the person you want me to be now," or as trivial as, "Another day with great breakfast!" Whatever the blessing may be, it's drawn from the heart and shouted out to the world!

Imagine if Mary Magdalene had this Facebook group when she saw the risen Lord. Hers would be the blessing to top off all other blessings! But even without Facebook, she was able to spread the Good News and became a blessing to many people because of her faith. *Migs Ramirez (migoy3@gmail.com)*

Reflection: What small and big blessings did you receive today? Are you bold enough to share these blessings to others?

Jesus, make me aware of the countless blessings You bestow on me every day. Help me to share these blessings with others, especially to those who are in need. Amen.

A QUIET HEART

But their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. – Luke 24:16

When I fled from my own hometown due to a big conflict between me and a close relative, the pain was so intense. It was difficult to see beyond it.

In our story today, the disciples going to Emmaus must have been in so deep a sorrow over the death of Jesus that they couldn't see that the Resurrected One was already standing before them.

In the deep sorrows, trials and confusions of our lives, we need to imitate the reaction of Jesus' mother, Mary. What could be more astounding than to learn that you, a virgin, will be pregnant with the awaited Messiah, the Savior of mankind? And what could be more confusing and frightening when doing so might mean your death — for pregnancy out of wedlock was punishable by stoning? But Mary "kept these things in her heart." Thus, she recognized God's plan and cooperated with Him.

Like Mary, let us learn to be quiet, to listen to God's ways in our lives and gain understanding through them. In the end, by His grace, we will be able to say yes to His plans for our lives. *Joy Sosoban (jsosoban@gmail.com)*

Reflection: You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. (Isaiah 26:3)

Dear Lord, grant me the grace of a quiet heart like Mary's. Enable me to listen to You and follow You. Amen.

Acts 3:11-26 • Psalm 8:2, 5, 6-7, 8-9
Luke 24:35-48

MARRIED TO A WALL

"Now I know, brothers and sisters, that you acted out of ignorance."
– Acts 3:17

I found this entry in *Ripley's Believe It or Not:* "Driven by love for the Berlin Wall, Eija-Riitta Berliner-Mauer of Sweden married it in 1979 and took its name as her surname."

It's obviously crazy to marry a wall. We may not do something as bizarre but are we any different in our love for material things?

How about the husband who pours time and money on his car and yells at his wife and children if they so much as scratch its glossy finish or spill something inside its pristine interior?

How about the mother who watches *telenovelas* nonstop rather than sit with her child who needs help with homework?

How about the career-driven person who backstabs a colleague to get ahead in the corporate rat race?

How about the employee who takes home office supplies to save on his kids' school supplies?

Many times we act like we are ignorant of the fact that people and values are more important than things. Let us consciously seek to know God's ways and His will so that we can act like the Christians that we're supposed to be. *Lella M. Santiago (mirellasantiago@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What worldly thing has become more important to you than God, values and relationships?

Lord, help me to make You my Number One.

DO YOU WANT TO SEE JESUS?

When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. – John 21:4

I stared at the picture of a sick child posted in the elevator. The boy was only seven years old and looked very frail. His body was skinny but his tummy was bloated. He had a liver ailment and needed a major operation. Below his picture were contact numbers and a bank account where one can make a donation.

Then I reached my office floor and I stepped out of the elevator unmoved by the child's plea for help. I justified my reaction by thinking, "A lot of people will read that poster and the child will get enough donations."

Three weeks later, I received an email from our HR officer. It was about the same sick child. I don't know what happened to me but I suddenly felt guilty about the way I had acted a few weeks back. I asked forgiveness from God because I didn't see Jesus in the helpless child. I gave a personal donation and also enjoined a few friends to give.

In today's reading, the disciples, too, didn't immediately recognize Jesus. They only realized it was Him when He gave them instructions. Initially, I also didn't see Jesus in the sick child needing help. I forgot that Jesus said that loving Him includes helping the sick, visiting the prisoner and feeding the hungry. *Alvin Fabella (alvinfabella@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Don't experience Jesus through prayers and Mass only. Experience His presence when you help others who are in need.

Jesus, let my faith come alive as I see and serve You in others.

OVERCOMING DOUBT

When they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe. – Mark 16:11

Think of a wake you last visited. You saw the casket in front, and maybe even the dead person, if you're the kind who doesn't mind looking at the corpse. You saw the grieving relatives and loved ones. You smelled the crowns of flowers that crowded the room. Maybe you were even present when they finally buried that person.

Now, a common friend reports to you that she just saw that dead person. He even talked to her!

Would you believe such a preposterous story?

The exact same thing happened to the Apostles. They were nervous when they first heard that Mary had seen the Risen Lord. That was perfectly normal. But when Jesus revealed Himself to assure them that He had conquered death, the news empowered them to preach the Word of God and make believers.

If the Apostles had let their doubts get the best of them, maybe there wouldn't be any Christians today and the cross would still be a symbol of shame.

But we know how the story went. And today, that shameful cross is a symbol of God's love and salvation. *JPaul Hernandez (jpaulmh@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What's keeping you from serving God fully?

How else can I use my personality, talents and resources to propagate the Gospel?

Acts 5:12-16 • Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24
Revelation 1:9-11, 12-13, 17-19 • **John 20:19-31**

NO FEAR

When the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst. — John 20:19

Many years ago, I attended a seminar in the U.S. In one of the sessions, each group had to brainstorm a particular case study and present their solution to the class. To my surprise, I was chosen by my American group mates to be the presenter. I was trembling inside for I felt I didn't have a full understanding of the case because of time pressure.

Armed with a few notes, I began my presentation. The instructor asked me some questions and I was able to answer them. When I returned to my seat, my group mates were all smiles. One of them even told me, "I couldn't have possibly done what you did."

In today's Gospel, Jesus' disciples were locked in a room for fear of the Jews, probably thinking that they would suffer the same fate as their Master. But when Jesus showed Himself and breathed His Spirit on them, all their fears were washed away. They had renewed courage to fulfill their God-given mission.

We may have fears that dominate our lives and we hide behind locked doors. Let Jesus' Spirit enter the closed door of our hearts and break us free from the fears that have chained us for so long. *Judith Concepcion (svp_jmc@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What are you afraid of? Know that God is with you in the midst of your fears.

I surrender my fears to You, O Lord. Fill me with Your peace.

Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10 • Psalm 40:7-8, 8-9, 10, 11
Hebrews 10:4-10 • Luke 1:26-38

THE PRESENCE

The virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel. – Isaiah 7:14

A wide arid land. Then finally abundance. And it was a Presence that changed the landscape of the land.

That was the sense I got when I had my conversion experience. On that day when I met Immanuel — God with us — my barren existence became full of life and color. The loneliness was replaced with joy through God's presence.

Immanuel, God with us, is a name and characteristic of our Lord that I treasure dearly. Living away from home since I was 10 years old to study in another city, I found a faithful Companion and Friend in Jesus that assuaged my loneliness. In His Person, I found a cause greater than anything that my idealist tendencies could look for. Meeting Him was a pivotal moment in my life, which has not been the same since.

Recognizing the Presence, who was actually there all the time, changed things for me.

How about you? *Joy Sosoban(jsosoban@gmail.com)*

Reflection: He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

Dearest Lord, enlighten my spiritual heart and my mind to see your presence.

Acts 4:32-37 • Psalm 93:1, 1-2, 5
John 3:7-15

WINDSURFING

The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. – John 3:8

I'm not athletic. I'm not a surfer. But as a travel show host, I go through different challenges. In Boracay, I had to learn windsurfing.

First, check for the wind's direction. I didn't know where it would blow or how strong it would be. I had to be more sensitive to the wind's changing directions. Then I got on the sailboard. While keeping my balance, I pulled the rig up with the sail. It slipped, fell, and so did I. Splash!

I pulled it up again, decisively, carefully, until it was stable. Holding on to the boom helped me move the sail to ride the wind. Next thing I knew, I was windsurfing! Awesome!

I see in this sport an analogy for my Christian life. The sail is my commitment. God is the wind. My commitment catches the wind and I let the power of God move me.

Today's Gospel talks about being born again, born in the Spirit. To begin living a new life, I must decide to commit to God, to love Him and let Him be my wind. *Carlo Lorenzo (carloflorenzo@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Remain committed to God even when you can't understand where He is leading you.

Father, You are my wind. Make me sensitive to follow Your leading.

Acts 5:17-26 • Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9
John 3:16-21

ANGELS ON ASSIGNMENT

But during the night, the angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison, led them out... – Acts 5:19

I watched the video waiting for the "miraculous rescue" that the newscaster had referred to before the segment came on. The footage showed a woman in her SUV being sucked in by a flash flood. She couldn't escape because she couldn't swim and she kept all four windows shut to keep the water out.

With the car almost engulfed by the muddy waters, a guy reached her and tried desperately to break a window with a stick. No luck. Soon, five other rescuers had arrived. But by then, her car was completely submerged. Suddenly, one of the rescuers on top of her car felt her hand grasp his through an opening in the window. He pulled her out of the water to safety.

Where was the miraculous rescue there? When the car was towed from the water, all four windows were closed! No one could explain how the woman got out of her car.

We, who believe in God's power, know exactly how she was rescued. Angels aren't stuff of fairy tales or folklore. Hebrews 1:14 says, "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

Yes, angels are all around us, protecting us, directing our ways and leading us closer to our Lord. Have you prayed to your guardian angel to lead you today? *Rissa Singson-Kawpeng (justbreatherissa@gmail.com)*

Reflection: For (God) will order His angels to protect you wherever you go. (Psalm 91:11)

Dear Guardian Angel, be at my side to guard and protect me today.

Acts 5:27-33 • Psalm 34:2, 9, 17-18, 19-20
John 3:31-36

IN WEAKNESS THERE'S STRENGTH

"He does not ration his gift of the Spirit." – John 3:34

Ann cannot move by herself. She is bedridden and experiences frequent muscular pains and headaches. Yet she wakes up at 3 a.m. to pray for people who ask for her prayers. She also uses her toes to compose inspirational text messages and sends them to her friends and even strangers who request for her prayers.

Fatima is blind, but through her music and jolly spirit, she inspires millions to trust in God despite their trials.

Jessica is armless but she hurdles through life using the power of her two feet and legs. As a motivational speaker, she goes around the globe to encourage people to pursue their dreams with persistence and creativity.

Ann, Fatima and Jessica are only a few of the countless people I know who have some form of handicap. But our God is a God who gives so much more than what our physical bodies could do for us. He is a God of balance — what we think and feel we lack, He compensates in other ways.

We only have to look beyond what our eyes can see and realize that He has given us sufficient gifts to achieve our purpose in life. *Tess V. Atienza (svp_tvatienza@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: How do you see your weaknesses? Do you allow them to obstruct the fulfillment of your mission in life?

Lord Jesus, thank You for the gifts You have given me. May I learn to use my weaknesses in serving You, too.

Acts 5:34-42 • Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14
John 6:1-15

WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

When they had had their fill, he said to his disciples, "Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted." – John 6:12

As a child, my parents taught my siblings and me not to waste food (among other resources). My dad, in particular, insisted that we always eat everything on our plate, saying that there were many hungry kids all over the world who were not as materially blessed as we were. This is something I am, in turn, trying to teach my own children: to be grateful for what we have, and not to waste whatever blessings and resources God has given us.

We recently welcomed the Easter season, which was preceded by 40 days of Lent — a time for prayer, reflection, fasting and good works. It was a time for self-denial and sharing our blessings with others.

We need to remember, though, that denying one's self and sharing with others shouldn't just be a Lenten practice but something we must do every day. We shouldn't waste the time, talent and treasure God has given us. Instead, we should allow these to be blessed, used and multiplied so that others can benefit from them. *Tina Santiago-Rodriguez (teachermamatina@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Think about what you can do to reduce wastage of food and other resources in your home. Also, offer your time, talent and treasure in service to God.

[illegible]

I WALKED ON WATER

"It is I. Do not be afraid."– John 6:20

I once walked on water. Don't be impressed. I had a pair of ice skates on and the water was solid ice.

When I was a teenager — not too long ago — I lived in Minneapolis, Minnesota as an exchange student. Minneapolis is known for its beautiful lakes that freeze throughout winter time, so people go ice skating on them.

Friends brought me to one of those lakes and taught me how to ice skate. I slipped and ripped my pants on the knees, but once I got the hang of it, I enjoyed the sport immensely. But at the back of my mind, I was afraid the lake would thaw and I would plunge into the icy water.

So, I can relate with the Apostles in today's Gospel when they tremble in fear as they see Jesus walking on flowing water. But Jesus tells them, "It is I; don't be afraid."

Now, every time I walk on the dangerous waters of life's trials, I keep in mind Jesus' words. I focus on Him, and I am no longer afraid. I imagine myself simply ice skating on solid ice that, with Jesus, will not possibly thaw. *Cynthia U. Santiago (cusantiago@gmail.com)*

Reflection: You'll never walk alone.

Lord, let me look straight to You, especially when I feel like drowning in my troubles.

Acts 5:27-32, 40-41 • Psalm 30: 2, 4, 5-6, 11-12, 13
Revelation 5:11-14 • **John 21:1-19**

DO YOU LOVE ME?

Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." – John 21:16

It was the worst snow storm to hit Seattle in years. We were scheduled to fly from Hoboken, New Jersey to Seattle to conduct a management workshop for the leaders of our community, Bukas Loob Sa Diyos (BLD). My husband, Raul, was shifting back and forth between watching the TV news and making phone calls to our district stewards in Seattle until 2 a.m. A few hours before take-off, we finally decided to brave the storm. Everything was in God's hands.

Our plane was the last to land at the Sea-Tac International Airport that day. All incoming flights were subsequently diverted to other nearby airports. Our host was nowhere in sight as they were not able to negotiate the icy road to the airport. After a long wait in the cold outside the terminal, we took a Shuttle Express van. There was snow everywhere.

When we got to our drop-off point, there they were — Tony and Auring, our hosts in BLD Seattle. All our difficulties and anxieties vanished with their welcoming smile. On the day of the workshop, the sun came out and the snow melted away. When you obey God's Word, as we did in "tending His lambs," all will be well. It's the promise of the Lord. *Mari Sison-Garcia (mari_sison_garcia@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Today, surrender all your doubts and anxieties to the Lord and have peace in your heart.

God, teach me to always be there as we go about tending You and tending Your lambs.

BLESSING OR BLESSER

"You are looking for me… because you ate the loaves and were filled." – John 6:26

St. Thomas Aquinas is said to be the most scholarly among the saints and the most saintly among the scholars. A miracle happened to him when Jesus at the crucifix came alive and spoke to him saying, "You have written well of Me, Thomas. What would you desire as a reward?" In tears, he replied, "Nothing, Lord. I'm doing it all for You."

Scholars note that such a reply was the mark of the wisdom of the church doctor. Because why would you settle for anything when, by doing it all for Jesus and choosing God alone, you have everything?

Choose the "Blesser" and you get all the blessings you need.

Jesus never stopped blessing the people in His time. He healed them. Even fed them. Yet, He reminded them to desire the "Eternal Giver" more than the temporal gifts.

He fed them with "earthly bread" which is to meet a physical, practical and immediate need. But He taught them to receive the "Bread of Life" that will lead them to eternity.

Alvin Barcelona (apb_ayo@yahoo.com)

Reflection: Do your gifts from God lead you to desire more than the Giver? Or do you simply want the blessings but reject the "Blesser"?

"I ask for nothing, Lord. I'm doing it all for You."

THE LORD OF THE SERVICE

So Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven." – John 6:32

The email and blog ministry MabutingBalita.net has been going on since 2004. I started it using Bo's old articles, that I had to re-type word for word! It now includes many contributed articles from friends. There were times when I'd receive praise for the inspiration it provides. The compliments would make me feel good about myself but God would remind me that it is He who does all these and I am just one of His instruments. He constantly impresses on me that the true mark of any Christian service is when the servant diminishes and the Lord shines.

Sometimes, we start doing things for the Lord with the right "heart-set." When things go right and we get accolades and recognition from all around, our human mind and pride start to work against us and we fail to point to the True Author of our work. We must be on the alert to catch ourselves when this happens.

Our achievements, success and good deeds should always point to God. It is important to keep our eyes and hearts set on the Lord of the Service and not on the one who serves. *Jun Asis (mabuting.balita@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Are you serving to receive praise and recognition or do you really want the Lord to be glorified in what you do?

Acts 8:1-8 • Psalm 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7
John 6:35-40

EAT YOUR HEART OUT

"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst" – John 6:35

It was our Caring Group's Christmas celebration. It was also the birthday of one of the brothers, so he and his wife hosted our dinner. They laid an abundant feast before us! There was veggie salad, stuffed turkey, roasted pork, fish, squid, shrimps and other dishes. There was also a variety of desserts and drinks.

After eating, we felt we needed to confess the sin of gluttony! But this couple-host's generosity didn't stop there. They even sent us home with more food for our kids!

If our friends could be immensely generous with us, how much more our big God? He has blessed me with loving family members and friends. He has given my husband a well-paying job so we can send our son to college. He healed my husband and my son when they were both down with flu. He hears my prayers for loved ones who are sick. He gave us a faithful househelp when many are looking for helpers. He allowed us to get a 10-year multiple-entry U.S. visa. He keeps us safe and protected.

Indeed, our God is amazing! He fills and satisfies us. With Him, we will never go hungry and never be thirsty.

Sol Saura (sol_saura@yahoo.com)

Reflection: Whoever has God lacks nothing: God alone is enough. (St. Teresa of Avila)

Lord, You are the Bread of Life. We believe that You shall fill our every need.

TAUGHT BY THE LORD

"It is written in the prophets: 'They shall all be taught by God.'"
– John 6:45

I'm the editor-in-chief of Shepherd's Voice Publications. When people ask me what course I took in college, I smirk and answer, "Computer Science. It's actually close to my job because I type on the computer every day."

My service in the community to which I belonged started me off in my career as a writer. I was still a student when I began to write for our community newsletter. Years later, our tiny publishing ministry turned professional. We came out with a monthly Christian magazine that was for sale. Our editor-in-chief, a servant of the Lord like me, was a former *Wall Street Journal* editor. She personally mentored me in editing. Then, much later, I took a course in the US on magazine writing.

Looking back, most of the expertise that I earn from today are skills I acquired from years of serving the Lord. Without any thought for a lucrative career, I offered my life to God as a young person, serving in whatever way God asked me to at the time. For His part, God was pouring upon me gifts that I could later use to earn a living. How true that when you seek God's Kingdom first, He will add everything else unto you (Matthew 6:33). *Rissa Singson-Kawpeng (justbreatherissa@gmail.com)*

Reflection: When God wants to do His great works He trains somebody to be quiet enough and little enough, then He uses that person. (J. Hudson Taylor)

Lord, teach me Your ways and use me to build Your Kingdom on earth.

SIDELINE

"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" – Acts 9:4

I was once hard-line with my convictions. I subscribed to an ideology that placed me "left of center" in the political spectrum and I reveled in my belief that I was serving my country by being "radical," by joining farmers and the marginalized in protest marches against the oppressive administration, and supporting the ousting of foreign military bases in the country. I may not have persecuted Christians but I turned away from Jesus and made an ideology my way of life.

I try to place myself in Paul's shoes at that very moment when Jesus asked him the life-changing question in the above verse. "Dina, Dina, why have you forgotten Me? Why did you choose an ideology over Me?" I could only bow my head in shame and cry tears of remorse. While change for the good was what I had intended to help bring about, there's no excuse for purposely pushing Jesus to the sideline.

I look back to my "old life" and feel no regret but only thankfulness to Christ who called me by name. He healed me of my "blind" belief and taught me the divine ideology: only faith in Him will bring about real change and lead us to eternal life. *Dina Pecaña (dpecana@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: The Lord works from the inside out. The world works from the outside in. The world would take people out of the slums. Christ would take the slums out of people, and then they would take themselves out of the slums. (Ezra Taft Benson)

Forgive me, Jesus, for the times I chose lesser things over You.

SHREK AND DONKEY

"This saying is hard; who can accept it?" – John 6:60

In the movie *Shrek*, Donkey was already halfway across a shaky old bridge in their quest to save Princess Fiona. But he wanted to quit, afraid that he might fall into the hot lava below. Shrek assured him that he wouldn't leave his side, but that didn't pacify Donkey. With nowhere to go, Donkey continued to voice out his fears while Shrek pushed him forward, one step at a time. Before he realized it, Donkey had already crossed the bridge unharmed.

How many times do we find ourselves in front of a dream, problem or challenge that we put off facing head-on because we're daunted by the giant risks ahead of us?

Healing a relationship, creating good habits, forgiving someone who wronged us and devoting time to regularly serve are only a few things in a long list we may consider as difficult to do. But when we do it with God's empowerment, nothing is formidable — only joys shared and love achieved.

You might even be surprised that just by taking the first step with God, you've already crossed the bridge. *Dreus Cosio (andreus.cosio@gmail.com)*

Reflection: What is God calling me to do that I find difficult? The Lord assures us, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

Lord Jesus, I receive Your love today. Always remind me that there is nothing You and I cannot do together. Amen.

MORE THAN ASKING

"My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me."
– John 10:27

Today, as soon as I open my eyes, the first thing that comes forth from my lips is, "Thank You, Lord."

Many years ago, when I was in the middle of a financial crisis, waking up was a struggle for me. I knew that as soon as I awoke, the problem would hit me right in the eye. I had credit card debts, and I was also being hounded by investors of a failed business that my cousin and I had put up. Those were dark days for me, and all I would do was worry, cry and get mad. I didn't know where or whom to turn to.

I couldn't even tell my husband. But one day, he found out and talked to me. His words hit me hard. "Have you asked God to help you? I'm sure He talks to you, but do you listen?" Then he led me to pray. As we did, my whole body, especially my heart, was on fire. Because as I laid out my problems to Him, a different calmness took over me. The key to prayer, which I learned that day, was to talk to God and then listen.

As I listened to God, I also learned to trust in Him until my faith became stronger.

Prayer is much more than asking. To pray is also to listen and to follow Him. *Chelle Crisanto (ellehcmaria@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: We are the sheep of the Lord. Listen to His voice because we know that no one can snatch us out of His hand.

Lord, I need to learn from You. Speak to me and fill my heart with the humility to obey.

FULL LIFE IN BEING CHILDLIKE!

"I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly." – John 10:10

Babies have special powers to captivate anyone. They have tantalizing eyes that can melt you with their gaze. They have little cute noses whose sneezes can make you giggle. They have angelic smiles and laughter. They have an amazing appetite. (I always wonder how babies get chubby just by taking milk.)

What's even more amazing is their capacity to love you back.

Through their little eyes.

Through their little smiles.

Through their little gestures.

Babies are living wonders because they never lose their sense of wonder. They are little packages of hope!

Pablo Picasso once said that every child is an artist. The challenge is how to keep this artist alive for the rest of your life.

Someone said that in heaven, there's a sign that says: "For Children Only. Adults Not Allowed!"

You want to live life to the fullest?

Avoid childishness; practice childlikeness.

Because from a pure heart comes a full life! *Obet Cabrillas (kpreacherobet@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Are you childish and immature, or childlike and pure?

My Father in Heaven, let me live like Your child here on earth.

Acts 11:19-26 • Psalm 87:1-3, 4-5, 6-7
John 10:22-30

ALL QUESTIONS ANSWERED

"If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." – John 10:24

Will I accept this service in our community? Should I continue to entertain this suitor? Which dress should I wear — the red or the pink?

If God has spoken plainly to some people in the past, can He also speak plainly to me when I'm in a dilemma?

I have asked God all these questions before — from the life-changing questions to the mundane or even vain. Believe me, He has answered them all... but not always plainly. Many times, He gives His answers through circumstances, the people around me or my prayer time. On a few occasions, He made things plain and clear. It really doesn't matter much how He speaks. What's more important is that our hearts are ready to listen to His voice and we obey Him.

Did I accept the service being asked of me? Yes. God spoke to me through my circumstances and Scripture.

Did I continue to entertain that suitor? Yes. God spoke to me through someone I know.

Which dress did I wear? I wore the red one; because God spoke plainly to me through a song.

Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." *Teresa Gumap-as Dumadag (teregmps@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Do you recognize God's voice when He speaks to you?

Lord Jesus, speak to my heart. Please be my guide.

HONESTY

Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me believes not only in me but also in the one who sent me." – John 12:44

Every now and then, we are faced with situations that would test our honesty regarding money matters and our faith in God. Truly, "The love of money is the root of all evils" (1 Timothy 6:10). Come to think of it, aren't most problems due to money?

Just look around and you will see: (a) Best friends Andy and Bob becoming best enemies because of unpaid debt; (b) Allan is fired from his job as a banker because of malversation of funds; (c) Siblings Rod and Amy are estranged because of unequal division of the inheritance from their parents; (d) Housewife Cecilia killing husband Alberto because she wants everything to be hers and none to the mistress; (e) The marriage of Roel and Anne breaking up because she's earning more than him.

Aren't these concrete proofs of how the love of money brings forth dishonesty and unfaithfulness to God?

I remember the story of my OB-Gyne professor back in med school. A patient went to her clinic to ask her for one thing at the right price: an abortion. At that time, the OB-Gyne was in financial straits and the offer was tempting. But she dismissed the thought because of honesty and her faith in God. *Dr. Henry Yu (henno_md@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: The secret to happiness is to simplify life and live simply by being honest and faithful to God Almighty.

Father, remind us always to be honest and faithful to You, no matter what

1 Peter 5:5-14 • Psalm 89:2-3, 6-7, 16-17
Mark 16:15-20

MY AMERICAN IDOL

"God opposes the proud but bestows favor on the humble."
– 1 Peter 5:5

I love Carrie Underwood.

From the time she auditioned for *American Idol*, I knew she would go a long way. She had a pretty face, great vocals and she seemed like a really good person, the way her parents described her to be. When she won the talent show, I literally cried tears of joy in front of the television because I cheered for her all the way to the finals.

Carrie went on to become a celebrated, multi-awarded recording artist in the American country music scene. Despite growing so famous — and rich — she remains humble and credits her success to God, who made her "crazy dreams" come true.

I believe that humility makes us grateful to God for every blessing that we receive. And when we are grateful, the more God blesses us with good things. For it was Jesus Himself who said, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:12). *Nova Arias-Sevilla (nova.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: How often do you say "thank you" to God?

Impress upon my heart, O Lord, the virtue of humility, that I may learn to be grateful for Your goodness.

RESERVED SEATS

"In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. I am going to prepare a place for you." – John 14:2

"Please bring your own towels for your island hopping adventure," said the receptionist at our honeymoon hotel. Upon arriving at the dock, our non-English speaking driver strangely asked for our towels as we got down from the car. He motioned as if to say, "Just trust me. I'll take care of everything."

We were a bit delayed in boarding the boat because I had to pay the tour guide for flippers and snacks. As I saw the people filling up the good spots, I sighed at the thought that we'd get the worst seats left. Then we saw our driver at the front of the boat signaling to us. To our surprise, we found our towels covering the best spot in the boat — the only two isolated seats right beside the captain. Our driver had reserved them for us.

There are times in our lives when we feel left behind. I did a year of volunteer service in the province right after college. When I returned, most of my AB Communication batch mates had gotten a head start as segment producers, TV hosts and even assistant directors. I felt I had gotten left behind. But after patiently waiting, working and praying, I now have my dream job as creative director of Bo Sanchez's media ministry. All the while, God was reserving the best seat I could ask for. *George Tolentino Gabriel (george.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Do you feel you've been left behind? God is reserving the best seat for you.

Lord, You are the restorer of lost time.

CLONED

"If you know me, then you will also know my Father."
– John 14:7

I used to know these twin brothers back in college who were so identical that it was hard to tell them apart. One was good in Math and the other, in the sciences. They would help each other by taking the exam for the other where one was good at. The teachers would never notice the switch because they looked exactly alike.

I guess God's ultimate purpose is to make us a "twin" for His only Son, Jesus. God has gone as far as putting the same Spirit in us that is in Jesus. The role of the Holy Spirit is not to make us look like Jesus — that will just make us a cheap imitation. God wants us to actually be like Him. That can only happen if we allow His Spirit to invade our life and let Him have His way with us.

The choice is totally ours.

Then one day, the Father will say, "Oh, it's you! I thought it was Jesus...." *Ronna Ledesma (ronna_ledesma@yahoo.com.ph)*

Reflection: Are you the real thing, or just a triple A genuine replica?

Holy Spirit, invade me and transform me until I am like Jesus.

Acts 14:21-27 • Psalm 145:8-9, 10-11, 12-13
Revelation 21:1-5 • **John 13:31-33, 34-35**

ONE PACKAGE

"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another." – John 13:34

Jesus was a dead man walking. He knew He'd be dead in no time. He didn't have the luxury of many hours and words. So He chose His best and most important message as His last words: "Love one another."

My spiritual father and personal saint, Bobby Pilar, was on his sickbed (before he eventually passed away) when he told me his single most important word: relationships. He echoed Jesus' same message.

Nothing romantic and mushy, but I think I got it. The common thread woven through the fabric of these messages is simple: *Real love requires sacrifice*. For relationships to survive and flourish, people need to sacrifice. If you think you love but don't know "sacrifice," maybe you do not yet love. You're just having fun with someone.

What's common among the following: a working mother who skips lunch to be able to buy a blue Superman shirt for her baby boy, a sleep-deprived husband who attends to his sick wife, and a brilliant medical student who serves on missions in the mountains? Answer: They know sacrifice.

Oh, I almost forgot. They inevitably know joy, too. It surely comes after sacrifice. Both come in one package. *Jon Escoto (faithatworkjon@gmail.com)*

Reflection: How can you do simple sacrifices today and for whom?

Lord, how can I bring happiness today. Make me willing to sacrifice and make this happen.

Acts 14:5-18 • Psalm 115:1-2, 3-4, 15-16
John 14:21-26

EMBRACING THE CROSS

"Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me." – John 14:21

When I was young, my parents would remind me that following the Lord and loving Him is the only way to live a happy life.

As I grew older, I realized that loving and serving God isn't easy at all. I didn't expect trials and challenges would come to hinder my journey in pursuing my apostolate. Instead of affirmations, I would be persecuted for the good things I did for Him. Financial problems and other difficulties arose which made me struggle in following Him. Oftentimes I would ask myself, does God really love me?

In reading the lives of saints, I saw how much they suffered as they followed the Lord. This inspired me to stand up and continue serving Him through various ministries that I am involved with.

No servant is greater than his master. If the Lord carried the cross of my sins, then with His grace, I, too, will embrace the cross of serving and following Him. *Dho Rimando (dougsterrimando@yahoo.com.ph)*

Reflection: Keep on serving and loving the Lord even in bad times. For in the end, the reward is peace and happiness.

Lord, teach me to embrace the crosses and trials that come my way.

Feast of St. Catherine of Siena, virgin and doctor of the Church

St. Catherine of Siena, virgin and doctor of the Church, pray for us.

NO NEED TO FEAR

Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. – John 14:27

A few nights ago, my daughter got hit in the eye by the stick attached to a balloon she was playing with. We thought she was fine but a visit to the doctor revealed that she had a laceration on the cornea of her eye.

A few weeks ago, my parents were informed of an unusually high reading on their water meter. They discovered that an underground pipe was leaking and this resulted in a P52,000 water bill.

A few months ago, my dear Aunt Christine passed away. I never got to visit her while she was battling cancer. I deeply regretted not being able to tell her how richly she had touched my life by being the warm and thoughtful person that she was. I still cry each time I think of her.

Accidents, money problems, losing loved ones. Trials in many forms may come our way. But Jesus in the Gospel assures us that we need not be afraid. He gives us His Holy Spirit to overcome the adversities of life. He gives healing, provisions and turns our mourning into joy. When we look to Him and trust in Him, He gives us the peace that the world cannot give. *Geraldine G. Catral (teachergeegee@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What areas of your life are needing peace right now? Surrender them to God!

Dear God, I [illegible] Jesus. I [illegible] Amen.

Genesis 1:26-2:3 (or Colossians 3:14-15, 17, 23-24)
Psalm 90:2, 3-4, 12-13, 14, 16 • Matthew 13:54-58

THE KINDNESS OF GOD

God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.
– Genesis 1:26

My life changed when I read the story of St. Francis of Assisi and I tried to imitate it. I was 13 years old, kneeling in prayer after communion. Then I heard a voice in my heart that said, "You'll receive a visitation from God." I thought, "I just received communion. God has visited me."

But when I left the church, the visitation came: I saw a very poor family sleeping on the steps of the church, covered only by rags and newspapers. Something pulled me towards them. I sat with them and introduced myself. That was when a terrible stench attacked my nostrils. I realized these people had not taken a bath for months.

The kids climbed on my back, jumped over my shoulders, and fell on my lap — and they climbed on my back again. When I went home, my white shirt was no longer white. I carried their stench on my body. But I had so much joy in my heart.

Every day, after Mass, I'd visit this family. It was like I had two Masses. One was inside the church, receiving Jesus in the Eucharist. The second was outside the church, receiving Jesus in the poorest of the poor. I never knew what happened to that family because one day, they were gone.

But this I know: I changed because I gave the kindness of God! *Bo Sanchez (bosanchez@kerygmafamily.com)*

Reflection: Have you met Jesus lately? Reflect on your encounter.

May I always be ready to recognize You, Jesus, in the persons I meet.

TRANSFORMING THE CHAMP

"I have told you this so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete." – John 15:11

"What an indescribable joy.... If I had died two years ago, I would have definitely gone to hell."

These are excerpts from the interview of boxing champ and Congressman Manny "Pacman" Pacquiao.

Pacman revealed to the reporter that while training for a fight in 2011, he diligently attended Bible study classes upon the prodding of his wife. As he learned more about God's Word, he developed an intimate relationship with the Lord. He dropped his vices of gambling, drinking, nightly partying and womanizing and has since felt happier and at peace in life. As he ended the interview, he invited his fans to have hope, to turn to the Lord and be transformed like him.

In God's perfect time, God worked on the conversion of Pacman. At the peak of his career and in a position of great influence, his testimony of what it is like to be back in God's fold serves as a good call.

When Pacman endorses a product, his fans buy it. Now that he has endorsed an abundant life in Christ guided by His Word, let's follow in the champ's footsteps and enjoy what God has to offer. *Marie Franco (mariefranco_pie@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: "Whoever accepts and trusts the Son gets in on everything, life complete and forever!" (John 3:36)

Take me back, my Lord, and fill my heart with Your promise of everlasting joy.

SPEAK AS I LIVE

"Believe because of the work themselves." – John 14:11

The chief investigator Hong Guk-yeong in the Korean historical drama *Yi San: Wind of the Palace* was going to try a group of their political foes for conspiracy to commit a crime. The ministers, in a bid to sway him, invited him to a high-class brothel, bowed and acted subservient to him, then declared at the middle of the drinking session that they were innocent of the allegations against them.

Hong Guk-yeong said in reply, "So why are your actions saying otherwise?"

Far too many times, we act like those ministers. We say we believe in God who created heaven and earth, yet we entrust our lives to some object bought somewhere that's supposed to bring good fortune. We say Jesus died for our sins, yet we live as though we are still very much slaves of those same sins.

There are many things in our lives that conflict with what we say. But as one saying goes, "Your action speaks so loud I can't hear a word you say." People will only believe what we do, even if we say otherwise. *Joy Sosoban (jsosoban@gmail.com)*

Reflection: "For every tree is known by its own fruit." (Luke 6:44)

Jesus, please help me to speak as I live and live as I speak.

BIGGER AND BETTER

They tried to go on into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. – Acts 16:7

Do you have unanswered prayers? Or failed business plans? Or broken dreams?

My last business was an online magazine cum social network for Filipinas. We had grand plans to partner with some hotshot groups for ventures like Internet TV. Even if technical stuff gave me nosebleeds and it was a 9 to 5 job, I agreed to work in the office. But all plans fell through and we closed shop.

My cousin wanted to bring her family abroad for a more comfortable life. Someone promised her a good job. She got the job but her relationship with the recruiter soured. She left her work and returned to the Philippines.

I have young friends whose romantic relationships fizzled. Despite fervent prayers they ended up with broken hearts.

Now, I work from home using my core gift, writing. My cousin's life is comfortable as two of her children work abroad. Our unstructured schedule allows us to serve in ministries we love. My brokenhearted friends? They found better boyfriends.

Sometimes, the Lord does not allow our plans to materialize. It must be because His plans are bigger and better.

Lella M. Santiago (mirellasantiago@yahoo.com)

Reflection: Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers. (from Garth Brooks' song "Unanswered Prayers")

Dear God, Help me to listen. When you say no, I will know

HELP IS ON THE WAY

"The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name – he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you." – John 14:26

It was the school's family day and my son's preschool teacher asked us to participate in one of the games. We were requested to join the sack race relay. Both the parent and child had to be inside the sack while racing against the other parent-child teams. My six-year-old Jason got worried when he saw how the participants kept falling down while doing their individual practices.

"I don't think we can win, Papa," he said. It was then that I gave Jason our game strategy. "Hold onto the sack with your two hands, while I carry you in my arms. I'll do all the jumping while I carry you," I said

The strategy worked as I hope it would. Our competitors kept falling while we coasted along smoothly towards victory.

God knows that life is difficult. He personally experienced this when He became man. This is why He sent the Holy Spirit to help us. Allow God to carry you in His arms as you coast along to victory in this game called life.

Alvin Fabella (alvinfabella@yahoo.com)

Reflection: Have courage for the great sorrows of life and patience for the small ones; and when you have laboriously accomplished your daily task, go to sleep in peace. God is awake. (Victor Hugo)

Lord, I am weak and life is challenging. I know I need a helper. I pray that the Holy Spirit will be with me each day, guiding and helping me in all my concerns.

Acts 16:11-15 • Psalm 149:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 9
John 15:26-16:4

SILENCING THE NOISE

We went outside the city gate along the river where we thought there would be a place of prayer. — Acts 16:13

It was a sunny Saturday in September 2010. I found myself in Antipolo, together with some 90 people, hoping to spend the entire day to experience the Lord more intimately. My life had been an emotional rollercoaster for the past few months. A break from the inner turmoil was more than welcome. I needed to silence myself for a bit just so I could forget all the noise in my life. (Those who know how talkative I am can attest that this can be quite a feat.)

The silence felt good.

For five hours, it was just me and my God on a date, having a quiet conversation. It was an exchange of worries and assurances. I offered Him my worries and He assured me of His promises. He revealed to me how immense His love is, and however "unworthy" I felt, there was just no changing that love. At the end of the silent retreat, with eyes swollen from crying, I fully accepted that love.

What followed was overwhelming joy and gratitude to my God, who is with me at all times. *Osy Erica (osy.erica@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Spend some quiet time with God today. You'll never know what He will reveal to you.

Warm all the noise and chaos in me. Forgive me, Lord, for the times I rejected Your presence. Teach me how to [illegible] on Your infinite grace.

FOR A GREATER GOOD

"It is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you." – John 16:7

Terry Fox was diagnosed with osteosarcoma, a form of bone cancer that often starts near the knees. His right leg was amputated and replaced by an artificial leg. He endured 16 months of chemotherapy. Terry embarked on a 14-month training program so he could compete in a marathon to raise cancer awareness. His hospital experiences angered him because of how little money was dedicated to cancer research. He sought to raise C$1 for each of Canada's 24 million people.

After 143 days and 5,373 kilometers, Terry was forced to end his run because his cancer returned. He had already raised C$1.7 million. On June 28, 1981, he passed away at the age of 22. On September 1981, the first Terry Fox Run was held. It has become an international event involving participants in over 60 countries. Over C$500 million has already been raised in his name.

Jesus' return to the Father was necessary so the Holy Spirit would come. By doing so, Jesus could be present anytime and anywhere. Goodbyes are often painful but sometimes it's necessary for a greater good to come. Christ's death, as well as Terry's, produced a greater fruit than when they were here on earth. *Judith Concepcion (svp_jmc@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: When God takes something away from you, believe that He will replace it with something far better.

I may not understand Your ways, Lord, but I choose to trust that You know what's best for me.

Acts 17:15, 22–18:1 • Psalm 148:1-2, 11-12, 13, 14
John 16:12-15

OPEN TO RECEIVE TRUTH

But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. – John 16:13

I remember with fondness how, during my high school years, there was a time I tried to read and understand the Bible on my own. It was the Bible of my brother, thick and with a green cover, and was especially issued to Don Bosco students. It had stick drawings on some pages that would explain further the passage in the Bible.

I had fun going through the drawings and reading the captions. But I could never quite understand the text when I'd start reading them, even if they were written in English.

Maybe at that time, my heart and my mind were not yet open to receive the truth. It was only after my conversion that I once again gained a hunger for the Word and the doors of understanding opened for me.

It's true, as our Bible verse today states, the Holy Spirit has guided me in knowing the truth. My desires, dreams and viewpoints have changed because of Bible-reading. *Joy Sosoban (sosoban@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

Dear Holy Spirit, I ask you to help me to ...

Acts 18:1-8 • Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4
John 16:16-20

A WHILE THAT LASTS

"What is this 'little while' of which he speaks?" – John 16:18

Just over one year old, Dax Locke was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer. His parents pursued all available solutions but after a few months, doctors announced that there was no hope for a cure. Dax would die in four to eight weeks.

At that point, his parents took Dax home, determined to let him enjoy the remaining days of his life. They brought out the Christmas tree and decided that, from that day on, every day would be Christmas Day.

When the neighbors found out, they, too, set up their Christmas decors. Others followed suit until the whole town was lit up with lights. When the media covered the story, the whole nation joined in. Moved by the sight of a frail yet happy baby, Christmas came early to hundreds of homes and so did the sharing the season usually brings.

Dax proved that we don't have to live long in order to inspire others and make a difference. Each of us is given "just a little while" to follow God's will on earth. It's not that complicated. We just need to learn to love Him and share that love with others. *Cecil Lim (cez_lim@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What do we need to accomplish to make our "little while" last an eternity?

Jesus, help me to simplify my life by learning what You want me to be and becoming that person. (Saint Therese of the Child Jesus)

DELAYED GRATIFICATION

"Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy."
– John 16:20

I don't know how many times I got hurt when I was learning how to ride a bike as a young kid. I found it difficult but I didn't want to give up. I knew that one day, I would be able to learn and enjoy a bike ride.

I'm glad I went along despite all the bruises I got. Because now I am able to enjoy bonding with my husband when we ride our bikes around the neighborhood.

There are things in life that we need to learn the hard way. Even Christ had to endure the most painful moments on the cross, yet He focused not on the pain but on the joy that awaited Him — the salvation of us all.

We are not spared from suffering. This is a painful reality that we must learn to embrace. But we must also remember that for every minute of pain, there is healing and renewed strength. For every challenge, there are discoveries and lessons learned. And for every sacrifice, there is always a reward.

So do not despair if you are going through a tough time. It's not a problem but rather an opportunity for growth and maturity. *Jane Gonzales-Rauch (mgr516@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Are your troubles causing you much grief? Don't despair; soon it will be over. Just PUSH (Pray Until Something Happens).

Lord, turn my problems into opportunities for growth. Amen.

MY PRISCILLA AND AQUILA

But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the Way of God more accurately. – Acts 18:26

In my early days in the renewal, I had the great privilege of being under the spiritual direction of two holy priests: the late Fr. Thomas Green, SJ, and Fr. Francis Gustilo, SDB. They are my Priscilla and Aquila who opened the Word of God to me more accurately.

Fr. Francis had the rare gift of breaking the Word to our community, Evangelium Dei, that he would leave us enthusiastic to study God's Word more deeply. Long after our community had ceased to exist, Fr. Francis would still invite us to his recollections to share the Word of God to us. In 2011, when he went to the Holy Land, he posted his reflections on Facebook, from Day 1 up to the last day of his pilgrimage. It served as a mini Lenten retreat for us, his FB friends.

Fr. Tom, for his part, revealed the richness of God's Word to me through spiritual direction. He taught me to listen to God by meditating on His Word.

God made possible the writing of the Bible through His evangelists. And He sends us the Holy Spirit and people as well to help us understand and live out His Word. *Tess V. Atienza (svp_tvatienza@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Who opens God's Word to you? Thank the Lord for them.

Thank You, dear God, for the people You have sent my way to help me know Your Word more deeply.

HIS POWER

The immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.
– Ephesians 1:19

"I am almost 52 now and it will be difficult for me to get another job," I typed.

"You can still do it," he replied.

I was exchanging messages on Facebook with a good friend from my university days. He is now a vice president of a New York-based financial institution.

It struck me how much this guy had immense hope that I would overcome my situation. It had been over five months that I'd been looking for a job, and I was close to quitting.

How embarrassing that I, a renewed Catholic, wasn't conscious of the power of God. My friend's confidence reminded me that indeed, there is nothing impossible for God (Matthew 19:26)! I repented for not trusting God enough.

A few weeks later, I had an interview with a director of an overseas information and communications technology company. It was a casual chat over a cup of cappuccino in a coffeeshop. We were like good old friends who exchanged our experiences in IT.

I saw the great power of God working.

After sips of this rich coffee, I was offered a good job overseas. Just believe! *Danny Tariman (dtariman.lop@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Are you thinking of quitting? Let God be God!

Lord, I am sorry for not trusting You. I hear now the direct invitation to trust in You.

Acts 19:1-8 • Psalm 68:2-3, 4-5, 6-7
John 16:29-33

WISDOM FROM THE SPIRIT

And when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them. – Acts 19:6

The woman told me she had aborted her pregnancy. "I cannot forgive myself for killing my baby," she sobbed.

For the first time, I was dealing with abortion and didn't know what to say.

So I said in my mind, "Holy Spirit, quick, what will I tell her?"

Then, gently, the words came. "Sister," I told the lady as I handed her a piece of tissue paper to wipe her tears, "your baby did not die. Remember, our soul lives forever — your baby is alive in heaven. What really died was your faith in God. You chose abortion because you did not have faith that God would take care of you and your baby. Now, let's pray that you'll have a renewed faith in God — He loves you, He has forgiven you and will give you grace to forgive yourself."

Since then, I've said those words to women carrying guilt for the loss of their children. (I also tell them they should confess to a priest for what they've done.) They thank me, but I tell them the wisdom comes from the Holy Spirit. And so does the peace they feel after hearing His words — the wisdom and peace promised in today's readings. *Cynthia U. Santiago (cusantiago@gmail.com)*

Reflection: "Do you now believe?"

Come, Holy Spirit, grant me Your wisdom, give me peace!

Acts 1:15-17, 20-26 • Psalm 113:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8
John 15:9-17

STILL UNDER CONSTRUCTION

"It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you..."
– John 15:16

As a recovering codependent, it is not easy for me to accept praise. There's still a little voice in my subconscious that sometimes whispers that I don't deserve what I get.

For example, I received a letter from a priest friend today praising me for my work for the Lord. The first time I read it, I was teary-eyed and deeply touched. But after several readings, my questions of whether I deserved his compliment started coming. In my heart, I remember the times I had been insensitive, tactless, neglectful and other unforgettable faults. Sigh! I haven't fully recovered from codependency, although I'd like to think I'm a lot better now than years ago.

Jesus assures me in Scripture that He chose me. He affirms that it wasn't I who unworthily puts on a robe of service with impure motives. Every time I think about this, a ray of healing takes place in my heart. In due time, as I repeatedly read this Word of His, I trust that I can fully accept how much Jesus really loves me — how much He reaches out to me, His chosen one. *Cristy Galang (cristy_cc@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: From 1 to 7, where 1 means "definitely not" and 7 means "yes, very much," rate yourself with the question: Do I believe Jesus when He said "I chose you"?

Jesus, I want to [illegible] You. Help me [illegible] Your love.

SENT

"... so I sent them into the world." – John 17:18

There are a hundred and one reasons why I preach and serve the Lord. But one reason stands out. I believe "I was sent" to do what I am doing. And somehow that gives me the authority, courage and purpose to do what I do.

When I was younger, my mom trained me to run our family-owned school. I was just an apprentice then. Yet teachers and employees listened to me. Why? I was the owner's son. I had power then not because of what I could do but because of the one who was training me.

Now, as one of the preachers and Feast builders of the Light of Jesus Family, thousands of people listen to me as a person in authority. Still, I know that much of that authority comes from the one who appointed me. That's why when I drop the name Bo Sanchez as my leader, mentor and friend, somehow what I say and do gain more power.

But ultimately, it is when I raise up the Bible, sing, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet," and start speaking God's Word that I draw my strength and authority in what I say and do. Because I say and do things in the name of the One who sent me to the world for this purpose — our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. *Alvin Barcelona (apb_ayo@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Where do you ultimately get the power and authority to do what you do? From yourself, others or from the One who sent you?

Lord, grant me the grace to have confidence in what I can do and the humility to acknowledge that I can only do all these because of You. Amen.

Acts 22:30; 23:6-11 • Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11
John 17:20-26

STAND UP FOR JESUS

The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage. For just as you have borne witness to my cause in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness in Rome." – Acts 23:11

I was with an aggressive group who had been together for quite some time. They were closely-knit and had been through some tough times as a team. To say that they were united was an understatement. They were so familiar with one another that they even finished one another's jokes. They seemed to think as one.

The discussion soon turned to sexual innuendos and teasing, flirting and dares that encouraged infidelity and unwholesomeness. They were enjoying themselves.

I prayed in my mind and prepared to correct them, one against all. With a pounding heart and the fear that they would be indifferent, I explained that I didn't subscribe to loose talk and that what was going on was wrong.

To my surprise, they took my advice and cleaned up, so to speak. I don't know if they were sincere or just politely acceded. But God gave me the strength to stand my ground and speak up for what was right.

There will be times when we will be in tough situations, standing alone. Yet we never are. The Lord will always give us the grace to stand up for Him.

All we need is to ask for His grace and respond accordingly. *Jun Asis (mabuting.balita@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Think of daily situations where you have the chance to speak up for what is good, right and true. Do you?

Lord, give me the strength to stand up for You.

MERCY

"Simon, son of John, do you love me?" – John 21:16

The boy stood in front of the coffin even as he felt everyone's anger on him. He was ready to be beaten, berated and driven away, but he still visited his dead friend because he wanted to pay his respects, say goodbye and ask for forgiveness. After all, he was holding the gun they were playing with when it went off and killed the other boy. So it was a surprise, beyond all understanding, when the mother of the dead boy approached and hugged him. They both cried as they held each other. Repeatedly, the grieving mother assured him, "It's not your fault."

Forgiveness is not always about the one who receives it; instead, its meaning is found in the one who gives it. Easter is a remembrance not only of Jesus' victory over sin and death, but it is also a remembrance of the suffering He had to go through for us — all done out of love.

When we are as gracious and merciful to forgive others who have wronged us, then we say yes to Jesus' question to Peter, "Do you love me?" *Rod Velez (rod.velez@gmail.com)*

Reflection: How can you show your love for Jesus this Easter season?

With all my heart I ask, "Lord forgive me for all my sins and help me to extend that mercy to others."

MISQUOTED

So the word spread among the brothers that that disciple would not die. But Jesus had not told him that he would not die. – John 21:23

I had reached an impasse in my faith. After almost two decades of faithfully following the Lord in my Catholic community, I started to question why I was doing what I did. I wasn't questioning my faith in the Lord; I was questioning the manner I was living it out.

To make sense of the muddle, I began to deconstruct the norms I lived by. Fine, I had Scripture passages to back up most of those practices, but did those specific verses actually mean how we had interpreted them? It was an excruciating process for me. I felt like I was undermining the very ground I stood on. I went through many dark nights of the soul. But in the end, God's light and truth shone forth.

It's so tempting to isolate certain passages from Scripture and develop a whole new theology from it. Just as celebrities are often misquoted in media, it's so easy to take something that Jesus said and make it mean something other than what He intended. But when we look at the big picture of our faith, we are brought back to the essentials. *Rissa Singson-Kawpeng (justbreatherissa@gmail.com)*

Reflection: In the essentials, unity. In the non-essentials, liberty. In all things, love. (Rupertus Meldenius)

Acts 2:1-11 • Psalm 104:1, 24, 31, 34, 29-30
Romans 8:8-17 (or 1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13)
John 14:15-16, 23-26 (or John 20:19-23)

PRAYER BURDEN

The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all. – I Corinthians 12:7

I am blessed to be part of a group of intercessors. I learn to love and serve others by bringing their intentions before God in prayer through our gatherings. I also learn to "die to myself," putting others' needs before my own when I pray.

One time, I suddenly woke up at 3:00 a.m. and felt very anxious about work. As far as I knew, I was on track. So I asked the Lord, "Is there someone You want me to pray for?" I sensed that my being awake was a "prayer burden" and that I needed to pray for someone. Five minutes later, I received a text message from a friend working as a caregiver in the U.S. She was on the verge of being suspended due to an injury a patient allegedly sustained under her care. I prayed for my friend and surrendered her concern to God. Later in the day, my friend texted me that the patient had no injury and all was well with her.

I am constantly amazed at the way the Holy Spirit moves within me to guide and lead me about what, when and how I should pray. Come to think of it, all I need to do is follow Him. *Dina Pecaña (dpecana@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: This Pentecost Sunday, thank the Father for sending us His precious gift of the Spirit.

Holy Spirit, make me sensitive to Your proddings, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sirach 1:1-10
Psalm 93:1, 1-2, 5 • Mark 9:14-29

BELIEVE

"Everything is possible to one who has faith." – Mark 9:23

In a modern world littered with technology, finding answers to many of life's head-scratching questions has become a simple stroll in the park. You can hardly think of a question that Wikipedia cannot answer or Google cannot search for. In fact, I'd like to think that geniuses like Einstein or Newton are probably turning over in their graves because of how easily the complex can now be made comprehensible through technology.

Yet there are still areas of our lives that technology will never be able to explain. Like stories of patients who receive complete healing even after being diagnosed as terminal. Or marriages that manage to recover even after being considered irreparable. Or an unemployed father struggling to make ends meet who suddenly gets a job offer just as soon as his last peso runs out. Some may rule these out as luck but faithful ones call it a miracle.

Miracles are the offspring of our faith. They are results of how God is able to work wonders when we believe. That's why faith is one of the most powerful forces in the universe. When you believe in a God who can easily do the unexplainable and unattainable, everything else becomes possible. *Audee Villaraza (avillaraza@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Today, pray that you overcome any unbelief and that your faith be anchored on your God who can do the impossible.

I believe, Lord. Help my unbelief. Increase my faith. I surrender my life to You

St. Bernardine of Siena, priest, pray for us.

Sirach 2:1-11 • Psalm 37:3-4, 18-19, 27-28, 39-40
Mark 9:30-37

THANK YOU FOR THE WINGS!

My son, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials… trust him and your reward will not be lost. – Sirach 2:1, 8

During my Good Friday to Easter Sunday pilgrimage in 2011, God sent me an important message. It was contained in a timely devotional by L.B Cowman, *Streams in the Desert,* given by a dear high school classmate, Atty. Catherine Triunfante-Manahan. I was then being tested in fire (Sirach 2:5) — undergoing a challenge in my work as ambassador for God and country.

The timely lift to my sagging spirit came in the form of a myth about bird's wings.

Once upon a time, birds only had shining feathers and angelic voices but could not fly. One day, God decided to give them wings, but they found these too heavy and complained about them. Then, the miracle happened! The birds realized that their hated obstacle allowed them to fly near the heavens.

If you are going through trials as a servant of the Lord, welcome your "wings." Trust in Him for His reward is not lost. My "wings," which at first caused me great distress, later allowed me to fly like an eagle soaring higher in the service of God and country. *Grace Princesa (grprincesa@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Are you bothered by your trials as a pilgrim Christian?

Lord, help me welcome the "wings" in my life, secure that they are meant to bring me closer to You.

Sirach 4:11-19 • Psalm 119:165, 168, 171, 172, 174, 175
Mark 9:38-40

THE FORCE VS. THE DARK SIDE

"There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me."– Mark 9:39

Nothing disempowers a person more than being in the "dark." When mountains of problems seem immovable or when we are reduced to the status of victims, it's so easy to feel hopeless.

Many things can cause us to be banished to a psycho-spiritual dungeon. Like when we let ourselves get stuck in our status quo and become imprisoned in our comfort zones. When the scarcity mentality traps us into thinking we are forever poor and limited. When we are afraid or lazy to start a worthwhile endeavor, or finish it haphazardly and half-heartedly.

When we dwell in this kind of darkness, we are living on the "dark side" of life.

My dear friends, there is hope. And it's by God's grace that you have this hope to overcome the dark side. I want to call that hope that empowers and sets free as "the Force." Because 1 John 4:4 declares, "The One that is within you is more powerful than the one who is in the world!"

The Force is the power of God within you! The Force is the Holy Spirit at work in you and within you! Claim your Force and overcome the dark side! *Obet Cabrillos (kpreacherobet@gmail.com)*

Reflection: He can do exceedingly and abundantly above all that we could ever ask or imagine according to the power that is at work in us. (Ephesians 3:20)

[illegible]

Sirach 5:1-8 • Psalm 1:1-2, 3, 4, 6
Mark 9:41-50

CUT IT OFF!

"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. Everyone will be salted with fire." – Mark 9:43, 49

One day, I was so ashamed to pray because I had offended God with the same habitual sin I had previously confessed.

Then I read a book saying that habitual sin is like a sickness. It must go through a process of healing. One should focus on the growth process rather than his present state of imperfection.

Having this in mind, I looked at my past state when I began my habitual sin, then at the times I repeatedly committed it, until that day when I did it again. There was a big difference. Because I had grown in my love for God, I strived harder and harder to cut off this sin. I was more ashamed when I committed it. Through His grace, its frequency lessened.

Right now, God has freed me of this sin. Honestly, it's a painful, humbling process, like going through fire that burnt away my skin-deep pride and selfishness. But it's worth going through for the love of God.

Temptations are always present, but we need not give in to them. We can cut them off by avoiding occasions of sin. It may be hard, but our determination to love God more gives us the strength to endure. *Ma. Luisa De la Cruz (theessence_byluisa@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Look into your heart. What habitual sin needs to be cut off in your life? Bring them to God.

Dearest Lord, here I am, help me to be freed from my sin. Strengthen me with Your love.

Sirach 6:5-17 • Psalm 119:12, 16, 18, 27, 34, 35
Mark 10:1-12

STUCK AND SAVED

A faithful friend is a life-saving remedy... – Sirach 6:16

I got trapped in a parking lot once. I overextended my stay so much that my parking fee exceeded the money I had in my wallet. I didn't have an ATM card as well. In short, I was stuck.

I started thinking of who I knew near the area. At some point, I was ready to beg for cash from a complete stranger.

Suddenly, I remembered that I had a friend who was working near the parking lot where I was. Embarassed, I asked if he could lend me some money.

He said, "Sure." He lent me the money and I was able to leave. He was a lifesaver. Thank God for faithful friends like that.

A lot of people are stuck.

Stuck in debt. Stuck in hurts. Stuck in stress. Stuck in a lot of things. You don't need to look far to see that a lot of our family and friends are stuck in different ways.

Today, I encourage you to lend a helping hand to those around you. It can just be a simple act of service, but to them it might already be a life-saving hand that you are extending.

Mike Viñas (mikemichaelfcv@yahoo.com)

Reflection: Who among your family and friends need help right now?

Father, make me a faithful friend as You are faithful. Let me be a life-saving blessing to many.

Sirach 17:1-15 • Psalm 103:13-14, 15-16, 17-18
Mark 10:13-16

CHECKLIST

Limited days of life he gives him, with power over all things else on earth. – Sirach 17:3

"A limited number of days…." This made me think of how I have lived my life so far. These excerpts from a poem by an unknown author came to mind. They could very well be my (and your) checklist of how to live well.

God will not ask what kind of car you drove, but He will ask how many people you drove who did not have transportation.

God will not ask the square footage of your house, but He will ask how many people you welcomed into your home.

God will not ask about the clothes you had in your closet, but He will ask how many you helped to clothe.

God will not ask what your highest salary was, but He will ask if you compromised your character to obtain it.

God will not ask what your job title was, but He will ask if you performed your job to the best of your ability.

God will not ask how many friends you had, but He will ask how many people to whom you were a friend…

I'm a work in progress. When God asks me later on, I pray that I'll be able to answer His questions well. *Nova Arias-Sevilla (nova.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: How have you been living your life?

You have taught us how to live, Lord. May we be ever conscious of our ways.

Proverbs 8:22-31 • Psalm 8:4-5, 6-7, 8-9
Romans 5:1-5 • John 16:12-15

BIRTH PAINS

We even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint... – Romans 5:3-5

I heard someone say that the most painful moment of giving birth is usually the one right before the baby is born. But as soon as the child comes out, all the agony and suffering disappear because the mother is suddenly beholding the miracle she's been awaiting for so long.

In the same way, I'm experiencing some birth pains right now. I'm in the middle of a long venture and am faced with a lot of difficulties. It's been an uphill climb and I sometimes feel I'm losing strength. But every now and then God reminds me that His strength is perfect when mine is gone. He also reminds me of how He has seen me through every trial and difficulty in the past — why should He not do the same now?

I firmly believe that by the time you read this reflection I will be beholding the miracle God has prepared for me. By then, I know it will all be worth it. It's just a matter of time, patience and endurance. *George Iolentino Gabriel (george.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: If you're in pain right now, find Your strength in Him. Your miracle is coming soon.

Lord, give me patience and endurance for the times that seem to take long. I hold fast to Your promise.

Sirach 17:19-24 (or Sirach 17:19-27) • Psalm 32:1-2, 5, 6, 7
Mark 10:17-27

JUST ONE

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, "You are lacking in one thing..." – Mark 10:21

There's a popular expression that goes, "You can take a girl out of the country but you can never take the country out of a girl." It refers to a woman who spends loads of money to appear rich and classy, but the moment she opens her mouth, it reveals her poor breeding or lack of class. She's overhauled the external but left out the crucial internal factor that would complete the transformation.

That's the way it is with our spiritual life sometimes. We may be doing a lot of spiritual acrobatics for God, giving spiritual seminars left and right, practically living in the church or in prayer meetings — yet we may not be an inch closer to God.

Stop. Think. What is that one thing that God has told you to do that you have not yet obeyed?

The rich young man in the Gospel has kept every commandment since he was young. But Jesus asks of him just *one* thing. And he goes away sadly. *Ronna Ledesma (ronna_ledesma@yahoo.com.ph)*

Reflection: If you feel like you're in a spiritual rut, check if you have not yet obeyed God in that one thing He is asking of you.

Lord, let me not withhold from You that one thing You ask of me.

Sirach 35:1-12 • Psalm 50:5-6, 7-8, 14, 23
Mark 10:28-31

THE POWER OF FOCUS

"There is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age." – Mark 10:29-30

Q: Manny Pacquiao, Henry Sy, Gary V. and Mother Teresa — what do they have in common? A: They are all known as successful people. And all are either Mr. or Ms. "100 Percent" who give their all for the sake of the "dream."

Show me a successful person and I'll show you a 100-percent person willing to leave everything, even those they have a rightful claim to, to pursue their big dream. This is the key to all success. The universe abhors a vacuum. When you empty yourself, God will fill it with the beauty you aspire for. Jesus is handing out a similar key to the highest dream you and I could ever have.

The people I mentioned may have been successful in specific areas of their lives. Friend, my encouragement is this: be successful where it really matters. No, I don't believe that Jesus wants you to thoughtlessly just leave your home, children, family, etc. Jesus' big message is, "Focus on Me. Pursue Me above all. Yes, you are called to other loyalties, but your loyalty to Me should be on top of the list." This is the way to succeed where it really matters. In life now and eternity, too!

Jon Escoto (faithatworkjon@gmail.com)

Reflection: What weakens your love for God?

I [illegible]

Sirach 36:1, 4-5, 10-17 • Psalm 79:8, 9, 11, 13
Mark 10:32-45

I SERVE

"Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all."
– Mark 10:43-44

I've always been fascinated by the contradictions in the Bible. Holy contradictions.

From foolish wisdom where the King of Kings takes the form of man, to triumphant defeat where the Son of God gives up His life that we may live. From being the least so we could be the greatest, to being the last so we could be first.

He showed us the way. He who knew no sin became sin for our sake. Jesus gave up His rights and privileges so that we may enjoy ours.

In today's Gospel, Jesus uses another divine contrast to teach us a lesson on servanthood.

I believe servanthood is forgetting about ourselves. It happens when we put the interests of others above our own.

Servanthood is the prelude to greatness. There can be no greatness without genuine service. We can never be number one if we don't make others number one.

When was the last time you served? When was the last time you extended a helping hand to a needy neighbor? When was the last time you gave without expecting any return?

Serve your way to greatness! *Randy Borromeo (rborromeo@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Today, deny yourself and put others first. Serve.

Lord, You showed us the real meaning of servanthood. May we serve others the way You want us to. Amen.

Sirach 42:15-25 • **Psalm 33:2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9**
Mark 10:46-52

FEAR OF THE LORD

Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all who dwell in the world revere him. — Psalm 33:8

If love is the opposite of fear, then why do we have to fear the Lord as commanded in the Bible? Sounds contradictory, huh?

This is just one of the many curious questions I asked my cell group leader when I was still new in my first community. No one could answer my difficult question, but I was not fazed. I learned the answer in the long run.

"Hate is not the opposite of love," was one of the shocking truths I learned in my second community, where I've committed most of my single life. Bo Sanchez preached in one of his talks that fear is the opposite of love (1 John 4:18).

On the other hand, fear of the Lord refers to reverence — worshipping and honoring Him. So there's nothing contradictory about my question after all.

I thank God for showing me the answers to my questions about my Catholic faith when I was still a baby Christian. Otherwise, I could have sought answers from other religions and possibly been proselytized.

God gave the best answer I was looking for. *Ems Sy Chan (havenofleeanne@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: We may not find all the answers to our questions about the Catholic faith, but it is our duty as committed and conscientious believers to study our faith.

[illegible] thoughts, words and deeds

St. Gregory VII, pray for us.

Zephaniah 3:14-18 (or Romans 12:9-16) • Isaiah 12:2-3, 4, 5-6
Luke 1:39-56

BE THE BETTER MAN (OR WOMAN)

Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. – Romans 12:9

As a homemaker, I've had my share of, err, less than perfect househelp. One helper was an all-around nanny-housekeeper who faked a relative dying so she could go home to the province with extra cash. Another helper, while experienced as a cleaning maid, had a tendency to give unsolicited advice — about how I should run my home.

Thank You, Lord. You truly are a giver of grace... because these women are truly sources of grace for me!

Yes, it's hard to love people who are hard to like. Still, Jesus commands us to love others authentically, without faking it. Which means that even if people — family, coworkers, employees, househelp, et al — get on our nerves, we're called all the more to be like Christ to them. So even if someone annoys you or cuts you mid-sentence with a catty remark, don't react negatively. Be the better man or woman, and be a blessing to them instead. Your example of goodness and love may be just what they need to make a turnaround.

Martine de Luna (the.dainty.mom@gmail.com)

Reflection: Is there someone who is difficult for you to love authentically? Ask the Lord for wisdom on how to show them compassion and love appropriately.

Jesus, help me to keep the Golden Rule, to love and accept others as I myself would want to be loved and accepted. Grant me the constancy to do this. Amen.

Sirach 51:12-20 • Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11
Mark 11:27-33

GOD'S VERSION

When I was young and innocent, I sought wisdom. – Sirach 51:13

I was fixated on a 500-square-meter property for our community center. It was a foreclosed property that a bank was selling. I wanted it so much, I'd visit it many times and even raise my hand towards it and "claim" it to be ours. I told the tiny Light of Jesus community to fast.We also went into massive fundraising. We went Christmas caroling in August.

But one day, we received the news. Someone else had bought the property from the bank. We were devastated. Our prayer meeting that week was like a funeral.

But 10 years later, God answered our prayer. We finally acquired a property. This taught us that God's timing isn't our timing. But it wasn't 500 square meters. It wasn't 1,000, or 2,000, or 5,000, or even 10,000 square meters. God gave us 50,000 square meters! On that land, we built Anawim, our ministry for the abandoned elderly.

I was asking for 500 square meters, and God must have been laughing, saying, "You won't be able to do what I want you to do. Just wait."

When it comes to your dreams, don't be attached to your timing. Don't be attached to your measurements. And don't be attached to your version. Trust that He will answer your prayer — His version. *Bo Sanchez (bosanchez@kerygmafamily.com)*

Reflection: Are you desperately praying for something? Open your eyes — God's answer may come differently.

Help me, Lord, to always trust in Your wisdom. You know what's best for me.

St. Justin, martyr, pray for us.

Genesis 14:18-20 • Psalm 110:1, 2, 3, 4
1 Corinthians 11:23-26 • Luke 9:11-17

10 PERCENT FOR CHARITY

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. – Genesis 14:20

Most people set aside as savings whatever is left from their month's pay after deducting all the expenses. Then from the savings, they get a portion to give to charity. With uncontrolled spending, there is often nothing left for savings, much less for charity.

I follow a different approach. Fifteen percent of my earnings automatically go to savings and investments while another 15 percent goes to charity. This covers the fixed monthly stipend of seminarians and World Vision sponsorship plus variable contributions to Mass offering, assistance, donations and alms. The balance goes to my living allowance and personal expenses. With this approach, even as a self-supporting single mom, I maintain a comfortable lifestyle and have never experienced any financial difficulty.

When my son started working, I taught him the same approach to manage his finances (I started him off at 10 percent). He is careful with his spending but is generous. When before I used to give him money to drop in the offertory basket every time we attended Mass together, now we make our individual contributions.

Acts of charity cannot be left to chance. More often than not, there will be excuses not to give. Plan for it and do it.

Marie Franco (mariefranco_pie@yahoo.com)

Reflection: Are you generous enough?

Dear God, make it easy for us to open our hands not to ask for more but to offer more of what we have.

Tobit 1:3; 2:1-8 • Psalm 112:1-2, 3-4, 5-6
Mark 12:1-12

HE NEVER LEARNED

"Will this man never learn!" – Tobit 2:8

When Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino decided to come back to the Philippines after staying in the U.S. for some time, I'm sure a number of people thought that he had never learned his lesson. After all, hadn't he suffered enough when he was in prison in the Philippines? Why was he returning to his place of suffering instead of staying in the land of milk and honey?

And yet, Ninoy Aquino came home. And in a most profound way, our country has become what it is now because of that one man's act of heroism — or perhaps recklessness, for others.

To me, that's the essence of self-knowledge and responsibility. There are some things in life we must choose "never to learn" if we want to be true to who we are and what God plans for us. Certainly there is an element of recklessness to it — calculated recklessness.

After all Jesus risked everything when He became man. He knew more than anyone what kind of people He would be saving. Going to Jerusalem was a mighty risk, for He knew what would happen. And yet He risked it. He "never learned" — and we all attained salvation in the process. *Joy Sosoban (jsosoban@gmail.com)*

Reflection: For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. (1 Corinthians 1:25)

Help me to be wise, Lord

Tobit 2:9-14 • Psalm 112:1-2, 7-8, 9
Mark 12:13-17

IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD

"Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God" – Mark 12:17

They say there are two things that are inevitable in life — taxes and death.

In our lifetime, we pay all kinds of taxes from birth to death. Where we live, we pay community tax. When we earn, we pay withholding tax. When we buy goods or services, we pay value-added tax. When we have a business, we pay income tax. When we own properties, we pay real estate tax.

The government serves and gives us benefits. Therefore, we should diligently pay our taxes as Jesus said, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar."

We also receive a lot of material and spiritual blessings from God. He gave us our life, our family, our faith, our gifts and talents, our work and ministries. Everything we are, everything we have and everything that we can do comes from God. Therefore, it's just right that I give to God my time, talents and treasures in serving Him in the different ministries of my community. I give my tithes and love offerings faithfully and generously. I try to follow what Jesus said, "Give to God what belongs to God." *Meann Tee (meanntytee@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: When you look into a mirror, do you see the image of God? Then, give to God the gift of yourself.

Father, may I be a clear reflection of You so that people may always see You in me.

DO YOU BELIEVE IN ANGELS?

At that very time, the prayer of these two suppliants was heard in the glorious presence of Almighty God. So Raphael was sent to heal them both. – Tobit 3:16-17

In the old days, it was normal for God to answer His children's prayers by sending an angel to send them a message from heaven and guide them.

Archangel Gabriel was sent to Mary to announce to her that she would bear a son who would save the world. Raphael was sent to heal Tobit, became Tobias' travel companion and guided him to the lifetime partner God had chosen for him, Sarah.

Today, angels are in active duty as they were before, sent by our loving Father to assist us in our needs. Even if we don't notice them, they continue to take care of us, protect and guide us, light our way and direct our steps towards heaven.

Sometimes, the Lord also sends earth angels, friends who suddenly appear in our lives at a time when we need them the most, and who suddenly leave after their mission in our lives are accomplished.

We are blessed to have our guardian angels always by our side. We're even more blessed to follow their example and be angels to one another. *Marjorie Ann Duterte (marjorie.duterte@gmail.com)*

Reflection: God loves us so much that He gave each of us a guardian angel. Let us be grateful to Him for our unseen friend who takes care of us every day.

Tobit 6:11; 7:1; 9-17; 8:4-9 • Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5
Mark 12:28-34

SURPRISES AND LOVE

"To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." – Mark 12:33

I enjoy planning surprises. Once, in the middle of planning a birthday gimmick, I received a call from the friend we intended to surprise. She sounded disheartened and I knew she needed to be with someone. After we talked, I asked another friend to visit her since I was preoccupied with the birthday surprise.

When the day came, she was indeed surprised with what I and some friends had organized for her. While she appreciated our efforts, she said, "It's more important for me to be with the people I love when I need them most." Ouch.

Sometimes, we get so preoccupied doing things for those we love that we forget the real reason why we do them.

It happens also in our service to God. We go all over the place doing this and that, to the point that we no longer have time to listen to what God is telling us. We become attached to our service, not to our God.

Like our loved ones, God simply wants to be with us in everything we do at every moment. Putting God first can be our sweetest way of saying, "I love you, Lord." *Maymay R. Salvosa (cmsalvosa@yahoo.com)*

REFLECTION: How do you express your love for God?

Lord, my heart, mind and soul belong to You alone. May I live my days loving You above everyone and everything.

Ezekiel 34:11-16 • Psalm 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6
Romans 5:5-11 • **Luke 15:3-7** (or John 15:1-8)

EXTRAORDINARY LOVE

"Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep." – Luke 15:6

"I have a surprise for you," my mom excitedly told me.

When I entered the kitchen, I saw a very dirty cat under the table. It was Barbie, my pet cat, who had been missing for more than a week. I literally shouted for joy upon seeing her. I stooped down, held her in my arms and embraced her, not minding that she was filthy and smelled like trash. I think I even shed some tears.

My mom found Barbie in front of one of our neighbors' houses on her way home. When Mom called out her name, Barbie responded with a purr and followed my mom back home.

Imagine how much more our God greatly rejoices when He finds His dearest creation who has strayed from the path? He doesn't mind if you're filthy and stinky. He will lift you up from the miry clay of your sins, carry you in His arms and forgive you.

That's how extraordinary God's love is for each one of us. *Judith Concepcion (svp_jmc@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Have you lost your way? God will search for you far and wide. His love will lead you back to His arms.

Thank You, Lord, for loving a sinner like me.

Isaiah 61:9-11
1 Samuel 2:1, 4-5, 6-7, 8
Luke 2:41-51

SEEKING HIM

And his mother kept all these things in her heart. – Luke 2:51

It was an agonizing decision I had to make because I wasn't sure I should change careers. All my prayers — daily prayer time, Holy Rosary, Mass, visits to the Blessed Sacrament — were filled with anguish, trying to understand the direction the Lord wanted me to take.

In His own inimitable way, the Lord answered with a sense of direction and a message in my heart that gave me peace to step forward and take the leap.

I have found time and again that the Lord hears the prayers of His servants when they ask for guidance and direction. It doesn't always come easy. But as I treasure in my heart what He has taught me in the past and continue to learn from Him, He has shown the way. In the process of getting to know His will, of desiring to follow Him and of seeking His blessing, I have also gotten to know more His character, His desires and His heart.

On this Feast of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, let us imitate Mary and trust the Lord to speak to us. Let us seek Him with all our hearts. *Joy Sosoban (jsosoban@gmail.com)*

Reflection: By waiting and by calm you shall be saved, in quiet and in trust shall be your strength. (Isaiah 30:15)

Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening.

DON'T CRY

When the Lord saw her, he was moved with pity for her and said to her, "Do not weep." — Luke 7:13

Imagine a society with no means to support a widow. How can she go on living especially when her only child dies? Hopeless, alone and in pain, the widow is like a dead woman walking.

In the Gospel, Jesus was with a crowd going along their way when He saw the widow and her dead son. He could've just stayed the course and ignored her. She did not ask for help, she did not ask for any miracle but Jesus felt her pain and took the initiative. She did not go to Him but He went to her. Not only that, He said, "Don't cry." This probably meant, "Hush, all will be well. I'll take care of everything."

And though considered ritually impure, Jesus touched the bier and commanded the dead son to rise. The son was brought back to life!

This is an awesome account of how our true God is. Like the widow, even before we ask for help, even before we make any move to go to Him and even if we're not worthy, He takes the initiative to restore us. He comes to us! So the next time you're in great pain, in silence, listen to the voice in your heart telling you, "Don't cry. I'll take care of everything."

Carlo Lorenzo (carloflorenzo@yahoo.com)

Reflection: God meets us where we are. Whether we're in pain, in anger, in sin, or away from Him. He finds ways to bring us back to His embrace.

Father God, [illegible] You [illegible] Him [illegible]

2 Corinthians 1:1-7 • Psalm 34:2-3,4-5, 6-7, 8-9
Matthew 5:1-12

ESSENCE OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT

Who encourages us... so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction... – 2 Corinthians 1:4

It was a simple outpatient procedure that had gone bad. Before long, my wife's aunt had developed sepsis or blood poisoning, a potentially deadly medical condition. The family was devastated. I was particularly alarmed because I had just read about a young woman who had died of sepsis. I quickly sent an email to some friends asking for urgent prayers.

Soon after, a prayer brigade was organized in both the U.S. and the Philippines. For days on end, round the clock, people were interceding, praying the rosary, offering Mass, even fasting. The show of concern and compassion was overwhelming. What was more amazing was that most of those who participated didn't even know my aunt-in-law personally.

My aunt-in-law eventually survived that horrifying episode, but our family will forever be grateful for the support and prayers of those whose names we didn't even know and faces we never got to see.

When it comes to trying situations, like-minded people sharing the same faith and hope just have a way of coming together as one. That is the essence of the human spirit. *Erwin Roceles (erwin_roceles@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Are we there for friends even during difficult times?

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

Acts 11:21-26; 13:1-3 (or 2 Corinthians 1.18-22) • Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6 9 (or Psalm 119 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 135) • Matthew 10:7-13 (or Matthew 5:13-16)

BAKING BOO-BOO

"It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out."
– Matthew 5:13

One thing that I used to love to bake was *lengua de gato*. I did it so well — the kind that melts in the mouth — that my sweet-toothed sisters, nieces and nephews loved it so much. And I guess, over time, I got too confident doing it.

One time, as I was mixing the ingredients, I noticed that the mixture's consistency was different. After reviewing the ingredients I had already poured into the bowl, I realized I had used salt instead of sugar. I had no choice but to throw out the mixture and start all over again.

In life, we make mistakes — that's for sure. Instead of following what we know to be right and true, we deviate and follow our own sinful ways. We mix our divine nature with impure, lustful thoughts and acts, with greed and gluttony, with selfishness and apathy.

But we're blessed because we have a God who doesn't throw us out of the circle of His love whenever we fail Him. Instead, He allows us to start over and over again, loving us unconditionally until we finally realize how great His love for us is.

Let us not waste His love. *Tess V Atienza (svp_tvatienza@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: In what ways are you failing God now? What are you going to do about it? Do it now.

I will run the way of your commandments when you have set my heart free.
Psalm 119:32

Memorial of St. Barnabas, Apostle

St. Barnabas, Apostle, pray for us.

QUALIFIED!

Our qualification comes from God. – 2 Corinthians 3:5

As I write this, I have been working at Shepherd's Voice Publications (SVP) for two weeks. For me, it's a dream come true! I had always wanted to be a writer, but because I wanted to fulfill my parents' dream of having a doctor in the family, I took up Physical Therapy in college, supposedly as a pre-med course.

But God had other plans. My parents became Couples for Christ (CFC) members and I joined Youth for Christ (YFC). I became active in our campus ministry in UP Manila. After graduation, I decided to work fulltime for CFC/YFC. God brought me to mission in different places, including Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia and Timor Leste. It was the best and most blessed 10 years of my life!

But God showed me that He still has other plans for me. After a long period of discernment, I decided to leave full-time work for CFC. Right after I made my decision, God led me to work in SVP.

Am I a Communications graduate? No. Did I take up writing courses? No. But I believe my qualification comes from God. His grace is more than enough! *Tina Santiago-Rodriguez (teachermamatina@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Believe that God has the best plan for you. He will make you "qualified" and will equip you with what you need.

Lord, thank You for Your grace and for leading me to where I am now. May I always depend on You in all I do, trusting that You know what's best for me.

2 Corinthians 3:15-4:1, 3-6 • Psalm 85:9, 10, 11-12, 13-14
Matthew 5:20-26

PHOTOSHOP, ANYONE?

"I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."
– Matthew 5:20

I used to edit a lifestyle magazine and the Photoshop technique came real handy when we had to correct photographs. With the graphics editing program developed by Adobe Systems Incorporated, you can easily erase a model's wrinkles or smoothen her dress.

One day, we were going to use a photograph of a foreign model for the cover of the magazine. To enhance the photo, the artist took a photo of a local model, cut out the body, and pasted it under the head of the foreign model.

I okayed the layout and it was sent for proofing.

When I saw the proof, I realized my big mistake. I wouldn't want my head pasted on another woman's body, would I? But if I changed the layout, I would be slapped with a P30,000 fine to pay for the cost of the press proofing.

At the moment, one principle I've tried to live by nagged me: "Do what is right." So I had the layout changed, and I paid the fine. Ouch.

But now, as I reflect on today's readings about doing the right thing, I smile and feel like patting myself on the shoulder. *Cynthia U Santiago (cusantiago@gmail.com)*

Reflection: What teachings in today's Gospel do you find hard to follow?

2 Corinthians 4:7-15 • Psalm 116:10-11, 15-16, 17-18
Matthew 5:27-32

WHITE LACE AND PROMISES

"You shall not commit adultery." – Matthew 5:27

The wooden doors of the San Antonio de Padua Church in Silang, Cavite flung open and there she was, the most beautiful bride I had ever seen, in the most gorgeous gown made of French lace. The angelic voices of the Las Piñas Boys Choir filled the whole church with their own version of "Yellow" that instantly captured everyone's heart. If only one could freeze that moment to make it last forever.

It was the wedding of our only daughter Trina to Jang, her law school classmate, and they wanted to share with their guests something really special. Nothing was left to chance ever since Jang made the proposal in Central Park. The "same day edit" video caught many guests in tears at the wedding ceremony officiated by a family friend, Archbishop Angel Lagdameo. The garden reception in Tagaytay was equally enchanting as guests delighted in a delectable sit-down dinner. A firework display signaled the start of the celebration that lasted for hours. What a night to remember!

But beyond all that was visible to the senses, what mattered more was what was written in the hearts of our newlyweds. "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6). *Mari Sison-Garcia (mari_sison_garcia@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: A marriage is a contract among three parties: the bride, the groom and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, be the center of my marriage.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 • Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12
Matthew 5:33-37

YES-YES-NO

"Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes' and your 'No' mean 'No'."
– Matthew 5:37

I am not afraid to change my mind, especially when I know I was wrong in the first place. Yet, I know that people respect you more if you stand by your word and do what you say.

That's a principle that's important to our kids. They tend to remember and hold on tight to our promises. Their world crumbles and they start losing trust when promises are broken.

This goes true with adults, too, especially for persons in authority. I have experienced many times how my "yes" could build much faith and hope in people, and how I may also crush their spirits when I suddenly backtrack and say "no." I, too, have been given much hope by people I look up to when they say "yes" — and have been shattered many times when they change their minds and say "no."

Of course, when it comes to God, He knows whether you'll make good on your promise or break it. Still, He teaches us that it's better to be very careful with your words than to carelessly promise things you may not deliver — for your own good, and for the good of many others.

So the next time you say "yes" or "no," you'd better be sure about it. *Alvin Barcelona (apb_ayo@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Are you a man of your word? Are you aware of the effects on others when you change your mind? Make it up to the people to whom you broke your promises.

Lord, give me a heart and a screen mind so that I will be mindful of what I speak and do. Help me to keep my promises and not crush their spirits.

Servant of God Orlando Catanli, pray for us.

2 Samuel 12:7-10, 13 • Psalm 32:1-2, 5, 7, 11
Galatians 2:16, 19-21 • Luke 7:36-8:3

OWNING UP

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan answered David, "The Lord on his part has forgiven your sin: you shall not die." — 2 Samuel 12:13

"Ako na!" she said (*"Ako na"* is a colloquial term that reluctantly lays blame on one's self), when she was reprimanded by her supervisor. It was her way of putting the matter to rest, without contrition. After her boss left, she started to explain that she didn't do anything wrong. She claimed it wasn't her fault but her boss's.

What a contrast to our first reading where Nathan called David's attention to the sin he had committed. David could have wormed his way out of the situation he had created. He was king, after all, and could have disregarded Nathan. It would have been more politically practical. He could have denied it effortlessly. Yet, David took it like a real man and admitted his sin. He was quick to admit his fault with sincerity and contrition.

Many of us deny our wrongdoing to save face, to avoid the consequences of our actions or to simply hold on to our pride. We are afraid to show that we are imperfect or weak. Yet David, king, conqueror, warrior — a man after God's own heart — humbled himself and confessed his sins.

We could learn a lot from David. *Jun Asis (mabuting.balita@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Do you let your pride get in the way of truthfulness?

Lord, teach me to be humble of heart, to see my sins and repent of them swiftly.

BUILT FOR AWESOMENESS!

Behold now is a very acceptable time. – 2 Corinthians 6:2

What if J.K. Rowling had second guessed her story line and kept the *Harry Potter* novel all to herself? What if Steve Jobs had stuck to conventional technology? What if Mother Teresa had gotten lazy?

These big names made history because they acted on their passions. They didn't allow fear or disappointment to intimidate them as they opened themselves up to the opportunities of the world.

Today, the Lord is inviting us to open ourselves up to His abundance because He wants to fulfill our dreams! He's reminding us that every day is packed with endless blessings reserved just for us. Now is a very acceptable time to pick ourselves up and succeed.

You know what else comes with God's abundance? People. He makes sure that we're never alone, whether in success or in failure. He placed us in a ministry of people who will back us up. They're our secret weapons, our angels on earth.

So whenever you feel like you're not good enough, remember that Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team and a newspaper editor fired Walt Disney because he lacked imagination. Don't stop. You are made for awesomeness! *Pia Angelica Suiza (piasuiza@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Who are the people who push you to fulfill your dream?

[redacted]

carry out Your purpose. Amen.

THAT'S WHY HE CAME

For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich. — 2 Corinthians 8:9

It was the most emotional rosary I've ever prayed. More than a dozen of us were gathered in a hospital chapel one late evening, praying for the healing of the small daughter of our friends. As we interceded, her parents began to weep. Before long, the whole group — most of us young parents who could relate to how the couple felt — was weeping along with them as we finished the rosary.

I could imagine this girl's parents would have been more than willing to trade places with their little daughter, if only to spare her of the pain from her condition. I know I would.

Right then and there, I got a deeper insight into why the Father sent Jesus to save us. If a flawed, sinful, selfish mother like me would be willing to trade places with her sick daughter, how can I not understand the love that prompted Jesus to lay down His divinity and take on my cloak of flesh?

Jesus came to take our place! It grieved Him to see us suffering in our sinful condition. So He came for us every time we'd fall into sin, every time we'd be sick, every time we'd be heartbroken and devastated.

We are the reason why He came. *Rissa Singson-Kawpeng (justbreatherissa@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Who are the people you'd be willing to trade places with to spare them of suffering? Jesus already did it for them.

Lord Jesus, thank You, thank You, thank You!

NO SECRETS

"And your Father who sees in secret will repay you." – Matthew 6:4

My friend shared with me that he has been donating to a home for the elderly anonymously. For many years, he was able to keep his good deed a secret. He said he wanted to remain unknown as a reminder to be humble and that whatever he is able to give comes from the Lord.

I admire my friend for his silent generosity and I believe God is blessing him with even more opportunities to give.

There may be many good works we do that others will never know about. That's OK because nothing good ever escapes God. He sees every single act of kindness, hears every prayer uttered and feels every heart beating out of love. And His is the only acknowledgment and attention we need.

We can never hide anything from God, especially the good we do. He knows all about it and has already set aside a prize for us in heaven. Try as we might, our secret is no secret after all. *Dina Pecano (dpecano@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Keep your deeds of mercy secret but shout God's goodness from the housetops.

BABBLING

"In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words." – Matthew 6:7

In my service for the Lord as a worship leader, I often find myself praying publicly, leading people into God's presence. But I have a confession to make.

During my younger days, whenever I would lead people in worship or in prayer, I would always use highfaluting and complex words to make me appear spiritual and knowledgeable in the faith. Although some people would affirm me for my deep prayers, I knew I wasn't that effective because I was only pleasing myself, not God.

I still lead worship regularly, but now it's different. Having matured in my walk with Christ, instead of praying to draw attention to myself, I now pray to draw attention to the One most worthy of our affection and devotion — God. With this, I'm glad to be simply used by God, for Him to bless His people in worship. I know now that it's not about me; it's all about Him.

Underneath it all, God sees what's in our hearts.

Our intentions will determine whether our words and actions are worship or indulgence.

Let's worship God with our lives, in spirit and in truth.

Mike Viñas (mikemichaelfcv@yahoo.com)

Reflection: I'm coming back to the heart of worship and it's all about You, it's all about You, Jesus. (Matt Redman)

Lord, teach me to be sincere in my service and worship of You.

REAL TREASURE

"For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be."
– Matthew 6:21

In high school, I was part of the play *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder. One of the characters there asked this crucial question, "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it – every, every minute?" Another character replied, "No, saints and poets maybe, they do some." This question made me reflect even more that there was more to life than just eating, drinking, sleeping and waking up.

So for a time, I believed that spiritual relationships outside my temporal family were paramount. My heart was focused on this belief. Until God literally silenced me to hear His message. In 2000, I had a voice operation that rendered me speechless for three months. Looking deep inside me, I was apparently being prepared to be contemplative — I realized who I was and who is my real wealth, the Love of my life and my eternal Best Friend — Jesus.

I promised God that I'd sing to Him once I gained back my voice. On that day, He arranged for me to render Him a solo concert in our empty parish adoration chapel. I sang one of my favorite songs with gusto and feeling, *"Tanging Yaman."* My restless heart finally rested in God's loving embrace. How true St. Teresa de Avila's epiphany is: *Solo Dios basta* — God alone is enough! *Grace Princesa (grprincesa@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Are you still asking what or who is your treasure?

RECONCILE!

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." – 2 Corinthians 12:9

Reconciliation. This beautiful word is being treated by modern society as unimportant. Yet, I believe each person must work on it, otherwise it will become an extinct virtue.

People would rather go on living without reconciling. With whom? With God. With one's self. With family. With friends. With enemies. Then they wonder why life is miserable.

Many think it's too difficult to forgive and ask forgiveness to be worth the trouble. But my friend, Mahatma Gandhi (he didn't know me but his wisdom equips me for life), said, "You cannot succeed in one department in life while cheating on another; life is an indivisible whole." What many fail to understand is that God gives us the grace to forgive so that we may help restore our broken relationships.

Reconciliation means moving on. When you return, redefine and reconcile, you are restoring your life!

Return to God. Redefine your true identity in Christ. Reconcile with others and be set free.

Restoration is our mission. When we reconcile, we build up God's Church. One brick at a time. *Obet Cabrillas (kpreacherobet@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Holding on to anger, resentment and hurt only gives you tense muscles, a headache and a sore jaw from clenching your teeth. Forgiveness gives you back the laughter and the lightness in your life. (Joan Lunden)

Lord, I depend on You for the grace and power I need to forgive and reconcile with my brethren.

Zechariah 12:10-11; 13:1 • Psalm 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9
Galatians 3:26-29 • Luke 9:18-24

GOD'S CHILDREN

Through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus.
– Galatians 3:26

With my highly idealistic and romantic nature, I used to see every member of the opposite sex as a potential boyfriend. I met one potential after another and had a relationship with a couple of them when I was close to my ideal marrying age. But both didn't last. What followed was terrible heartache.

Then three years ago, I started to actively seek for a future spouse. But before 2010 ended, I got a message that I was to consecrate the following year to God, so I focused on my career instead.

I got the breakthrough I was praying for, as I managed to write articles for an inspirational magazine almost every month. On some months, two or three of my articles were published in a single issue. The magazine also won a highly-coveted award for the first time.

Just when my year of consecration was almost over, I met a brother in Christ. This time around, I saw him as a potential friend first, probably because his sister and sister-in-law are my friends. Six months after we first met, I knew he was The One I'd been patiently waiting for. The Feast brought us together. *Ems Sy Chan (havenofleeanne@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: It is good to see a member of the opposite sex as a brother or sister first rather than a future partner, since we are all united by the blood of Christ.

I [illegible] people You want me to [illegible] and meet. May I bring them all closer to You.

Isaiah 49:1-6 • Psalm 139:1-3, 13-14, 14-15
Acts 13:22-26 • **Luke 1:57-66, 80**

NAME TAGS

He asked for a tablet and wrote, "John is his name." – Luke 1:63

I remember a classmate of ours named Jun who projected a strange image as far as we were concerned. We would call him "the exception to the rule," a different kind of personality, a deviant, a weirdo and not a PLU (Person Like Us).

We later found out the reason for his attitude and behavior: he was label-conscious. Being the eldest and the only son in a brood of five children, he was brought up and trained to be a strong man at all times — to speak with authority, to walk upright, to be inflexible as a bamboo and to not cry.

Yes, we found out all these things. But it was too late because we discovered these at the funeral parlor where his body laid in state.

In today's Gospel, relatives disapproved of the name that Elizabeth and Zechariah wanted to give to their son because none of their relatives had that name. But the couple chose to follow the Lord's leading instead of caving in to pressure.

In the final analysis, we really don't have to live up to what people think of us. What matters is what God says. *Dr. Henry Yu (henrio_md@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: We are all God's children and are each called by Him in a special way. We are not meant to be a xerox copy of somebody else. We are made in the image of God and we are meant to live up to that.

Father, remind us not to tailor our lives according to labels and name tags but to live up to the name that You gave us.

FALLING OUT

So Abram said to Lot: "Let there be no strife between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are kinsmen."
– Genesis 13:8

Just last night when I was out partying with college friends, I learned that a popular bar across our party venue happened to be the brainchild of one of our friends. He put it up with his brother, and it became a hit. However, he is no longer connected with the establishment because he had a falling out with his brother.

Time and again we hear of money and business destroying family relationships and friendships. My mother once warned me to never get into business with relatives and closest friends. "That's the beginning of conflict," she said. But there are many successful family corporations around, as well as businesses run by friends.

When do conflicts arise then? When pride, greed and envy step in.

Abram's words to Lot in the chosen verse above reflect that he valued family relations. And this story shows us that relationships are more valuable than any material wealth that we possess. Between material possessions and relationships, may we keep in mind that the latter is irreplaceable. *Nova Arias-Sevilla (nova.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Do you have conflicts with family or friends about money? How can you resolve this peacefully?

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18 • Psalm 105: 1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8-9
Matthew 7:15-20

THE COMING BLESSING

"Fear not, Abram! Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so," he added, "shall your descendants be. To your descendants I give this land." – Genesis 15:1, 5, 18

"One caramel afogato for George!" (That's my favorite drink at Starbucks. What's in it? Uhhhmmm, sorry, a fogat, o… he, he.)

In coffee shops, they take your name and write it on the cup where your drink will be. Sometimes it takes a while but we know we'll get it soon enough. And we know it's ours because they call out our name.

In the verse above, God was promising a man close to 100 years old and a barren wife that he would have countless descendants and would possess a land currently owned by the Pharaoh. Although unbelievable, I imagine Abraham waiting for the fulfillment of this promise with excitement. And when he saw it coming to pass, I wonder if he remembered that God made sure to mention his name, "Abraham," when He spoke it.

It took a long time before I found the love of my life. But several years ago, when I had just begun courting the girl of my dreams, I made a leap of faith. I wrote down on my dream list that I would one day marry Dinah Chikiamco. Three and a half years later, I walked out of our parish holding in my hand Mrs. George Gabriel, the answer to my prayer. God gave me what I asked for… and He even put my name on it. *George Tolentino Gabriel (george.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Are you waiting for a blessing? Maybe God is still preparing it for you. It's coming soon.

Give me patience, faith and gratitude for when my blessing comes.

Genesis 16:1-12, 15-16 • Psalm 106:1-2, 3-4, 4-5
Matthew 7:21-29

TOO MUCH INITIATIVE

Sarai said to Abram: "The Lord has kept me from bearing children. Have intercourse, then, with my maid; perhaps I shall have sons through her." – Genesis 16:2

It was an expensive sport shirt brand from the 70s that had an embroidered logo of a face with a moustache and one eye. A guy who had that new shirt told his maid to take extra care in handling it. The maid obeyed and washed it carefully. But when she was about to iron it, she panicked when she saw that there was only one eye. She thought the other eye had gotten washed off! Instead of telling her boss about it, she did what she thought was best — she embroidered another eye!

Isn't that what we do sometimes? We have the best intentions but later on, we end up doing more damage than good. Take Sarah, for example. She gave her slave Hagar to Abraham in her desire to have an offspring. It was taking too long for God to fulfill His promise, so she took matters into her own hands and did the next best thing. But the next best thing is never good enough. This offspring, Ishmael, known as the Father of the Arabs, became the perpetual enemy of the Israelites.

Only God can give the best. *Ronna Ledesma (ronna_ledesma@yahoo.com.ph)*

Reflection: Hell isn't merely paved with good intentions; it's walled and roofed with them. Yes, and furnished too. (A.Huxley)

Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me. . (Psalm 25:4)

THE DECLARATIONS

"He stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I will do it. Be made clean." – Matthew 8:3

Outcast. That's his name. During his time, this leper guy was not just sick. He himself was the disease of society. Hopeless and lonely were synonyms for him. While other sick people were cared for by their loved ones, nobody wanted to be near this dude.

That's why when he declared what Jesus *can* do to his life, Jesus piped back with a counter declaration, "Of course! I'm willing! Be clean!" My heart can even hear Jesus continue, "Today is the day you are stepping into a new season of your life. The rest of your life will be the best years of your life. You've been buried in this sickness for so long, but this is not your home. The treasure called 'you' is coming out. I'm calling forth the dreams I've planted in your heart — the gifts, the talents, even the untapped potential that I created you with — to come back to life."

"You can overcome all obstacles. You can prosper amidst difficulty. You can be joyful amidst trials. You can recover from a fall. You can be all God created you to be."

If these sound familiar, it's because these are God's declarations for you, too! *Jon Escoto (faithatworkjon@gmail.com)*

Reflection: How do you feel as you read God's declarations for you?

Jesus, give me grace to have faith in the faith You have in me

Acts 12:1-11 • Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9
2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18 • Matthew 16:13-19

IN THE MIDST OF WAR

Peter thus was being kept in prison, but prayer by the Church was fervently being made to God on his behalf. – Acts 12:5

How many times have we found ourselves in trouble because of our faith, like Peter was?

I remember when our family was still on mission in Timor Leste for Couples for Christ. I was five months pregnant with our first child when a civil war of sorts broke out. Houses and cars were randomly set on fire and fighting broke out among the Timorese because of perceived racial discrimination. Some foreigners also reported their cars being stoned by disgruntled youth, plus other incidents of violence.

From our mission house, we could hear gunshots in the distance and see young people armed with knives, sticks and clubs roaming in the streets. During those times of uncertainty and fear, our hearts were still at peace, knowing that our brothers and sisters in the community and the bigger Church were praying for us.

We were eventually evacuated out of Timor but, by God's grace, we returned a few months afterwards. Peace was eventually restored in the country and we continued with our mission, reaping even bigger harvests for the Lord. *Tina Santiago-Rodriguez (teachermamatina@gmail.com)*

Reflection: When was the last time you prayed for others, especially those in dangerous and trying situations? Make a list of people you can pray for, including the missionaries of the Church.

1 Kings 19:16, 19-21 • Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11
Galatians 5:1, 13-18 • Luke 9:51-62

BREAKING RULES

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself." – Galatians 5:14

While riding in a taxi cab in another country, I was reviewing with my three-year-old daughter the meaning of the colors on the traffic light. We together exclaimed, "Green means... go! Red means... stop!" And just as we approached the intersection, the yellow light flashed, and our driver sped away. I jokingly said, "Yellow means... go faster!" My daughter was perplexed. I assured her afterwards that what she knew was correct — yellow means "slow down." I had to explain to her that the driver wasn't following the rules.

People break rules because they know they won't get caught. People break rules thinking that what they do does not affect those around them. But rules are made for our own good, and for the good of those around us. Some rules are laws that govern how we conduct ourselves in public. Some rules are unspoken, but deal with matters of the heart. In big and little things, in the office, in school, on the road, or in our homes, let us choose to use our freedom to do what is right, and take each chance we get to love others the way God wants us to. *Geraldine G. Catral (teachergeegee@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Today, in what ways will you love your neighbor as you love yourself?

O Lord, help me to serve and love those around me just as You want me to. Holy Spirit, help me to always choose what is pure and good, and right. Amen.

PRAY LIKE A CHILD

By Rissa Singson-Kawpeng

The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. – Exodus 33:11



You don't have to be a mystic to know how to pray. Even a child can do it.

My nephew Enrique is proof of this. He was four years old when his family was saying the rosary. They were interceding for the safety of a family member who was going to have a surgery.

Everyone was reciting their Hail Marys when Enrique's grandma noticed that he was in intense prayer. With eyes closed and his small white hands tightly clasped together, he mumbled along with everybody.

His grandma was surprised to see him praying because she knew he didn't know the "Our Father" or "Hail Mary" yet.

So she leaned over to listen to him. To her surprise, she heard Enrique saying "Baa, baa, black sheep…"

I believe that Jesus listened to that prayer. It came from the heart of a child. While Enrique didn't understand the words that were being said, his desire was clear. He wanted to talk to the Lord.

GO TELL THAT SPECIAL SOMEONE

That's the essence of prayer. It's a conversation. It's talking to God like you would to a friend.

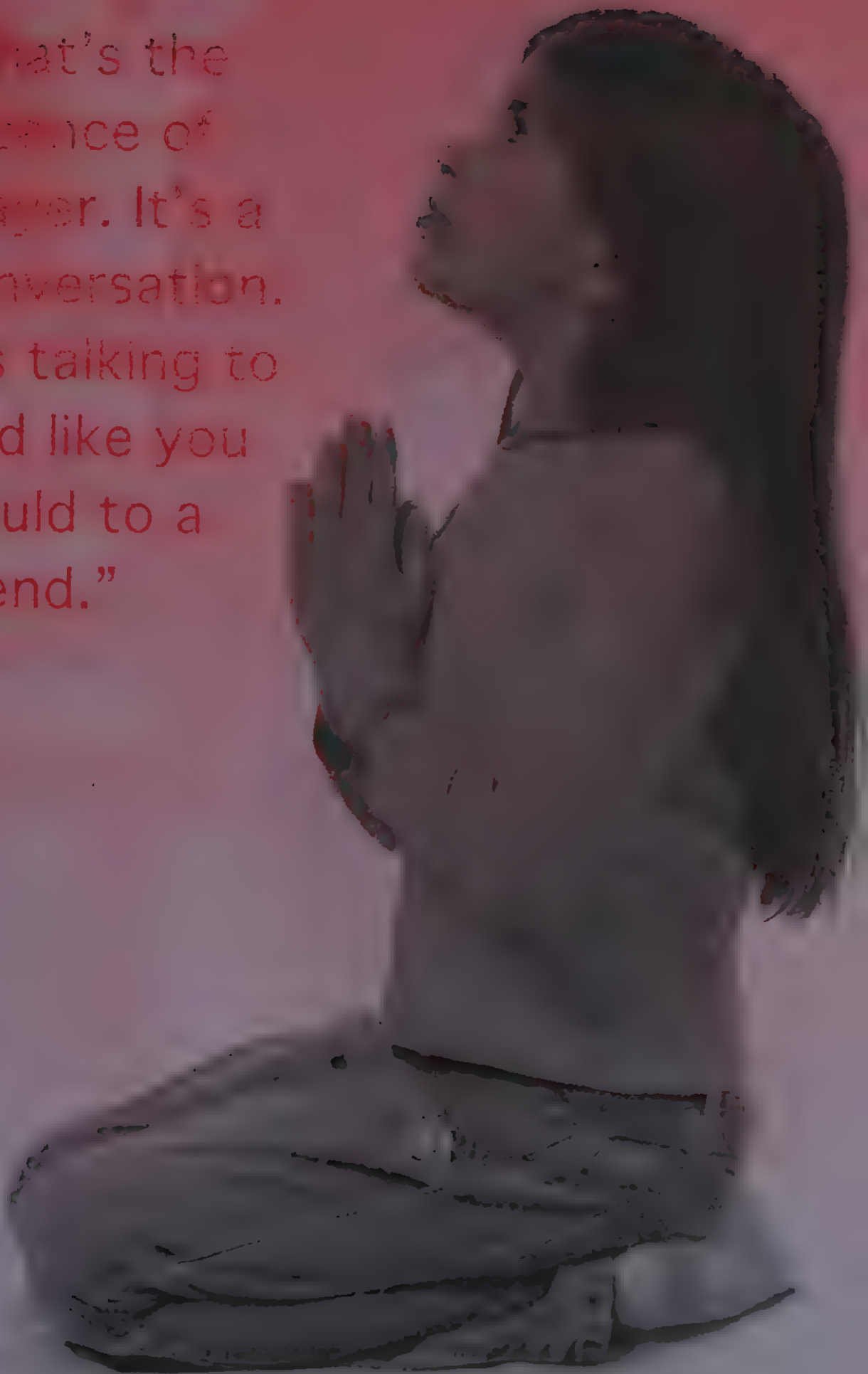
What do you do when you're happy? Let's say, you passed the board exam or you won the first prize in your office raffle. Don't you pull out your cell phone and call a friend, your spouse or a family member and say, "Hey, guess what? Something wonderful just happened to me!"? Then you go on telling that special someone the details of your story.

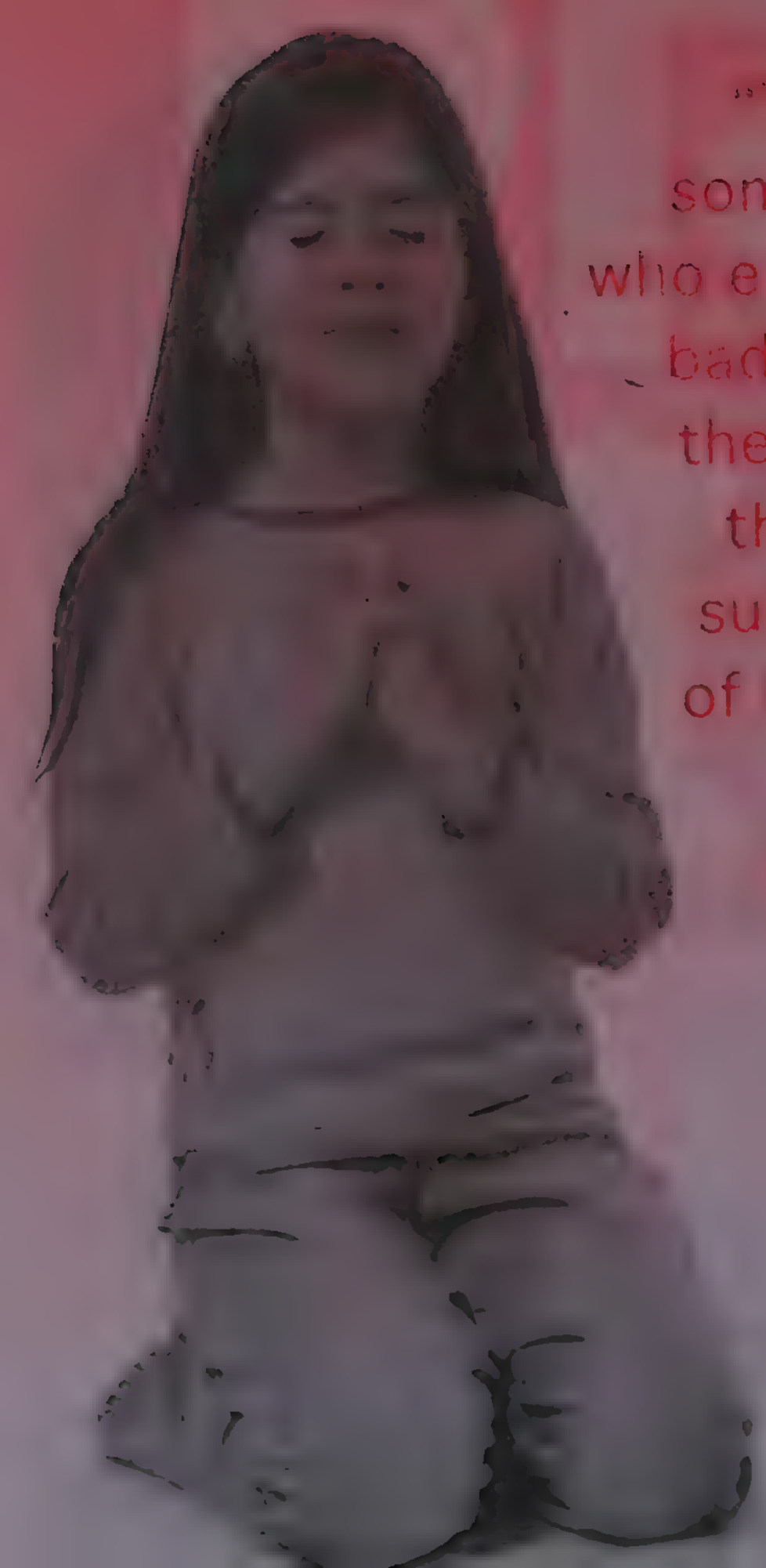
How about when a negative thing happens to you? What do you do?

Don't you also pour out your heart to someone close to you?

King David was such a man. Read the Psalms and imagine that he was alive today. The Psalms read like his blog entries directed to the Lord!

"What's the essence of prayer. It's a conversation. It's talking to God like you would to a friend."





"There are some people who experience bad things in their life and they would sulk in front of God. Oh, I was one of them!"

There are psalms where he's happy and he praises the Lord. But there are also psalms when he's worried, afraid or angry.

Just read some of them:

All my enemies whisper about me and think the worst about me. They say, "He has a terrible disease. He will never get out of bed again." My best and truest friend, who ate at my table, has even turned against me.

– Psalm 41: 7-10

"Rescue me, my God! Slap all my enemies in the face! Shatter the teeth of the wicked!"

– Psalm 3:8

"Babylon, you are doomed! I pray the Lord's blessings on anyone who punishes you for what you did to us. May the Lord bless everyone who beats your children against the rocks!"

– Psalm 137:8-9

Wow, talk about anger! I bet none of us would have the courage to pray, "Lord, please *lang, mabungi sana ang kaaway ko*!" But here is King David doing this and more — and it's even recorded in Scripture!

ANGRY PRAYERS

There are some people who experience bad things in their life and they would sulk in front of God. Oh, I was one of them!

There was a time when things didn't work out between my boyfriend and me. In short, we broke up.

That wouldn't have been a real problem if I were younger. But I was already 34 and panicking. Besides, I had already set

my heart on this man and we had gone as far as browsing through wedding gown magazines together.

For days, all I wanted to do was stay in bed and never wake up. I went into depression. I stopped going to daily Mass. I lost the desire to pray. I felt bad that God didn't make things work out for us. I felt like a little kid to whom He had handed a lollipop only to grab it back again.

But you know what I learned?

When we're angry with God, we don't need to turn away from Him. We can tell Him straight that we feel bad and that we're mad at Him. Just let it out. It's OK, God is big enough to take it. Because that in itself is praying.

And before long, I'm sure your prayers won't always be full of anger. Your prayers will change. Because you'll change. You know why I'm sure? Because no one can be in the presence of God and remain unchanged.

"When we're angry with God, we don't need to turn away from Him. We can tell Him straight that we feel bad and that we're mad at Him."

(Reprinted from Rissa Singson-Kawpeng's book, Discover Your Inner Beauty Queen*)*

Genesis 18:16-33 • Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 8-9, 10-11
Matthew 8:18-22

BAD HISTORY? NO PROBLEM!

"Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." – Matthew 8:19

One day, I was reading the genealogy of Jesus. It was quite impressive. It included heavyweights of the Bible: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and so on. But inserted in various places were four surprising characters: Tamar, Bathsheba, Ruth and Rahab.

Tamar slept with her father-in-law. Her story is so distasteful (see Genesis 38). The second woman is Bathsheba, an adulteress. Next was Ruth, a Moabite widow. To the Jews, she meant bad luck, a foreigner who was not favored by God. And finally, there was Rahab, a prostitute.

Here's my question: Couldn't God have selected better women to be in Jesus' bloodline? Perhaps a woman who didn't cheat on her husband? Or who didn't sell her body? A woman who was responsible, disciplined and mature?

But that's how God operates. If God found these four women good enough to be in Jesus' lineage, He can really use anyone. God isn't interested in where you came from but where you're going. He's not interested in what you did but in what you're going to do. He's not interested in how you've failed Him in your past but in how you'll follow and serve Him in your future. *Bo Sanchez (bosanchez@kerygmafamily.com)*

Reflection: Does your personal history hinder you from following Jesus? Reflect on the stories of the four women in the Bible.

Lord, help me to trust in my worth. Help me to believe that in Your eyes, I am worthy to follow You.

Genesis 19:15-29 • Psalm 26:2-3, 9-10, 11-12
Matthew 8:23-27

WHO ARE YOU TRYING TO IMPRESS?

The men were amazed and said, "What sort of man is this, whom even the winds and the sea obey?" – Matthew 8:27

One day, my brother Jen and I were riding an FX van together. We were on our way home from our grandmother's house. When it was time to alight from the van, Jen opened the door, hopped off and started walking without even waiting for me to get out. Shocked by his display of "ungentlemanliness," I ran after him and said, "Hey! Why didn't you wait for me to get out? I'm a girl, you know! That's so ungentlemanly of you."

His reply surprised me. "What? I *am* a gentleman!" he insisted. "I wait for my girlfriend to get off but not you. You're different. You're my *sister!*"

Funny how we often try to impress other people more than the ones who truly matter to us. We spend so much effort trying to sweep others off their feet, giving them the best of us, while we ignore our loved ones whom we live with and spend most of our time with.

We do the same to God, too. We can give much of our time and effort to people and projects while forgetting the One who truly loves us.

Jesus died for you. Don't you think He deserves your best? *Erika Pauline Mendoza (epaulmendoza@gmail.com)*

REFLECTION: Live to impress your audience of One.

Lord, help me to keep You No. 1 in my life.

Ephesians 2:19-22 • Psalm 117:1, 2
John 20:24-29

OUR FATHER

You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God. – Ephesians 2:19

Reading U.S. President Barack Obama's memoir, *Dreams from My Father*, I gained an insight into how a black man feels growing up in a place dominated by white people and their history, their culture and their way of thinking.

Obama felt so out of place, so lost, so hungry for identity that it led him to study, research and return to his roots in his father's place in Kenya. There he met his relatives and learned to accept and integrate within himself the dichotomy that he was—being born of a white mother and yet having the dark skin of his father.

For us who are baptized Catholics, we need to realize and accept that we are at a different level of relationship from those who just honor Jesus as a wise man. As members of His household, we ought to follow His example of sacrificial service and love.

As disciples, there should be no dichotomy within us — we are in the world, but not of this world. Let's all strive to keep this in mind. *Joy Sosoban (jsosoban@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Enable me to serve You well, my Lord.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.

Genesis 22:1-19 • Psalm 1115: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9
Matthew 9:1-8

ABRAHAM AND THE ANT

"Because you acted as you did in not withholding from me your beloved son, I will bless you abundantly." – Genesis 22:16-17

I received an email with a cartoon of an ant toting a contact lens. The caption said, "*Lord, I don't know why You want me to carry this thing. I can't eat it, and it's awfully heavy. But if this is what You want me to do; I'll carry it for You.*" The story behind it was the cartoonist's daughter lost her contact lens during a mountain climb. Another climber found it when he saw an ant walking on the face of a rock carrying the contact lens on its back.

Abraham must have felt as the ant did about God's command to sacrifice Isaac. It was incomprehensible and the hardest thing for a parent to do, but he obeyed anyway.

Are you carrying a heavy burden? A life-threatening illness, a problematic relationship or a debt you can't pay no matter how much you scrimp? Are you at your wit's end trying to understand why this is happening when you're doing your best to be a good person?

Be like Abraham and the ant. Bear the burden with faith. God has a purpose and a great reward in the end.

Lella M. Santiago (mirellasantiago@yahoo.com)

Reflection: When trials come, do you ask, "Why me, Lord?" or do you ask, "What do you want me to do, Lord?"

Lord, may I see Your purpose in everything You ask of me. But if I can't, help me to trust You anyway.

St. Elizabeth of Portugal, pray for us.

Genesis 23:1-4, 19; 24:1-8, 62-67 • Psalm 106:1-2, 3-4, 4-5
Matthew 9:9-13

THE LOVE THAT CHANGES

"I did not come to call the righteous but sinners." – Matthew 9:13

"Every saint has a past; every sinner, a future." This was the beautiful lesson of the film *There Be Dragons*, which portrayed the friendship of St. Jose Maria Escriva with a childhood friend who lived his life in anger but was redeemed in the end by his son's forgiveness and the love of his friend.

In a prayer meeting, Bo Sanchez told a story of a young atheist who got pregnant out of wedlock. But she found herself welcomed by a group of mothers who accepted her without judgment and loved her to wholeness. Today, she believes in a loving God because of the kindness she received from them and continues to share how her life has changed because of God's love.

The Gospel today speaks of the kindness of God. He calls sinners like you and me and transforms them with His unconditional love.

There is always hope because we have a God who will not give up on us even when we want to give up on ourselves because of our many weaknesses. Jesus invites us to stand up and walk and try again when we stumble and fall because it's not what we do but what He is going to do in us that matters. All we need to do is follow Him. Let us allow His love to change us. *Marjorie Ann Duterte (marjorie.duterte@gmail.com)*

Reflection: He said to him, "Follow me."

Lord Jesus, I am ashamed of my many sins. Please forgive me and bring me to wholeness. I trust in Your healing love. Amen.

Genesis 27:1-5, 15-29 • Psalm 135:1-2, 3-4, 5-6
Matthew 9:14-17

A TIME FOR EVERYTHING

Jesus answered them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast." – Matthew 9:15

When we were kids, we came home one day to discover that my five-year-old brother had rounded up all of our chicks and buried them up to their necks in the ground. When we confronted him, he explained that he buried the chicks because he wanted to "grow more of them." Apparently, after watching my father planting rice, he thought planting chicks would also serve to multiply the creatures.

There's a right time and a right way to accomplish everything. While planting chicks is the wrong way to reproduce animals, it's the right way to cultivate plants and trees. Similarly, fasting is right for sacrifices but it's inappropriate when the situation calls for generosity. And offering sacrifices is not a substitute for turning away from sin.

We are all called to be discerning. As we exercise our vocation as Christians, may we not follow blindly. Instead, let us keep our hearts and minds open to His leading that we may know what the season calls for; that this day, no matter how ordinary, may become extraordinary. *Rod Velez (rod.velez@gmail.com)*

Reflection: We are all creatures of habit and we love our routines. But sometimes God calls us to do something outside of what we're used to. What new thing is the Lord calling you to do?

Isaiah 66:10-14 • Psalm 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20
Galatians 6:14-18 • Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

MY PERSONAL PURSUIT

From now on, let no one make troubles for me; for I bear the marks of Jesus on my body. – Galatians 6:17

Our house rests on the ridge of Mount Makiling where we watch birds freely flying in front of our house. One time, I saw two birds — one chasing after the other, over one tree, then another, and circling back several times tirelessly. All the while, the birds were happily chirping.

In my mind, I likened the joyful bird chase in the way I pursue God through my apostolic work in the office. I am reminded of my personal mission to keep doing the right thing despite the opposition of my colleagues on how we earn money from our real estate dealings.

Coincidentally, my Bible reading for this day is about the parable of the sums of money and the principle behind chasing after wealth. It made me resolve more firmly to be a witness to others on how my husband and I earn money.

I thank God that I find consolation in doing what is right and following His precepts. *Donna España (donna@homeliving.com.ph)*

Reflection: He who kneels before God can stand before anyone. (Unknown)

Jesus, I thank You for Your cross and Your great love that saves me. May I always boast of what You have done for me.

FAITHFUL TITHER

"Of everything you give me, I will faithfully return a tenth part to you." – Genesis 28:22

I didn't use to tithe faithfully. Although I grew up in a Catholic community since I was a teen, I didn't give tithing much importance, even when I became a full-time mission worker. Giving 10 percent of my meager missionary allowance to the Lord didn't make much sense to me at that time. (Ssshh! Don't tell my leaders!)

Don't get me wrong. I did tithe but not regularly. However, when my boyfriend and I got engaged, we decided to start tithing faithfully, no matter what. (My fiancé, now my husband, also works full-time for our community.)

It's been eight years since we made that decision and we're still tithing as faithfully as we can. Although it can be quite challenging, especially now that we have kids to raise, we have seen how God faithfully provides.

His grace is sufficient. With Him, we can say that we are truly rich! (That's mostly why my blog is named *Truly Rich Mom!*) *Tina Santiago-Rodriguez (teachermamatina@gmail.com)*

Reflection: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides" (Matthew 6:33). When you tithe, you are "seeking first the kingdom of God." Believe that He will provide for you always.

Lord, help us to be faithful in our tithes and gifts. Help us to be faithful trusting in Your abundant provision.

Genesis 32:23-33 • Psalm 17:1, 2-3, 6-7, 8, 15
Matthew 9:32-38

MAN IN THE MIRROR

Jacob said, "I have seen God face-to-face." – Genesis 32:31

I have a friend who always complains. He always gripes that he's at the receiving end of unfair treatment or surrounded by incompetent nincompoops. But I don't believe he just happens to be the unluckiest person in the world.

In reality, the way we perceive others is a reflection of how we see ourselves. Our insecurities, fears, defects and guilt manifest in the way we relate to other people. That's why the insecure always find fault in others, the guilty are judgmental, and the unloved are unnecessarily harsh.

To change the people around us, we need to change ourselves. Look at your innermost self and confront the monsters lurking inside. Scary, isn't it? We refuse to do this because we are driven by the fear of being found unacceptable when we show our true selves.

Understanding God's unwavering love for us helps us to accept our true nature. We are all wonderfully made. No fault, no shortcoming and no past can ever change this. Accept His mercy and you'll be surprised to see the changes it will bring to yourself and, by extension, to the people around you. *Cecil Lim (cez_lim@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Why did Jacob see God in the person who hurt him, and the Pharisees see a demon in Jesus when He healed? It's not what is apparent outside but what is perceived from within.

Lord, I will no longer wound myself [and others] with the thoughts and questions that have surrounded me like thorns: that is a penance You do not ask of me. (Thomas Merton)

Genesis 41:55-57; 42:5-7, 17-24 • Psalm 33:2-3, 10-11, 18-19
Matthew 10:1-7

MAGNANIMOUS

"Alas, we are being punished because of our brother. We saw the anguish of his heart when he pleaded with us, yet we paid no heed; that is why this anguish has now come upon us." – Genesis 42:21

When my brother and I were little kids, my mother always reminded me to give him the bigger chicken leg. She said it was my duty as the eldest to take good care of him. But when my mom wasn't looking, I'd hide the big chicken leg under my pile of rice. The concept of being magnanimous was a bit tricky for my immature mind to handle.

It's difficult not to keep a scorecard in your head. When we think friends and family treat us unfairly, we give them demerits. Joseph had every reason to hate his brothers. After all, they plotted against him. How easy for him to wield his power now and exact revenge. Instead, he forgave his brothers.

That is love in action. That is compassion — a generosity of spirit that allows us to empathize with another and forgive those who have wronged us. Only God knows what is in our hearts. His love knows no measure, for it is vast and endless.

Gina Verdolaga (mgjver@yahoo.com)

Reflection: Do you judge who must be rewarded or punished for their actions?

I [illegible] my brothers and sisters in [illegible]

Genesis 44:18-21, 23-29; 45:1-5
Psalm 105:16-17, 18-19, 20-21 • Matthew 10:7-15

HEALTHFUL CLICHÉ

"But now do not be distressed, and do not reproach yourselves for having sold me here. It was really for the sake of saving lives that God sent me here ahead of you." – Genesis 45:5

According to WebMD.com, research shows that forgiveness is beneficial to one's health. It affects not just the emotional health of a person but also his or her physical well being. And if you couple "forgive" with "forget," studies say that stress hormones will be reduced, your immune system will be strengthened and blood pressure may stabilize.

Amazing? Yes, indeed! Easy? Uhmm… not really.

My mom would usually tell me to always live out this Christian value of forgiveness. She would remind me of the importance of having a tranquil mind and a peaceful heart if I forgive others of whatever offense they have done against me.

She would also remind me of forgetting after forgiving. Though this part seems to be more difficult to do, still she would insist on its significance to Christian living. Consequently, if we get the hang of doing it at all times, for sure, it will be easier for us to make it a part of our system.

Analiza Obiasca (aobiasca_cute@yahoo.com)

Reflection: There is no revenge so complete as forgiveness. (Unknown)

Lord, teach me to be a forgiving person. Amen

ANOTHER CALL

"Behold, I am sending you out..." – Matthew 10:16

This is my second trip to Papuá New Guinea.

The first one was "Mission Accomplished." I was able to help the Charismatic organization in the archdiocese for two years, and ended my trip with a big bang — a huge Pentecost celebration attended by Catholics from all over the archdiocese.

I thought I was finished. But another call came: to set up The Feast in Port Moresby. There was literally no presence of the Light of Jesus Family in the city. I had to rely solely on the Lord to lead me.

In July 2011, I had an audience with the archbishop and presented to him a letter from The Feast founder Bo Sanchez about our intention to set up a local community. The archbishop immediately approved it.

Sometime in late August, I got a call from a "stranger" who traced me through my *Didache* reflection. We met, and he agreed to help build The Feast.

From a group of four friends, we had grown to 55 by March 2012, with twice a month Feasts. By the time you read this, The Feast should be held weekly.

Indeed, when God calls, He leads. The Bible says, "Do not be anxious... for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour" (Matthew 10:19). *Danny Tariman (dtariman.loja@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Do you sense a calling? Listen to God's Word and command for you today.

Here I am, Lord. Send me!

Genesis 49:29-32; 50:15-26 • Psalm 105:1-2, 3-4, 6-7
Matthew 10:24-33

WHY THERE ARE RAINBOWS

Therefore have no fear. By thus speaking kindly to them, he reassured them... – Genesis 50:21

A rainbow is formed when the sun shines on drops of rain as they are falling. The rays that come from those drops produce the rainbow colors. Rain is a symbol of trials, while the sun is a symbol of blessings. So the rainbow is a symbol of God's presence during our times of despair.

In Genesis 6-9, God sends a great flood to cleanse the earth. But He instructs Noah, who is just about the only righteous man in his generation, to make an ark and bring in his family and the animals so they will be safe during the flood. After the deluge, God places a rainbow in the sky as a symbol of His vow never again to destroy the earth.

Despite God's promise, we see again in today's readings that His people, the brothers of Joseph, are anxious about their future. Oftentimes, we are like them, afraid of life's trials. The good news is, when we're in trouble, God does visit us — not just through the symbolic rainbow, but through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Cynthia U. Santiago (cusantiago@gmail.com)*

Reflection: What do you see in times of trouble?

Lord, let me see Your sunshine on my rainy days.

Deuteronomy 30:10-14 • Psalm 69:14, 17, 30-31, 33-34, 36, 37
Colossians 1:15-20 • **Luke 10:25-37**

LOVING OUR NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBORS

"Who is my neighbor?" – Luke 10:29

Do you know who your next-door neighbor is? How often do you talk with them? Do you care about them?

In the direction of the Church to build Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC), we are also encouraged to love our "geographical neighbors." Come to think of it, it does not seem right to co-exist in one milieu, oblivious of the people around us. Every day, we may be communicating with people across the globe through the Internet but we have zero communication with the person next door who, for all we know, may be alone and in pain.

As Christians, we are asked to love everyone especially the person within our reach. That's why Bible sharing groups are venues offered by the Church to build and strengthen neighborhood communities. As we get to know each other better, we as neighbors can come together and settle common issues like security measures, garbage disposal systems, or practical concerns that need not be referred to family or friends who live in another city. Then we become a community of disciples witnessing a true reflection of Christian living. *Cristy Galang (cristy_cc@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Do you live in isolation from your neighbors? Are you willing to open your doors to them in friendship?

Exodus 1:8-14, 22 • Psalm 124:1-3, 4-6, 7-8
Matthew 10:34-11:1

INEFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread.
– Exodus 1:12

Oppression, cruelty, violence — they never work. They're the most ineffective solutions. The Egyptians reduced the Israelites to cruel slavery because of their insecurity and fear. In the end, they found themselves fighting against God through Moses.

Still, the world never learns. Many continue to fool themselves thinking, "If I am more powerful I can easily subvert and silence those who are weaker by using force."

It may seem to work for a while. But in the end, it will surely backfire. From the politics of world leaders down to how you discipline your child, choosing violence and force will only cause the problem to "multiply and spread."

Our Lord Jesus is a perfect example of a victim of cruelty and violence. No less than the Romans, who were the powerful and mighty conquerors then, enforced His execution. And did it stop Him or His followers?

Look at how Christianity is now everywhere. Rome itself is the seat of the Catholic faith!

And how was the world conquered by Jesus? By love — the most effective way of all. *Alvin Barcelona (apb_ayo@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: How can you effectively make things happen? Is it through force, coercion or violence? Or is it through dialogue, understanding, compassion and love?

Dear Lord, grant me the grace to always remember that it is love — Your love — that conquers all. Amen.

St. Bonaventure, bishop and doctor of the Church, pray for us.

Exodus 2:1-15 • Psalm 69:3, 14, 30-31, 33-34
Matthew 11:20-24

GUARDIAN

His sister stationed herself at a distance to find out what would happen to him. – Exodus 2:4

I was watching a show on television about a young girl with special needs. The Department of Social Welfare and Development had rescued her from the guardian to whom she was entrusted by her mother who was working abroad. One administrator of a special needs school made a comment that struck me. She said that having a child with special needs is a gift from God and He knows that those parents are the best guardians for the child.

Having a special needs person in the family takes a lot of patience, understanding and love. We may not completely understand why God gave us a special person in the family, but one thing is clear from the get-go: we are this child's guardian.

It's a sad reality that many do not understand persons with special needs. But it should not remain so. As we watch over these special persons in our family and community, we can make others aware that these persons may behave differently but they are not lesser beings. They deserve just as much, if not more, respect and understanding as every other "normal" person. *Mae Ignacio (maemi04@aim.com)*

Reflection: More than our sympathy, persons with special needs could do with more understanding, respect and guidance from us.

Lord, I ask all persons with special needs, Mary, to bring better guardians for them and treat them as Jesus would treat all of your children.

ON FIRE!

He was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed. – Exodus 3:2

My depression seemed to get worse by the day. And no amount of money and success could shake me out of it. I mean, what else could I ask for? We were living a life that most people only dream of, so why did I feel so stressed out?

Going back home to Manila seemed to be such a risky decision, but with God's grace, it paid off. I was able to find myself again. I found my way back into God's arms. I fell in love with my wife all over again. And the fire that was lost within me was re-ignited.

Yes, I had been on fire before. I wanted more fame, more power and more money. But I didn't realize that I was getting consumed by it until I got burned out.

The fire that dwells in me now is a lot different — it has caused me to have more service, more love and more security. And I guess, that's why God's fire is so unique. Because the more I get consumed by it, the more light I get to share to the world around me. *Orange V. Garcia (orange_garcia@hotmail.com)*

Reflection: What kind of fire are you lighting up in your life? Is it just for yourself? Or is it to become a channel of God's light to others?

Lord, make me a channel of Your light. May Your fire continue to burn within me so I can share Your light to more people.

BIG TOE

"For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." - Matthew 11:30

One of my favorite Christian short stories is "The Parable of the Big Toe" written by Bro. Willy Nakar. It's about Big Toe (right foot) who was always complaining and envious of the other parts of the body. He complained that he was always covered with socks, sweaty and constantly on the go.

"They have all the fun while we down here have to bear the full burden of *Kuya* Body's weight," he grumbled. "I just wish I could be on the face one time, somewhere in the center... like the nose," he added.

God granted Big Toe's wish, and instantly, he found himself in the middle of the face. Aside from being a hideous replacement of the nose, his new location compromised the body's stability. Just as the body was about to take a step, it lost its balance and fell flat on its face. Big Toe, of course, took the brunt of the fall.

Aside from being a satire emphasizing the importance of unity in the Body of Christ, this parable reminds me that where I am is where I can serve the Lord best. It's tempting sometimes to compare myself with others and think that the grass is greener on their side. But in truth, I cannot bloom where I am not planted. The cross that Jesus gives me to carry will always fit me perfectly. *Rissa Singson-Kawpeng (justbreatherissa@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Is your burden too heavy to bear? Lay it at the feet of our Lord.

Lord, thank You for the grace You give me at this time of my life. Amen

Exodus 11:10-12:14 • Psalm 116:12-13, 15-16, 17-18
Matthew 12:1-8

KINDNESS BEGETS KINDNESS

"I desire mercy, not sacrifice." – Matthew 12:7

Mom and I were having lunch that rainy day. While enjoying our grilled chicken meal, she happened to see a young boy outside, looking intently at the diners through the glass window. Mom asked me if it was alright to invite the young boy to join us. I said yes, by all means. She signaled for the boy to enter the restaurant and gestured for him to sit beside her. I asked him what he wanted to eat and he said, "I'll have whatever you want me to eat. I am grateful to have even your leftover food because I haven't had anything to eat since this morning." We wanted him to have his fill, even just for lunch, so we bought him a grilled chicken meal, too. "Thank you," he said, "I'll bring half of my meal home to my mom, if that's OK." Mom and I were touched by his gratitude and kindness.

That is what kindness does to us — it humbles us and reminds us to always give thanks to the one who is kind to us. We have the capacity to be kind because we first experienced the loving kindness of God. And by His grace, kindness begets kindness, forming an unending circle of love. *Dina Pecaña (dpecana@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: No act of kindness, however small, is ever wasted. (Aesop)

Heavenly Father, You have shown us nothing but Your loving kindness. Teach us to share this love with others.

QUALIFIED

"And in his name the Gentiles will hope." – Matthew 12:21

It was the time of year when coffee shops would give out annual planners to their patrons. I would eagerly show my card to get a stamp whenever I'd place an order at my favorite coffee shop. But I'd often forget to bring my card. So by the end of the promo period, I wouldn't have enough stamps to qualify for a planner. I resigned myself to the fact that I wasn't going to get one.

After the promo officially ended, I went to the coffee shop and saw that their promo display for the planner was gone. I mentioned this to the cashier, admitting my failure to present my promo card despite my numerous visits. She said, "We have one more planner here. I recognize you. You always patronize us so I guess you can have it!"

All I could say was, "Thank you!"

There are times in our lives when we feel we have fallen short of what is expected or required. We feel unworthy of even hoping that things could be better.

The Gentiles, being non-Jews, were considered "unqualified" by the Law's standards. But God had other plans. He "qualified" them, and made them complete in Jesus.

As you come before the Lord today, let Him qualify and complete whatever is lacking in you. Let Him give you hope.

Jonathan Yogawin (jyogawin@gmail.com)

Reflection: Are you running out of hope? Run to God and let Him give you a vision of His possibilities.

Lord, I believe with all my heart that the best is yet to come. I trust in You!

Genesis 18:1-10 • Psalm 15:2-3, 3-4, 5
Colossians 1:24-28 • Luke 10:38-42

A BIGGER VIEW OF GOD

I am a minister in accordance with God's stewardship given to me to bring to completion for you the word of God.
– Colossians 1:25

I recently sold some guitar equipment online to a church musician. Through our conversation, he learned that pastoral/ministry work was my former occupation. He said it was a shame that it was no longer my career, adding that he would pray I become a full-time minister again.

He was a nice guy and I appreciated his good intent. But I thought his words reflected a very limited and stereotypical view of what it means to do "God's work." Are priests and pastors more involved in God's work than lay people? Are nuns holier than secretaries? Are bishops more Christian than CEOs? Is a missionary a better Catholic than a plumber? The answer is, it depends.

It depends on what sort of plumber or pastor, bishop or CEO, secretary or nun you are. Every Christian must work passionately for God's Kingdom — regardless of what their formal occupation is. In fact, working in the "secular" realm positions you strategically in the corners of the world that need God's light. *Kiddo Cosio (twitter.com/kiddocosio)*

Reflection: Have you narrowed your view of God and His Kingdom? How can you be a light through your occupation?

God, give me eyes to see every opportunity where I can be Your light.

Exodus 14:5-18 (or Songs of Song 3:1-4 or 2 Corinthians 5:14-17)
• Exodus 15:1-2, 3-4, 5-6 (or Psalm 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9)
Matthew 12:38-42 (or John 20:1-2, 11-18)

REWIND AND MOVE ON!

"Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you" – Matthew 12:38

We live in a hurting world. As long as you are breathing, you will be hurt.

By a breakup. By a business associate who double-crosses you. By your husband who cheats on you. By your teen who falls into drug addiction. By a talebearer who causes strife. By broken promises.

The list is endless.

The reason why the world inflicts hurt is because it was hurt before. To understand a difficult or toxic person you need to rewind.

Find out about that person's hurtful past and begin to understand the pain.

Then forgiveness and healing happens — to you and to the person you are forgiving.

To forgive is to give mercy to the one who needs it most.

Love, forgive and move on!

It's the best sign that there really is a God! *Obet Cabrillas (kpreacherobet@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Rewind the past, play and relive the present, and renew the future!

Lord, help me heal this hurting world with my forgiving spirit.

Memorial of Mary Magdalene, disciple of the Lord

St. Mary Magdalene, pray for us.

NAME DROPPING

"For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother." – Matthew 12:50

I noticed that Filipinos love to "name drop."

"My classmate is the president of that big company."

"Oh, Bo Sanchez, he's my friend and we're quite close."

"My relative works in that agency and he can help us."

For whatever reason, we like to be associated with successful or popular people.

Today, the Lord tells us that we should acknowledge Him and be a "spiritual name dropper." Our car can reflect that by having a crucifix on the rear view mirror or a "Jesus" sticker. We can have pictures of the Lord in our room, a Bible enthroned in the living room or a rosary hanging somewhere to show that we're Catholic.

But more than that, we need to drive properly and be patient on the road while our car carries His Name around. God would be more pleased if we show patience at home where we honor His image on display. We should model integrity, gentleness and excellence in the workplace while people see the Bible sitting on our desk.

Our connection to Jesus is in having the fidelity to do God's will with the right heart. *Ariel Driz (adriz77@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Have you been a mere "spiritual name dropper" lately?

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your Name! I pray for the grace to bear it well by constantly doing God's will. Amen.

Exodus 16:1-5, 9-15 • Psalm 78:18-19, 23-24, 25-26, 27-28
Matthew 13:1-9

SOWERS OF GOD'S WORD

"A sower went out to sow." – Matthew 13:3

Jonah was a faithful prophet of God. Whenever God spoke, he announced it to His people. But one night, God told him to speak to Nineveh, a sinful city. For Jonah, he knew that if he speaks and they repent, God would forgive them. He didn't think they deserved forgiveness so he initially ran away from God's call.

Our Nineveh today can be the people whom God wants us to talk to about Him. Maybe He asks us to correct that person's wrongdoing. Or maybe it's just to remind that person that God loves him or her.

There are times when we don't obey for different reasons: fear of rejection; political incorrectness; the person knew us before our encounter with God and talking about Him might freak them out; or, just like Jonah, we think they don't deserve the mercy of God.

But all of us are called to be prophets of God in the sense of being proclaimers of His Word or sowers of His messages. We have been given the seeds, and the Owner of the land has instructed us to sow. At the end of the day, either we go back to the Owner with a full sack or an empty one as we have sown regardless of where the seeds may fall. *Emmanuel Calayan (emmanuel_calayan@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Who are the people whom God wants you to talk to about Him?

Lord, make me a dedicated sower so that I may share what You instruct me to share Your love.

2 Corinthians 4:7-15 • Psalm 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6
Matthew 20:20-28

OUCH!

…always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. – 2 Corinthian 4:10

Two years ago, I was rushed to the E.R. a week before Christmas because of a severe hyperacidity attack. The doctor administered two quick-relief medications intravenously, and boy, did that hurt! Worse, the nurse inserted the long needle into the bony side of my wrist. A week after that, my puncture wound still hurt badly. The vein was swollen. A light tap on the area would cause me to wince in pain.

The throbbing pain of my wound was frustrating. Then one dawn Mass, after receiving Holy Communion, it hit me: if this kind of pain on my wrist can make me cry, how much greater pain did Jesus endure? The thought brought tears to my eyes.

It is good to be reminded of Jesus' suffering every now and then. In fact, it is better to be reminded daily! Because when we constantly remember that He suffered and died for us, it is more likely that we would want to be worthy of that suffering by living the life He taught us to live. *Nova Arias-Sevilla (nova.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: How do you handle pain — both physical and emotional?

You have endured much greater pain and suffering than we have, O Lord. May we learn to offer up to You our sufferings for the salvation of souls. Amen.

Sirach 44:1, 10-15 (or Exodus 20:1-17) • Psalm 132:11, 13-14, 17-18 (or Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11) • **Matthew 13:16-17 (or Matthew 13:18-23)**

SEEING LOUD AND CLEAR

"Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear." – Matthew 13:16

Some of the best reasons to thank God for the gift of seeing and hearing:

- Every night, before I go to bed, I take a few minutes to bask in awe and wonder at the beauty of the precious gift of my wife curled up beside me, already dozing off.
- The sight of her walking towards the car when I pick her up from work at the end of the day stirs up a thrill in my heart. At that moment, I just can't wait to embrace her.
- The sparkle in her eyes brightens up my day.
- On the days when things don't seem to go my way, when the worries and pressures of life somehow get to me and weigh me down, her voice on the phone telling me she's there for me gives me my second wind. I feel I can go on because my heart is filled with the reassurance of her believing in me.
- That same voice starts my day off perfectly with the simple words, "I love you."

Through these images and sounds, God tells me He loves me — loud and clear. *George Iolentino Gabriel (george.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: What are the things you are grateful to see and hear? Thank God for them today.

Lord, may I never take Your everyday blessings for granted

Memorial of Sts. Joachim and Anne, parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Sts. Joachim and Anne, parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary, pray for us.

BLOOD COVENANT

"This is the blood of the covenant..." Exodus 24:8

In his book *The Blood Covenant*, Dr. H. Clay Trumbull writes that "Eve was the first woman to wear a fur coat in the heat of the Mid-East" as she was evicted from Eden.

Adam and Eve sinned. God could not look at sin. He didn't want to abandon His creation, so He covered their sin with blood by covering them with the skin of an animal. Now all He would see was the blood that covered this sin.

Man sinned. God was obligated to destroy man. Instead, He sent His only Son to die and cover us with the blood He shed on the cross.

Now, all the Father sees when He looks at us is the blood of His beloved Son with whom He is well-pleased. When we kneel before Him, He sees His Son and not the sinful us, and that makes Him smile.

But you first have to accept the blood offering of Jesus.

So, similar to what an insurance agent would usually ask, the question is: Are you covered? *Ronna Ledesma (ronna_ledesma@yahoo.com.ph)*

Reflection: If you have not yet accepted Jesus, then God does not see His Son when you come before Him.

Father, cover me with the most precious blood of Your Son, Jesus.

CEO DAD

"When you pray, say: 'Father…'" – Luke 11:2

Jesus reveals what real prayer is: a relationship. A Father and child relationship.

There's a story of a wealthy CEO who explained to his young son how his secretary screens his phone calls at the office. He said, "If your mom calls me and I'm busy, the secretary will tell her what I'm doing, and then Mom will decide if I should be interrupted or if she should leave a message."

Then he said to his son, "If you call me, you'll be put right through. I want you to know that you can call me anytime, because you're my son."

A few days later, the secretary put a call through to the CEO from his son. He said hello and asked what he could do for his son. He replied, "Nothing, Dad. I just wanted to make sure I could actually get through to you that easily."

The King of the Universe is our Dad. Therefore, a smile, a sigh of frustration, a tear shed in anger, a frown of complaint, a shout of praise, a worship song sang out of tune, even a silent smile of love are all prayers when expressed in the presence of our Father. *Jon Escoto (faithatworkjon@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Do you want to smile, complain, shout, cry, or sing? Go ahead. Express it now in the presence of God. Friend, that's prayer.

Father, thank you for the beauty You made me and the darkness I've come through. May I experience more of Your father's embrace today

THE ASK PRINCIPLE

"Even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you." – John 11:22

Have you ever tried asking for something you wouldn't normally ask for because it was embarrassing? In my experience, this can sometimes be a hindrance to receving God's blessings. (Bo Sanchez talks about this extensively in his book *How to Be a Blessing Magnet*.)

Before I started reading and applying Bo's teachings (from his talks, books and website www.bosanchez.ph), I was always shy or embarrassed to ask for certain things I needed or wanted. But when I started applying his teachings and the Bible verse in Matthew 7:7, I began to see how true it is — that when we ask, we shall receive; when we seek, we shall find; when we knock, the door will be opened to us. When I started asking, seeking and knocking with a pure and trusting heart, God opened many doors for me as a wife, mother, writer, blogger and speaker. He even gave me a job as an editor at Shepherd's Voice to boot!

So, dear friend, what are you waiting for? Go ahead! ASK (Ask, Seek, Knock)! God wants to bless you abundantly! *Tina Santiago-Rodriguez (teachermamatina@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Believe that whatever you ask of God, He will give you — as long as it is part of His great plan for you. Decide to apply the **ASK** (Ask, Seek, Knock) principle in your life today.

Lord, I praise and thank You for always hearing my prayers and giving me what I ask for, according to Your holy will. Help me to see the doors You have already opened for me so I may bless others in Your name.

Memorial of St. Martha, disciple of the Lord

St. Martha, pray for us.

FASTING

Moses stayed there with the Lord for forty days and forty nights, without eating any food or drinking any water, and he wrote on the tablets... the ten commandments.– Exodus 34:28

I am one of those few who have no right to fast because I'm underweight. But I still do it once in a while to deepen my relationship with God.

One of my most difficult fasts was when I ate only bread and water from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. for several weeks in preparation for the Christian Life Series I was serving in.

It wouldn't have been a struggle if my birthday didn't fall within that period or if I was not teaching in a preschool. Despite my petite stature, I can eat like a horse after teaching a bunch of energy-zapping preschoolers who never run out of vigor.

I couldn't even get to eat the food I had brought for my colleagues for my birthday celebration. It also didn't help that my peers were telling me that God would understand if I took a sip of Coke or put *adobo* sauce on my bland bread.

What people don't know is that I find fasting difficult. I fast not because I want to stay thin, but because I want to master the art of self-discipline and say no to something as basic as food. When I do that, it's easier to say no to temptation. *Ems Sy Chan (havenofleeanne@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Fasting possesses great power. If practiced with the right intention, it makes one a friend of God. The demons are aware of that. (Quintus Tertullian)

Thank You Lord for my test no— I cannot easily say no to great offers. All because of Your grace.

Exodus 34:29-35 • Psalm 99:5, 6, 7, 9
Matthew 13:44-46

TEMPERING GREED

"When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it." – Matthew 13:46

Not too long ago, I operated a business that rented foreclosed equipment from the banks. For 10 years, the business made lots of money. Then at one point, the bank offered to sell me the equipment with a loan grant of over P100 million. It was a tempting offer, and since it had given me much income in the past, I made all the justifications to acquire the equipment. Thankfully through my wife's advice and by God's grace, I overcame my own selfish desire and turned down the offer to purchase the said equipment.

In less than two years, the business lost two thirds of its market. Had I pursued my selfish desires, I would have been left with an enterprise that barely made money and had huge bank obligations. I would probably be worried sick today, thinking about my enormous debt and impaired in my ability and availability to serve God.

I was pursuing a worldly treasure and God saved me from myself. He gave me wisdom and good discernment about who my real treasure is — Jesus, the Pearl of Great Price. *Rolly España (rolly@homeliving.com.ph)*

Reflection: What drives you? Is it yourself and your fallen nature? Pray to the Spirit who will guide you to the right path.

Jesus, let me treasure You in my heart. Then, I would know that all my decisions are well guided.

Exodus 40:16-21, 34-38 • Psalm 84:3, 4, 5-6, 8, 11
Matthew 13:47-53

WHEN GOD ASKS FOR SOMETHING

"What is bad they throw away." – Matthew 13:48

When I was a 13-year-old preacher, I was inspired to give up TV. So, while all my classmates were talking about the latest episode of *Charlie's Angels*, I felt very out of place. (I wish I could tell you that my version of *Charlie's Angels* had the cast of Drew Barrymore, Lucy Liu, Cameron Diaz, but...)

Throughout my teenage life, I grew up without TV. Looking back, I see what a huge blessing it was. Imagine freeing three hours a day to do other fantastic things like read books, play instruments, compose songs and, most of all, serve in ministry.

Think of this: if you live to be 75 and watched three hours of TV a day, minus normal sleeping time, you would have wasted 14 years of your life.

When I was 21 years old, I gave up my girlfriend. Reason: I felt I needed time to discern if I was called to celibacy or marriage. And for the next 10 years, I had no romantic relationship. (You can imagine how difficult that was, not only for me, but also for all the girls around me who found me irresistible.) Again, I believe those 10 years were my liberating years — I stretched my wings, expanded my world, and grew my horizons.

Friend, what is God asking you to remove from your life? *Bo Sanchez (bosanchez@kerygmafamily.com)*

Reflection: *What is God asking you to remove from your life?*

St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, bishop and doctor of the Church, pray for us.

Leviticus 23:1, 4-11, 15-16, 27, 34-37 • Psalm 81:3-4, 5-6, 10-11
Matthew 13:54-58

RITUALS AND FAITH

He did not work many mighty deeds there because of their lack of faith. – Matthew 13:58

All the seats were taken so I stood by the statue of the Crucified Christ as I heard Mass one Sunday morning.

Dozens of people passed by the statue, looked up to Jesus' face, touched His knees, made the sign of the cross and walked away. It was OK at first, but after an hour of standing there, I started to get distracted. I toyed with many questions in my mind. *Why do they have to touch the statue? Do they know why they're touching it?* Some would even take out their handkerchiefs, and wipe relentlessly on all the statues along the way. *Aren't they afraid of germs? Talk about good hygiene!*

As I feasted on my thoughts on this Filipino phenomenon, it hit me. I was claiming to have more faith because I knew better, but I was quick to judge and I lost my focus on the Mass, our highest form of worship.

Catholicism is teeming with rituals. But whether we do them or not, the question remains: "Do these rituals draw us to more faith in God, or are we reduced to doubt and distraction?" Just like the people in Jesus' native place, He could not work many miracles there because of their doubt.

Migs Ramirez (migoy3@gmail.com)

Reflection: How do you pray? What rituals do you love because they lead you into deeper faith? Are you too particular about rituals that you forget their real essence?

Thank You, Lord, for making Your presence known when I pray. May I grow deeper in faith so Your miracles can happen in my life.

Leviticus 25:1, 8-17 • Psalm 67: 2-3, 5, 7-8
Matthew 14:1-12

TRUTH AND FREEDOM

This fiftieth year you shall make sacred by proclaiming liberty in the land for all its inhabitants. – Leviticus 25:10

Freedom is something I learned in school – something that I consider a legacy of the university to me. Throughout my years in the University of the Philippines, I learned not to be afraid to question the status quo, to not just say yes to what is normal, to look for new ways of looking at and doing things.

I couldn't accept that life only meant school, then a job, then marriage. In my mind, there must be something more to life than that. It was in that restlessness and seeking that I found the Lord.

Aren't truth and freedom interrelated? It is in seeking for truth that I found freedom in God, a freedom that is apparently sacred, if we base it on today's verse. It is not surprising. Didn't God Himself give freedom to us? For isn't freedom of choice one of the most important gifts the Lord has given us? It's no wonder then that all over the world, that desire for freedom continues to live on as shown in the fight for liberation in countries that are repressed.

I can never thank the Lord enough for this freedom. Today, let us take time to appreciate the many ways we have been so blessed with freedom—and let us thank the Author for it. *Joy Sosoban (jsosoban@gmail.com)*

Reflection: You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:32)

Lord, You know everything. Give me the grace not only to be thankful for freedom, but also to handle it well.

Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23 Psalm 90:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14, 17
Luke 12:13-21

FLEETING FANCIES

Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth, vanity of vanities! All things are vanity. – Ecclesiastes 1:2

She had beautiful straight hair that I envied. She didn't need to comb it after shampooing. All she had to do was run her fingers through her hair and it dried into silky-smooth tresses. I need to mousse, blow-dry and perma-freeze mine.

So I was aghast when I saw her one day with hair that looked like broom bristles. They were dead — murdered by an inept hairdresser who had rebonded her hair. "Rebond? You? Why?" I was perplexed. She had wanted straighter hair.

She said, "The Lord probably did this to me so I will learn a lesson." She was so sad I had to bite my lip from blurting out, "The Lord had absolutely nothing to do with it. But I'll bet He allowed it just for that insight."

Sometimes, we need to be reminded that the worldly things we want are meaningless. Is it greater beauty? More money? Prestige? The list goes on. But as the passage above says, everything is fleeting. And because of that, we have to focus on things that are eternal — a gorgeous soul, loving relationships, good character... These are the things that last.

Lella M. Santiago (mirellasantiago@yahoo.com)

Reflection: How much value do you put on temporal things? In contrast, how much time do you spend in the pursuit of spiritual matters?

I choose You, O Lord, above all the pleasures of this world.

GOD ALWAYS PROVIDES

They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up the fragments left over – twelve wicker baskets full. – Matthew 14:20

I was at a fastfood restaurant to eat breakfast. I was already in line when I realized that I didn't have enough money even for the cheapest value meal. I was about to step out to look for a nearby ATM when it suddenly started raining.

The continuous downpour forced me to stay inside. I just had enough to buy a cup of coffee so I sat down and waited for the rain to stop. A woman approached me and asked if I could be interviewed for a survey. Little did I know that I was about to be blessed that morning.

The woman said they were doing a survey on a new product for the restaurant. She gave me a free sandwich to taste. I was only on my second bite when she gave me another sandwich to try. She told me to compare them. After I gave my comments, she gave me another surprise. She handed me a small token for my participation in the survey.

Similarly, God showed His generosity when He performed the multiplication of bread. After the miracle, they still had 12 full baskets of bread. God was generous in the past and continues to be so up to now. I could only afford a cup of coffee that morning but I ended up with two free sandwiches plus a gift from a stranger! *Alvin Fabella (alvinfabella@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: How many times has God surprised you with a blessing? Recall them and say a prayer of thanks.

upon You

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 • Psalm 97:1-2, 5-6, 9
2 Peter 1:16-19 • **Luke 9:28-36**

I CAN ONLY IMAGINE

"Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But he did not know what he was saying. – Luke 9:33

You can't blame Peter for blurting out something so inappropriate at the scene of the Transfiguration. After all, it's difficult to think clearly if you are seeing Jesus transfigured and radiating the fullness of God's glory right before your very eyes. Add to that the presence of Moses and Elijah, and you'll be able to understand a little more why Peter wanted to set up tents and stay up in that mountain for good.

Peter may have acted oddly but then I remembered the song "I Can Only Imagine" by the band MercyMe. The song poses the question: What will you do if you suddenly see Jesus right before you? My favorite lines in the song goes: *"Surrounded by Your glory, what will my heart feel? Will I dance for You, Jesus, or in awe of You be still?"*

As you reflect on today's Gospel, close your eyes a little longer and envision Jesus standing in front of you.

What would you do? *JPaul Hernandez (jpaulmh@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: How can God's glory change your life?

Lord, I want to encounter Your glory. I believe that Your glory can transform me into a better person.

Numbers 13:1-2, 25-14:1, 26-29, 34-35
Psalm 106:6-7, 13-14, 21-22, 23 • Matthew 15:21-28

PRAYER: ONLINE TO JESUS

"I will do to you just what I have heard you say." – Numbers 14:28

My husband looked worried when he came down the stairs. He said that he had gone through his wallets and all the papers on his desk, but he couldn't find his credit card. There was anxiety written all over his face because he had a huge credit limit and we know how unauthorized card holders can easily exhaust the unused credit limit. I asked him when he last used it and he couldn't remember. The possibility of owing a great deal of money loomed over us.

So we came together and I said a prayer claiming the promise of God in Sirach 23:19 — "that the eyes of the Lord are ten thousand times brighter than the sun." I put my trust in Him.

Immediately, I was led to point to the side pocket of the bag he had used that day. And like magic, the credit card popped out of his hands. It wasn't magic, of course, but an instant miracle that the Lord had performed just as easily as He did at Cana where He turned water into wine at the wedding feast.

I just trusted and believed. *Donna España (donna@homeliving.com.ph)*

Reflection: Prayer keeps us "linked online" to Jesus 24/7.

Lord, may I always see You first in time of my need — no matter how simple my needs are. Amen.

St. Cajetan, priest, pray for us.

HIS BETTER PLAN

"You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."
– Matthew 16:23

There are times in our lives when we question what happens to us. This is especially true when bad things happen to us. Sometimes, though, God allows these things to happen because He has a greater purpose.

When my family and I were asked to leave our mission area in Timor Leste earlier than what my husband and I had discerned for and decided on, I was honestly very disappointed. It took quite some time for me to "let go and let God," because I felt that our Timorese brothers and sisters still needed us. I even questioned the wisdom of the elders in our community.

I praise God though that, by His grace, I learned to surrender to His will. Little did I know that God had a better, brighter plan for me and my family. He wanted us to return to Manila for His greater glory to be revealed — so we could serve in our community more fully and, in my case, proclaim His Word through my current job at Shepherd's Voice! *Tina Santiago-Rodriguez (teachermamatina@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Listen to and trust in God's Word: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, My thoughts higher than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Lord, I know that You have the best plan for my life. Help me to see beyond the bad things in my life and focus on all the good. I trust in Your thoughts and ways. Amen.

Deuteronomy 4:32-40 • Psalm 77:12-13, 14-15, 16, 21
Matthew 16:24-28

WHAT'S YOUR CROSS?

Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." – Matthew 16:24

Bill pushes himself to work hard beyond what's reasonable. Why? He believes his work should reflect the excellence of his God. And he wants clients to get the best.

But he gets mad when he doesn't achieve the results he wants. He wants to control people and processes and be responsible for the output. While clients love him because he delivers, people working with him fear him, the control freak. That's his cross. He knows that now.

He constantly reminds himself that relationships are more important than work output. More than a God of excellence, his God is a God of love. When he focused on that, things began to change. He continued to give his best but he surrendered the results to God. Every time he got frustrated, every time he'd want to scold the staff, he'd die to himself and allow his need to take the backseat.

This liberated him, gave him inner peace and made him a happier person. *Carlo Lorenzo (carloflorenzo@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: A cross can be anything. Mood swings, tardiness, dwelling on past hurts. What's your cross?

[illegible] mine, use it to bless me and the world

St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, pray for us.

SOWING THE SEED OF KINDNESS

Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly.
– 2 Corinthians 9:6

"Stop fighting!" cried little Johnny to some brawling children, but they just ignored him. Furious, he was about to jump into the fight when a radiant Gentleman appeared to him and told him to use kindness — not blows — to win over the children.

The Gentleman told the confused Johnny that He will give him a teacher. Then a Lady appeared. She told him to watch, and suddenly, the children turned into wild beasts. She instructed Johnny to be humble, strong and energetic so he could do for her children what he was about to see. The beasts turned into gentle lambs!

Johnny cried when he awoke for he did not understand his dream.

Johnny developed his athleticisms, practiced tight rope walking, mastered juggling and other skills as he grew. He then ministered to imprisoned youths and abandoned street children combining his talents with a Marian hymn, a Bible story or a retelling of the homily. He sowed bountiful kindness that transformed him into St. John Bosco, father and teacher of the youth. He reaped seven saints and 19 beatifications, among them St. Dominic Savio. Don Bosco truly lived out his dream. *Leo Villarico (leovrico@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What seeds have you sown lately?

Lord, make me sow bountifully the seeds of kindness and Your love.

Wisdom 18:6-9 • Psalm 33:1, 12, 18-19, 20, 22
Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19 • Luke 12:32-48

GOD'S MATHEMATICS

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. – Hebrew 11:8

It's weird.

Five years ago, I was earning well. Then I transferred to my present job in Shepherd's Voice Publications. The offer was just about half of what I used to earn, but I answered God's call and entrusted my finances to Him.

At first, it was hard adjusting to a simpler life. So I learned how to budget my monthly income.

My regular expenses included rent for an apartment I got near the office to avoid the daily traffic going to and from my home in Parañaque. There was also my contribution for bills in our Parañaque home as my way of supporting my retired father. And when a sister is in need, I also help out.

But the strange thing is this: it's during this time that I am able to tithe regularly, save and invest more, without necessarily depriving myself of little luxuries.

Just when I thought I had given up a lot to follow God's call for me to shift careers and move to a lower-paying job, God revised His math equation.

Instead of subtracting the blessings, He multiplied it a hundredfold. *Tess V. Atienza (svp tvatienza@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Are you afraid to give up something to follow God? Don't hesitate. Look at Abraham.

Give me the courage, Lord, to follow You when You call.

TO LOVE GOD WITH OUR ALL

"Love and serve the Lord, your God, with all your heart and all your soul...." – Deuteronomy 10:12

To do what the above verse says is a challenge. But over the past 15 years of serving in my Catholic community, I've learned a lot about how to apply this verse. Here are five ways we can love and serve God with our whole being:

1. *Make Him number 1 in our lives* — not our spouses, our children, our parents, our boyfriends (or girlfriends), our pets, etc.
2. *Offer up everything in our lives to Him* — our past, present and future; our strengths and weaknesses; our joys and pains; our deepest, darkest secrets and sins — everything, big and small!
3. *Spend time with Him every day in prayer and Scripture reading*. If you love someone, you'd want to be with that person every day, and get to know him better.
4. *Tell others about Him*. If you love someone, you'd want others to know about him, right?
5. *Share His love with others*. This is one of the best ways we can show God we love Him — by drawing more people to love Him, too. *Tina Santiago-Rodriguez (teachermamatina@gmail.com)*

Reflection: List down the different ways you love and serve God. Compare your list with the one stated on this page.

Lord, please help me to love and serve You with my whole heart and whole being all the days of my life.

BUDGET TOY FOR DYLAN

"Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven." – Matthew 18:3

When our grandson Dylan was a toddler, I often bought toys for him. Until his parents told me to stop wasting money because he already had too many toys. But I really got a kick seeing Dylan looking so happy when I bought him toys so I promised his parents I would buy only inexpensive ones.

One day, while we were in a toy store together with his parents, I told Dylan he could pick a toy that costs only P100. Quickly, the boy picked a toy and asked me, "Does this cost P100?"

When I said no, he obediently returned the toy to its shelf. The poor boy went round and round the store, trying in vain to find a toy within our budget.

I felt so sorry for Dylan that when his parents were not looking, I bought him the toy he liked, which was way beyond our budget. Yup, bad me.

Reflecting on today's Gospel, I wish to be like little Dylan — so pure, so innocent, so obedient — what Jesus said we should be if we want to enter heaven. But while we're still in this world, we get more than what we pray for. That's how much Jesus loves His faithful and obedient children. *Cynthia U. Santiago (cusantiago@gmail.com)*

Reflection: While we try to teach our children all about life, our children teach us what life is all about. (Angela Schwindt)

and sin

Deuteronomy 34:1-12 • Psalm 66:1-3, 5, 8, 16-17
Matthew 18:15-20

COUPLE POWER

"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." – Matthew 18:20

As members of the Executive Council of Servant Leaders (ECSL) of our community Bukas Loob sa Diyos (BLD), my husband Raul and I have been traveling to different BLD districts. If you have experienced what it is like to be spending the night in the home of someone you're meeting for the first time, you have lived the life of a true follower of Christ.

It's not easy, especially if you are a visitor in the U.S. where your hosts do all the domestic chores. In your mind, you become an extra member of their household with extra food to cook, extra dishes to wash, and extra cleaning to do. But one draws strength from God's Word, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

This love never failed to manifest itself in every BLD district we visited. Carlito and Evelyn were not an exception as they welcomed us into their home in Los Angeles with open arms, attending to all our needs. They were God's answer to our conjugal prayer at the start of every pastoral visit. *Mari Sison-Garcia (mari_sison_garcia@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: For He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. (Psalm 91:11)

Lord, whenever you choose to send us, give us the grace and the courage to say, "Here I am! Send me" (Isaiah 6:8).

Memorial of St. Maximilian Mary Kolbe, priest and martyr

St. Maximilian Mary Kolbe, priest and martyr, pray for us.

Revelation 11:19; 12:1-6, 10 • Psalm 45:10, 11, 12, 16
1 Corinthians 15:20-27 • **Luke 1:39-56**

SOMETHING ABOUT MARY

"Behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed." – Luke 1:48

I'm sorry but I really can't understand those who criticize us Catholics for loving and specially honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus. (And for the nth time, we do not worship her.) She herself said in the Bible that "all ages will call me blessed."

If you read the whole of the Canticle of Mary, it is the greatness of the Lord that she proclaims. She declares she is a "lowly handmaid" who will be called blessed because the "Mighty One has done great things for her."

Why, even the Angel Gabriel greeted her, "Hail, favored one. The Lord is with you." And her cousin Elizabeth, "filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.'"

But importantly, take note that Mary, and those who call her blessed, point to God.

So if there's really something about Mary, it's how she leads us more to her Son, Jesus.

So we take those cues and especially honor her, and proclaim the Mighty One who did great things for her. *Alvin Barcelona (apb_ayo@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: The Blessed Virgin Mary always points to her Son. See if your devotion to Mama Mary indeed leads you more to Jesus.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you

ONE SOURCE

"So they are no longer two, but one…" – Matthew 19:6

Not so long ago, a cousin of mine, whom I was not so familiar with, died. The event prompted me to look into my dad's family tree because I felt so sad about not having known much about my cousin. I was moved to tears when I found a picture of my dad and his siblings with their respective spouses posted by another cousin. My dad and his siblings were very close. There was a unique bond among them that amazes me until now. When each of them started their own lives and had their own families, they lived far from one another but they never grew apart. You will be amazed how they were able to constantly get in touch with one another before the time of cellular phones and the Internet.

From the union of two people, Marciano and Consuelo, a family unit was created that has branched out to a lot of generations. Our generation may not be as close as my dad and his siblings, but as much as possible, I try to be in touch with the rest of the family. With the Internet, my own family gets to meet new cousins and reconnect with old ones. After all, we all came from two wonderful people whom God has united to become one. *Mae Ignacio (maemi04@aim.com)*

Reflection: In marriage, God has joined a man and a woman to create a family that will forever be united by that covenant.

Lord, thank You for unions that You have brought together. May we be reminded that no matter what trials we go through, we will have each other to count on.

SHUN OTHER GODS

"Far be it from us to forsake the Lord for the service of other gods." – Joshua 24:16

In my mind and in my heart, it is my desire to declare my love for God through my words and my life. It's far from my mind to ever turn my back on Him to serve other gods.

But I didn't realize that there are times when I unknowingly serve other gods. Like when I prefer to spend longer hours on Facebook instead of reading a spiritual book that I've never gotten around to finish. Or when I extend my nap time instead of calling a friend who had expressed a need to talk to someone. Or when I busy myself with "nonstop" cleaning rather than spending time with my family. Or when I make excuses instead of responding to a prompting to do a charitable act. Or when I spend on useless stuff rather than saving money. Or when I complain instead of being thankful and prayerful. My list can go on and on.

It's shameful to think that during those instances, I served other gods. My prayer is that I can shun these other gods from my life and remain faithful to my one true God — and yield my heart to serve, love and obey Him. *Sol Saura (sol_saura@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What or who are your other gods? Are you willing to shun them for Jesus?

Lord, I [illegible] other gods [illegible]

Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10 • Psalm 40:2, 3, 4, 18
Hebrews 12:1-4 • Luke 12:49-53

EBED-MELECH

"My lord king, these men have been at fault in all they have done to the prophet Jeremiah, casting him into the cistern..."
– Jeremiah 38:9

A big Japanese cosmetic company received a complaint from a customer who had bought their soap but found the box empty. Immediately, management isolated the problem in the assembly line and asked their engineers to solve the problem. The geeky engineers devised an X-ray machine to see inside the boxes and had two people monitor the high-resolution screens to make sure that all the boxes that went out of their factory had soap inside. But a rank-and-file employee had another solution. He brought in a big electric fan that blew away the empty boxes from the assembly line.

I tell this story when I talk about Ebed-melech, a hardly known Bible character whom the Lord used to save the prophet Jeremiah. Ebed-melech was a eunuch, meaning he was emasculated and without power in the realm. He is a good reminder to us that we can't make excuses like we're shy, untalented, not from the right family or not rich enough when God calls us to do something.

Remember: God used a shepherd boy to slay an experienced champion warrior. He used a prostitute to protect God's spies. He used Saul, the persecutor of Christians, as the Apostle to the Gentiles. *Rissa Singson-Kawpeng (justbreatherissa@gmail.com)*

Reflection: God calls you because He can use you — warts and all.

If You can use anything, Lord, You can use me.

Judges 2:11-19 • Psalm 106:34-35, 36-37, 39-40, 43, 44
Matthew 19:16-22

PERFECTION

"If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor." – Matthew 19:21

Compared to the riches of the young man in today's Gospel, my net worth is probably just a drop in the bucket. Compared to this young man's privileged lifestyle, mine is as simple as simple can get.

So, is it correct to say that I will succeed in what the rich young man failed to do? Wrong. Like the rich young man, I feel sad because I am not able to do what Jesus requires of His disciples — complete and total obedience to His will. That is, after all, the true meaning of perfection.

More than earthly possessions, what Jesus is actually asking when He tells us to "sell what you have" is to let go of everyone and everything that we treasure above Him and that hinders us from following Him. I must admit that even though the creature comforts I enjoy are modest and affordable, still I tend to be possessive of these indulgences.

That is why I find it hard to let go. But let go I must if I desire to follow Jesus and to give my all to serve Him and others, perfectly. *Dina Pecana (dpecana@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Perfection is achieved not when there is nothing more to add but when there is nothing left to take away. (Antoine de Saint-Exupery)

Jesus, I want to be perfect as You are. Give me the grace to love, serve and follow You more. I ask this in Your name. Amen.

LOOK AROUND

"For I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face" – Judges 6:22

"Lord, if it's not too much to ask, can I literally see and hear you like in the Old Testament?" It was one of those tiring moments. I was inside a church and even after years and years of service in the community, I was like a child who wanted to be spoiled by his dad even for just a while.

I was starting to have an image of a still God. When I am down, God is there; when I am happy, God is there. He is *just* there. Then as I knelt down and prayed, an inner voice spoke to me. *"Look around."* Immediately, I looked outside and saw trees. Again the voice said, *"Look around,"* then I looked inside and saw people — living, breathing, praying.

His message came sweet and simple. "Whenever you see My creation, you see Me." It was very clear — we see God everywhere! His greatness, His love is seen and felt in His creation. Yes, God can be seen through you and me, face to face.

And just like in the readings, then there will be peace.

Dreus Cosio (andreus.cosio@gmail.com)

Reflection: Have you seen God face to face today? Look around, it could be through the love of your family and friends.

Open my senses, Lord, so I may never miss Your loving presence. Bless my entire being, that others may also see You in me. Amen.

GOD IS JUST

"Are you envious because I am generous?" – Matthew 20:15

Bill is a handsome young man who topped the bar exams, owns a huge estate, two yachts, lots of cars, and has a beautiful wife and handsome children. He also has a flourishing business with thousands of employees. He travels all over the world four to six times a year for his business, and twice a year for vacations with his family.

But Bill is a scrooge when it comes to his employees. He is the epitome of a nice and loving man with his family, but the devil incarnate to his underlings. He never gives to the church, alms to the poor or a single cent to anyone who knocks at his door. He believes that he worked hard to have everything, and others should work hard, too. People who know him ask, "Why is he so blessed? Why is it that everything he touches turns into gold? Where is justice here?"

This is the same story of Jesus giving the same pay to the man who was hired first and the man hired last. And when questioned, Jesus replied, "Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

God is all-knowing and all-loving. He knows that the last will be first and the first will be last. *Chelle Crisanto (ellehcmaria@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: The vague and tenuous hope that God is too kind to punish the ungodly has become a deadly opiate for the consciences of millions. (A. W. Tozer)

FROM BEASTLY TO BEAUTY!

"Many are invited, but few are chosen."– Matthew 22:14

The movie *Beastly* is about Kyle, a handsome, robust, witty and filthy rich young man. In other words, he was perfect. But he was also cocky, arrogant and rude.

Does it really come with the territory that the beautifully perfect are also haughty and mean? Will the outwardly beautiful always be inwardly horrible? Is there hope?

There is.

Second Corinthians 3:18 says, "And we who... reflect the Lord's glory are being transformed into His likeness from glory to glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

How will transformation happen?

When we realize that "many are called, but few are chosen." This heavenly privilege is revealed only to the humble. The "chosen" are those who humbly let God work from within them. They respond in gratitude expressed through loving service. Because when we serve, we move from selfishness to selflessness.

Then we make our lives beautiful — from the inside out.

Realize that you are called.

Serve, for you are chosen! *Obet Cabrillas (kpreacherobet@gmail.com)*

Reflection: "Do not judge from appearance or from lofty stature... Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart." (1 Samuel 6:7)

Lord, teach me to value internal character over external beauty.

Ruth 1:1, 3-6, 14-16, 22 • Psalm146:5-6, 6-7, 8-9, 9-10
Matthew 22:34-40

MY ALL FOR YOU

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." – Matthew 22:37

I was thinking of what to share in relation to the verse above when God inspired me to listen to a song written by John Keating of the Servants of the Word entitled "My All for You." I played the CD and listened to it repeatedly while reflecting on the verse.

My all for you, all else left behind.
Single of heart, single of mind, single of vision,
Consumed by a single goal:
To know and love and serve you with all my soul!
My all for you, you've paid the price.
In grateful love I offer in Christ:
A sacrifice of life outpoured
In undivided devotion to you, My Lord!

The song reminded me of the truth that the reason we give our all to God is because He gave His all to us first, including His only Son. It is when we experience this truth in our lives that we are moved by gratitude to give our all to Him as well. As the Scripture says, "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). May we experience God's love profoundly so we would be moved to love Him with our all, all our days. *Teresa Gumap-as Dumadag (teregmps@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Do we really love God with our all? In what aspects of our lives have we not loved Him the way we should?

Heavenly Father, help me to love with the same love that you love. Give me the courage to [illegible] I want to give my all to you this day.

Revelation 21:9-14 • Psalm 145:10-11, 12-13, 17-18
John 1:45-51

WINDOW SEAT, PLEASE

"You will see much greater things than this." – John 1:50

It was our first plane trip as Mr. and Mrs. Libiran.

I requested for a window seat for us to have a better view of the sky. And guess what? We were granted a window seat... minus the window because we were seated at the tail end of the plane. I was becoming bitter about it and was blaming the ground staff for giving us these seats. "No worries," I said to myself, "because I still have the best view beside me — my beautiful wife, Emelyn."

We were joking about it when the passenger beside us joined our discussion. Then God pulled out a wonderful surprise. It turned out that the man seated beside us was the manager of the resort where we will be staying.

Blessing no. 1: He gave us a free ride to the resort. (We were supposed to commute.) And blessing no. 2: He gave us a free whole-day tour, which would have cost us a lot.

Things may not always turn out the way we expect. When we find ourselves in some challenging situation, trust that God is on our side. He's preparing a greater blessing ahead of us, so be ready to be surprised! *JC Libiran (jclibiran@ymail.com)*

Reflection: Remember, even when it looks impossible, even when you don't see a way out, or even when you've made poor choices, God has a way. His power is unlimited. He can make a way because nothing is too difficult for Him. (Victoria Osteen)

Lord Jesus, with You in my life the best is yet to come.

Feast of St. Bartholomew, Apostle

St. Bartholomew, Apostle, pray for us.

Isaiah 66:18-21 • Psalm 117:1, 2
Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13 • Luke 13:22-30

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Endure your trials as "discipline;" God treats you as sons. For what "son" is there whom his father does not discipline? – Hebrews 12:7

My good friend and radio program co-host, *Tita* Jovie, lives a life that is full of trials. If I thought my life was a soap opera, hers is the longest running prime time *teleserye*.

Her journey from childhood to grandmotherhood has been a nasty roller coaster ride. I wish I could narrate her entire life story here, but trust me when I say that it's one big tearjerker.

Tita Jovie always says there's a hidden blessing in every trial that comes her way, so much so that she accepts them with open arms.

Her saintly ways inspire me to search for the blessings in my own share of trials. *What's in it for me, Lord?* I would find myself asking. And I guess my burdens grow lighter when I acknowledge that God is teaching me a good lesson, or that He's molding me into a stronger and better person.

If you're carrying a heavy burden today, trust that there is something to learn from it. When the tears in your eyes have dried, you will clearly see the blessing. Besides, He never gives us something we cannot handle, right? *Nova Arias-Sevilla (nova.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Look back at the past trials that you have overcome. What did you learn from them?

Lord, help us to see the blessings in every difficulty and the lesson in every activity under the heavens.

1 Thessalonians 1:2-5, 8-10 • Psalm 149:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 9
Matthew 23:13-22

PRAYING FOR OTHERS

We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you in our prayers. – 1 Thessalonians 1:2

I learned a very creative and fulfilling way to pray the rosary from Bo Sanchez. For each bead, you mention the name of a loved one or a specific intention that you can imagine in your head while praying. So for that particular bead, you picture the person you're praying for. It gives a lot more meaning to the repetitive Hail Marys.

I tried applying this once when I prayed the rosary with a friend. We each mentioned the name of a loved one with every other bead. By the time we reached the fifth decade, we were mentioning whole families and groups because we were running out of beads! We realized we had so many people to pray for that there weren't enough Hail Marys to lift all of them up.

Praying for others is a concrete way of loving them. This exercise helped me to feel their concerns and journey with them. It also made me forget myself for a while and be focused on the needs of others. *George Tolentino Gabriel (george.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Do you pray for others or just for your own concerns?

Lord, I lift up to You the intention of my loved one right now: (mention their name and their intention).

IN TRUST FOR (ITF)

"Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites..."
– Matthew 23:23

Years ago, a pastor and his wife took a baby from a children's home under the pretext of adopting her. They raised her while brainwashing her into believing that God wanted her to be their family's servant. For 20 years, she served them while she was being abused, until she called the police.

God has appointed us into positions of authority — whether we are preachers, pastors, teachers, older siblings, doctors, lawyers or ministry heads. But that authority goes hand in hand with the responsibility to care for and guard the welfare of the people placed under our power.

Sometimes, the power that comes with the position of authority can intoxicate people so much that it leads to abuse. So when you're tempted to abuse your authority, remember Jesus' warning to such people when He said, "You serpents... how will you escape the sentence of hell?" *Ronna Ledesma (ronna_ledesma@yahoo.com.ph)*

Reflection: God will demand more from the one who has been entrusted with much.

Father, [illegible] and temptations [illegible] the people [illegible] You've placed under me.

St. Monica, pray for us.

MERCY SHOUT!

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of filth."
– Matthew 23:27

He was young, physically active and appeared to be in the pink of health.

But on June 22, 2002, this 33-year-old St. Louis Cardinals pitching star was found dead in his Chicago hotel room. An autopsy revealed that he had a 90 percent blockage in two of three coronary arteries, an enlarged heart and a blood clot in one of the arteries. His appearance misled many to think that he was physically healthy.

People pretending to be well but are terribly sick in the spiritual sense — this is the definition of a hypocrite. In the heart of Jesus, His condemnation of hypocrisy was never driven by hatred of the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees. His was a wake-up call from the love of God who wants to reach out, to heal and to share His glorious destiny.

Yes, even if we think we're full and well, God is faithful. He will do whatever it takes to wake us up, until His hope that we admit our brokenness and receive the healing of God is fulfilled. And when we respond, His mercy shout becomes a roar of joy in His Kingdom. *Jon Escoto (faithatworkjon@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Do you hear God's mercy shout today?

Father, amidst my illusions of completeness and strong leadership, open my ears to hear Your shout today. And please don't stop until I come to You. Thank You.

St. Augustine, bishop and doctor of the Church, pray for us.

Jeremiah 1:17-19 (or 1 Thessalonians 3:7:13)
Psalm 71:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 15, 17 (or Psalm 90 3-5, 12-13, 14, 17)
Mark 6:17-29 (or Matthew 24:42-51)

HR MATTERS

"They will fight against you, but not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you," says the Lord. – Jeremiah 1:19

One of the first things I did as a human resources manager in the previous company I worked for was to reorient employees with existing company policies. I found out that although there were existing policies, they were not implemented. So I had to remind them of these before issuing disciplinary actions.

Many employees still got angry when they received disciplinary actions after violating company policies. I prayed to the Lord for strength and courage to do what the owners wanted me to do — to build a better company culture and institute policies. It was a difficult task to accomplish especially since most of the employees had been working there for years while I was just newly hired.

God showed His faithfulness to me in the months that followed. God helped me and the owners right-size the company, which enabled us to get rid of the bad apples in the organization. He blessed my efforts by enabling some of the employees to see the value of what I was doing. Some employees even became my friends after realizing that I was just doing my job as HR manager. Praise God for being my Deliverer! *Teresa Gumap-as Dumadag (teregmps@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Do you trust God to deliver you in times of trouble?

Lord, help me in my battles. Be my strength and courage. Be my Deliverer.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 • Psalm 97:1, 2, 5-6, 10, 11-12
Matthew 25:1-13

AGNES P. DE GUZMAN AKA KUNE

As you received from us how you should conduct yourselves to please God. – 1 Thessalonians 4:1

I was shocked to read a text message telling me that Kune had passed away. With lovely memories, I remembered Agnes P. De Guzman, or Kune as I fondly called her. She was an untiring, compassionate, humble and vibrant member of the God's Beloved Community, who would come once a month to minister to us at the Correctional Institution for Women.

Whenever Kune led praise and worship, I would get goosebumps. Before I know it, I'd be in tears and would fall to the floor, slain by the Holy Spirit.

"May you live your lives the way you have learned from us," she said as her parting message in one of her talks. She also shared that her ultimate dream was to acquire a lot and build a nice shelter for her immediate family.

Her message lingered in my mind as I viewed her remains in the dream house she had acquired before her demise due to cancer. Kune, you will always be an inspiration not only to me but also to those whose lives you've touched behind bars. *Beth A. Corral (bethcorral_0330@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: May all those who come behind us find us faithful. May the fire of our devotion light their way. May the footprints that we leave, lead them to believe. And the life we live inspire them to obey. (from the song "Find Us Faithful" by Steve Green)

Lord Jesus, may we persevere in living good lives according to what we have learned from You.

1 Thessalonians 4:9-11 • Psalm 98:1, 7-8, 9
Matthew 25:14-30

WORK ETHICS

"Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy." – Matthew 25:23

I was in the corporate world for more than 20 years. I started from the bottom, working up the corporate ladder through hard work and continuing education. My basic belief was focusing not on myself but on serving others, in this instance, the company I worked for. Eventually, I became a businessman and learned even more about stewardship — a Christian way of doing business. That is, making the business work for others, my stakeholders — employees, my clients, my supplier — and most especially for God. God blessed my businesses. That gave my being a businessman greater meaning and value.

Taking on more and more responsibilities has become second nature to me since I started accepting smaller ones. My community appointed me council head and thereafter made me chairman of the Kerygma Conference, the country's biggest annual Catholic learning event. I accepted readily.

My basic belief that brought me success and significance is simple: being selfless, and serving God and others reap joyful dividends for me — financially and spiritually. *Rolly España (rolly@homeliving.com.ph)*

Reflection: Do you work for yourself alone? Do it for God and others, and God and others will work for you.

Father of mercy, I thank you that I am manager of your greatness, which is to love.

Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29 • Psalm 68:4-5, 6-7, 10-11
Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24 • Luke 14:1, 7-14

MY PARENTS' LEGACY

Humble yourself the more, the greater you are, and you will find favor with God. – Sirach 3:18

The Light of Jesus Family started 33 years ago. I was 14 years old — and I was already its overall leader.

My father was a humble man. He never took the leadership because he believed I had the gift and he didn't. So he just supported me, always working behind the scenes.

He knew he wasn't a good preacher, but he knew he was a good accountant. So he managed the finances of the Light of Jesus Family. Because of him, I realized that humble people are secure people. It's the insecure people who like to grab the limelight, who scramble for position, who are enamored with titles because they need the crowd's applause.

Dad didn't need anyone's applause. At work, he was assistant vice president. But in the ministry, he'd arrange the chairs during our prayer meeting — week after week. Dad was also one of the most honest men I knew.

I always preach that we harvest what we plant. But here's the other truth: Part of what we harvest doesn't come from what we planted. Part of what we harvest comes from what our parents planted.

With integrity and humility, I continue to obey God's direction for my life and for the Light of Jesus Family.

Bo Sanchez (bosanchez@kerygmafamily.com)

Reflection: What values have you inherited from your parents?

Mold me more and more according to Your values, Lord.

MY *LOLO* FATHER

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor…." – Luke 4:18

My grand-uncle Cering was a mischievous young boy. Like the legendary Robin Hood, he'd steal from his *Inang* (mother) to buy toys and food to give to the farmer's children. One day, out of sheer exasperation at her son's misdeeds, she got an iron rod from the granary and whipped his hand hard enough to leave scars.

Cering asked permission to enter the seminary. *Inang* would not hear of it, fearful that he would just bring trouble and shame to the Jesuits. He entered anyway. On the day of his ordination to the priesthood, he went up to *Inang* after the rites, showed his hands and said, "*Inang*, these hands will be the same hands that will now serve the Lord." She cried profusely realizing her son's true calling. Fr. Cering, or *Lolo* Father to us, lived to become a well-loved and dedicated servant of the Lord. All his sisters — Angelita, Lily, Virginia and Elizabeth — likewise embraced the religious life.

Not all of us are called to be priests and nuns. But we can still spread God's Word and bring goodness as His Spirit is upon us. *Marie Franco (mariefranco_pie@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: One member of the family in the religious life is a blessing. What more to have five! How can you emulate them?

Lord, help us to be true witnesses to Your Love and Your Word. Help us to spread Your Word.

NOT FOR WRATH

For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night. – 1 Thessalonians 5:2

The year 2011 saw several devastating natural calamities that led to many deaths. There was the tsunami in Japan that caused 15,845 confirmed deaths. There was tropical storm Sendong that devastated Cagayan de Oro and its neighboring areas that killed more than 1,000 people and is considered that year's deadliest storm. There were changes in weather patterns that led to unexpected rains. There was even a movie, *2012*, that predicted that the world would end in 2012, according to the Mayan calendar.

As I write this reflection, these fears and questions continue to exist. The unstable financial market in the U.S. and in Europe, unrest in parts of the Middle East, and rising prices of commodities give people enough cause to worry.

But our reassurance comes from the verses that follow in today's reading. In 1 Thessalonians 5:6, it says, "So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober." And in verse 9, it continues, "For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." Let us therefore take heed. *Joy Sosoban (jsosoban@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Gird up the loins of your mind, live soberly, and set your hopes completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:13)

Grant us the grace to be sober and awake, Lord, awaiting Your coming.

HAPPY TO SERVE

He stood over her, rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up immediately and waited on them. – Luke 4:38

I had on-and-off fever with allergic rhinitis the week before the inauguration of the Feast Alabang Center.

The Wednesday after that, I had a relapse. I prayed that my fever would leave by Saturday so I could serve on Sunday. But by 10:00 Saturday night, my temperature remained high. I texted Joey and Myrna, our events heads, that I was still sick.

My phone's text alert chimed. Before reading the message, I cleared my nose. To my surprise, the congestion in my head flowed out freely. I had spent a week almost bursting my eardrums in futile attempts to expel the blockage.

Joey's reply gave me goosebumps: "May the most precious blood of Jesus wash away the cause of your fever. May God heal you right now. In Jesus' name, we pray." I realized the infection had been washed out at that instant.

I gratefully proclaimed God's healing as I served at The Feast the next day.

Simon's mother-in-law must have felt the same gratitude that's why she immediately got up and waited on the Lord. Service without hesitation is our humble way of showing appreciation for God's mercies. *Lella M. Santiago (mirellasantiago@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What blessings have you received recently? How are you thanking God for them?

Thank you, Lord, for your healing, for your provisions, for your love.

SUPERIOR WAYS

We do not cease praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will. – Colossians 1:9

They were scheduled to move back to the Philippines after having acquired their citizenship abroad. But a few months before their return, their young boy was diagnosed with cancer. It was heartbreaking news for the family.

Everyone rallied in prayer for his healing. The blessing behind all the sad news was that their new country of citizenship provided free healthcare that would afford them the best treatment that science could offer.

Oftentimes when tragedy hits, we can't help but question why God allows bad things to happen to us. It's so easy to focus on the negative, to doubt His presence in our lives, to forget that there is always a bigger picture.

But adversity also brings out the best in us, if we let it.

When we choose to find the silver lining behind the cloud, we allow God to reveal to us the supremacy of His wisdom. We gain new insight as well as a deeper knowledge of His character. Our faith is strengthened. We emerge from the experience with lessons we will benefit from for the rest of our lives.

In the end, we are wiser, stronger, more placid in the face of affliction. *Rissa Singson-Kawpeng (justbreatherissa@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Disappointments are God's way of saying, "I've got something better." (Unknown)

Jesus, when pain, loss or anxiety blinds me from seeing Your blessing hand, let me see with eyes of faith.

Wisdom 9:13-18 (Micah 5 1-4 or Romans 8:28-30)
Psalm 90:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14, 17 (or Psalm 13 6 6)
Philemon 9-10, 12-17 **Luke 14:25-33** (or **Matthew 1:1-16.18-23**)

A MATTER OF CONTROL

Or what king marching into battle would not first sit down…
– Luke 14:31

If you drop by our office, you'd notice that my work area has lots of checklists and charts on the side panels.

At a single glance, I'd know what our magazine's theme is for a particular month, what the deadline is, and who are the assigned writers for each column.

I'd also know what date a particular issue of *Kerygma* was delivered, and whether it was delayed or not.

I or the other managing editors would know what magazine our layout artist is working on during a particular week.

My management and industrial engineering background has taught me the value of planning and control in any undertaking so as to maximize the utilization of resources.

Applying it in my present job is a challenge though.

Sometimes, no matter how "deadly" the deadline is, a writer will fail to turn in his or her article. Or I would take long in finishing mine. Or the artist would get sick. Or the printer's equipment will break down.

When these things happen, I pause and lift it all up to God. Because no matter how much planning and control I do, things can still go wrong. I can only trust that with God, who is behind the work that we do, everything will fall into place. *Tess V. Atienza (svp_tvatienza@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: When things go wrong, do you panic or do you trust?

Lord, may I learn to always trust that You, not I, are in control of everything.

Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary

St. Adrian, pray for us.

WHERE I FOUND JESUS

God chose to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; it is Christ in you... – Colossians 1:27

When I was in college, I began an earnest search for my Christian God. I attended Catholic Charismatic groups while taking part in Protestant prayer gatherings.

In the end, I chose to be a Protestant. Their Bible study was so structured that I learned a lot about the God that I yearned to know. But something disturbed me.

It was the way a friend shunned his family after failing to evangelize them. He moved out of his parents' home and declared, "Let them rot in hell!"

Is this what will become of me? After learning all I can, will I become judge and jury of my fellowmen and condemn them for their apparent sins?

In contrast, I remembered the people in the Catholic Charismatic groups and how they shared their shortcomings and weaknesses. Because of their own failures, they support and encourage others who are also struggling. Their humility, compassion and mercy moved me and revealed to me what I had been looking for all along.

I searched and finally found God, not in the books that I read, but in the hearts of the people who loved as Jesus did.

Cecil Lim (cez_lim@yahoo.com)

Reflection: God doesn't want you to bring people to Jesus. God wants you to bring Jesus to people. (Bo Sanchez)

Father, remind me to carry Jesus in my heart to all the places that otherwise He may never reach.

ENEMY IN A MASK

See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to human tradition, according to the elemental powers of the world and not according to Christ. – Colossians 2:8

She was a sweet talker. I barely knew her but I was so drawn to her. She knew exactly what to say and what I needed to hear to convince me to invest in her business. It turned out she was a hoax. Soon she was gone and so was my money. I got fooled big time.

The enemy is cunning and persistent. He will find ways to get us at our weakness in an attempt to shake our faith, without even making us aware of it. He uses people who are masked with deception. They can be anywhere — in our own circle of family and friends, in our community, or even in our own church or parish. So we must always be on guard.

Our relationship with God is not supposed to be based solely on what we feel or what we want to hear. Rather, our faith should be rooted in the true knowledge of Christ. Every day, we must strive to know God even better so that the enemy will have no chance to derail our hope and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. *Jane Gonzales Rauch (mgr516@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Do not be a captive of deception. Seek for the truth that leads to salvation. Decide to spend more time reading and understanding the Scriptures.

Holy Spirit, grant me the gift of wisdom so I can see beyond deception. Amen

STILL BLESSED

"Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh."
– Luke 6:21

Blessed. Such a wonderful word!

But to someone who is totally damaged because of a miserable experience, this word has no place in the heart.

Iza, a friend of mine, was in this very situation sometime ago. When her fiancé left her for another girl, she was devastated. She knew she could no longer have him back. She withdrew from everyone and even attempted to end her life.

But there was one thing that Iza did that made a big difference. She prayed. She cried and offered up the pain of her heart and shouted her fears to God. She didn't understand then why God allowed it to happen but she still clung to Him. Several months of grief, anguish and fear passed but still she held on to Him.

And after weeping over shattered dreams, God showed her the light at the end of the tunnel. The family and friends that she was ready to give up were the people who helped her heal her broken heart. Iza just lost one guy but not the entire world — not her family, not her friends, not her future, not a new life. Still, she is *blessed*. *Analiza Obiasca (aobiasca_cute@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Cry. Forgive. Learn. Move on. Let your tears water the seeds of your future happiness. (Steve Maraboli)

Lord, in Your hands, even my most painful experience can be turned into a blessing. I surrender all my troubles to You.

REAL REWARD

"Lend, expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great."
– Luke 6:35

"A 'neighbor' is borrowing money," my wife would email once in a while. This "neighbor" can be a relative or a friend.

Oftentimes, the borrower is really in need. And we would think of just giving the money instead of lending it. We would tell that person that it's our way of helping, not a debt that he would have to pay.

And every time we do this, there are immediate rewards. We feel blessed that we have extra money to help others with. (It's better to have money to spare than none, right?)

We are blessed to be a channel of God's provision to persons in need.

We are blessed with the overflow of thanksgiving from the person we helped.

We feel liberated that we do not have to worry about when he will pay us back.

We have this confidence that we can ask our Father for the "great reward" as He had promised in the passage above.

And this is the real great blessing: the Word of God says that when you give to the needy, "the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake" (Deuteronomy 19:9). *Danny Tariman (dtariman loja@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Do you struggle to give when someone needy asks you for financial help?

Lord, teach me to be generous. Let me be a channel of Your love. Amen

DON'T WAIT FOR GODOT

"Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit?" – Luke 6:39

In college, I had to write an analysis of Samuel Becket's play titled *Waiting for Godot*, an example of the Theater of the Absurd that stems from Albert Camus's absurdist philosophy, which in turn is a branch of the existentialism philosophy pioneered by Soren Kierkegard. Existentialism proposes that man's existence is absurd because he is incapable of finding meaning or purpose.

Such absurdity is delineated in *Waiting for Godot*, a tragi-comedy about two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, who wait on a country road for someone named Godot. You think nothing happens in the play because Godot never comes.

Two characters arrive—Pozzo and his slave Lucky. But they are not much of a help for Vladimir and Estragon because Pozzo becomes blind and well, Lucky seems to be a useless servant. Yes, it's a case of the blind leading the blind as we are reminded in today's Gospel.

Some interpret Godot as God, and for us Christians, that really is absurd because we believe God comes to us especially when we are in trouble. And, because of our faith, we know our existence has meaning. We need not wait for Godot. *Cynthia U. Santiago (cusantiago@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Who is your faith mentor?

Lord, grant that I will never be blind to the truth that You are my Teacher and You give meaning to my life.

OPEN DOOR

"God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." – John 3:17

I asked the one in charge if I could invite Robin (not his real name) to be one of the leaders. "Do you know his personality?" he asked me meaningfully. "Yes, sir," I said bravely. Robin didn't have a good reputation especially among the more judgmental members of the other teams. But I observed his dedication to serve. With the rejection he lives with, he compensates by spending more time in our cluster, the more accepting members of the ministry. I felt that, if given a chance, he can still develop more self-esteem and grow in his potential.

"It's up to you to take the risk," was the permission I got.

Yes, it was a risk in a way, but it was worth taking. I thought that if Robin mixes with the more levelheaded, committed leaders of our "not perfect" group, he can join the tribe who are struggling to grow in the Lord and meet with more success.

Jesus set the pace by coming to save us, not judge us. Who are we to live otherwise? *Cristy Galang (cristy_cc@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: As a servant of the Lord, do you tend to use others rather than love them?

I thank You, Jesus, for the chance to show love to others. Give us courage, Lord, to pursue the good we can do for others and the vision and grace to fully love them in spite of their weakness.

Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

St. Norburga, pray for us.

PARABLE OF THE LOST

"There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents."
– Luke 15:7

Today's Gospel narrates to us three parables, all speaking about the lost. Luke 15:7 says it all — "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance." Why? I believe it's because of two things.

First, the nature of the sinner. He is desperate for God, just like the lost son. He is hungry, thirsty, naked and dirty. And he realizes that only in his Father's house (with God) will he be whole and be filled again. And because he is found and welcomed back, he will love more. Jesus Himself explained this in another story and parable: those who have been forgiven more will love more (see Luke 7:47).

Second, the nature of the forgiver. It is easy to love those who are obedient, righteous and good. But what should make us Christians different is that we love even those who have wronged us. Jesus said, "If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them!" (Luke 6:32).

In the end, it is loving the lost that will make us genuine followers of Christ. *Alvin Barcelona (apb_ayo@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Be grateful for those who love you, but be forgiving of those who hurt you. Think of someone who may have wronged you or whom you may have hurt. Reconcile with that person today.

Dear Lord, grant me the grace to be like You by loving even those who do not love me back. Amen.

INTERCEDE FOR ONE ANOTHER

I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone. – 1 Timothy 2:1

In January 2011, a group of couples listed down their petitions to God for that year. Each list was "raffled off" to another husband-and-wife tandem, and each couple committed to pray for that intention.

In January 2012, a wife from that group shared before an assembly that all of the petitions they wrote down had been granted by the Lord! And they were no ordinary petitions. A couple prayed for a car and were blessed with one. Two couples asked for a house and both got new homes.

There was a time when I took intercession lightly. When someone asked me to pray for a concern, I would say yes but would often quickly forget about it. Now, I take those occasions more seriously that I even ask for specifics. Like the name of the sick relative they are asking the Lord to heal. The time of the board exam. Where, when and what time the operation will take place (even the doctors and everyone else involved in the procedure). This way, I can be one with them in praying to God. *Jun Asis (mabuting.balita@gmail.com)*

Reflection: How often do you pray for other people's concerns?

Lord, I pray for the intentions of the people who asked me to pray for them. Hear our supplications through the intercession of Mary, Your mother and our mother, too.

A BETTER GIFT

When the Lord saw her, he was moved with pity for her and said to her, "Do not weep." – Luke 7:13

Edgar Guest wrote a poem where he asked God for many things. In the end though, he never really got what he asked for but his prayers were answered anyway. Part of the poem reads:

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life
I was given life that I might enjoy all things…
I got nothing that I asked for — but everything I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.

The widow of Nain has the same story. All she wanted was a comforting word, sympathy from others and the company of friends at a time when she had lost her only son. Aside from being a bereaved widow, she was now a penniless old woman, too. But Jesus knew her needs. More than sympathy, He knew that she needed her son. So He raised him back to life.

Jesus understands us better than we do ourselves. Often, He gives us nothing of the things we pray for because He always has something better for us. We only need to lift up our needs to Him and trust that everything will work out.

Rod Velez (rod.velez@gmail.com)

Reflection: When God doesn't give you what you pray for, do you hold on to faith or do you turn to bitterness and blame?

I am so fortunate, Lord, to have a God who weeps for me. You understand me, more than I can ever imagine. Teach my heart not to be anxious and to always trust in You completely.

DELAYED GRATIFICATION

"But wisdom is vindicated by all her children." – Luke 7:35

I can honestly say that I've lived a fast life. While kids my age were going to parties and having boyfriends, I was reading the Bible and going to prayer meetings. I died to my youthful desires so many times I'm surprised I lived to be in my middle age.

When everybody was thinking of their careers and how to make money, my only ambition was to serve the Lord without any thought of monetary compensation. In fact, I thought I'd never have to pay taxes because I wouldn't have income.

Looking at my life now, I see God's wisdom vindicated. The years of choosing the Lord's ways have brought the fruits that He had promised and so much more. The things I had given up as a young Christian, the Lord has returned to me in much greater measure than I could ever have imagined. But I wouldn't have known that His ways were true if I hadn't trusted and followed Him in the first place. *Rissa Singson-Kawpeng (justbreatherissa@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Apply God's Word in your life and see for yourself that He is true to His promises.

Your ways, Lord, are truly not our ways. But Yours is always the best.

1 Timothy 4:12-16 • Psalm 111:7-8, 9, 10
Luke 7:36-50

CHARACTER MAGNET

"Her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love." – Luke 7:47

"Character magnet" is one of the pet names I have for Mom. For some reason, Mom has this uncanny ability of attracting and befriending persons whom other people would rather avoid. Her best friend of more than 30 years is argumentative. Her aunt rambles on about the past for hours on end without giving Mom the chance to speak. Her former boss accused her of something she did not do. Her only daughter (me) is both her best friend and nagging critic.

How does she deal with these difficult characters? With forgiveness, love and understanding. She told me, "I'm a difficult person, too, you know. And a sinful one at that. But the Lord never seems to get tired of taking me back whenever I ask for His forgiveness. The least I can do is love others like He loves me."

I am blessed and honored to learn from the way Mom lives and loves. Her example reminds me to be thankful for the merciful love of the Father shown through the sacrifice of His Son. And the best way to respond to such a great love is to also love especially those who are the hardest to love.

Dina Pecaña (dpecana@yahoo.com)

Reflection: To forgive is the highest and most beautiful form of love. (Robert Muller)

Jesus, You have shown us Your great love by Your death and resurrection. Teach us also to love much those who need most to be loved. Amen.

INTEGRITY

For the love of money is the root of all evils, and some people in their desire for it have strayed from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains. – 1 Timothy 6:10

One of my recent favorite Christian movies is called *Courageous*. One of the main characters is a man named Javier who, despite his confidence in God, is having a hard time finding a regular job that will pay enough to sustain his family.

But one day, his prayers are answered. He lands a suitable job in a manufacturing firm. While working in his new post, Javier is offered an attractive promotion — with a catch. To prove his willingness to be a team player, he has to forge some entries on a supplies logbook. Despite the threat of being unemployed once again, Javier chooses the right thing. He declines the offer, saying that it would betray his family and his faith. The manager then quietly extends his hand to shake Javier's, revealing that it was a test of integrity that he had just passed.

Money is not evil per se, especially when it is used to bless others. But when it is used for greed, it slowly consumes and destroys the soul like termites feeding on wood. For this purpose, we need a solid foundation built on faith and integrity so we can make the right decisions involving money matters. *Audee Villaraza (avillaraza@gmail.com)*

Reflection: God gave me my money. I believe the power to make money is a gift from God to be developed and used to the best of our ability for the good of mankind. (John D. Rockefeller)

Lord, You are my real treasure. You are all that I desire.

THE CALL

"Follow me."– Matthew 9:9

Although I sensed God's call early on, I was too young to understand. From the time I could read, I tried to find Him in the pages I was turning. I also looked for His presence in meaningful movies. Or in the awesome beauty of nature.

As I grew in years and human wisdom, I thought He was present in my friendship and service to others. God had to slow me down through a mistakenly assumed heart attack. His message from a priest who said Mass at the Department of Foreign Affairs was: "If I was too tired for myself then I was too tired for Him." It made me take deeper breaths instead of hyperventilating in my multi-tasked life.

Forced to be still and guided to read the Bible, I finally found God in the silence of my heart, in a small voice that said, "Follow me and be My ambassador." *Grace Princesa (grprincesa@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Be still and know that I am God. (Psalm 46:10)

Lord, help me to be silent and still in order to hear Your whisper of love.

ENTRUST AND ENJOY!

"The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones." – Luke 16:10

I believe that whatever you care for and manage well is bound to grow. This is true whether it's a business, a relationship, a family, a career or even your body.

I've been 40 years old for 309 days and I realize that what others say is true. Life does begin at 40 — especially because I feel as strong as a 17-year-old lad! That's because I take care of my body with daily exercise and good nutrition.

The same is true for other things that God has entrusted to me: my family; The Feasts in Manila and Pasig where I am the Feast builder; my Youth Missions, Campus Missions and Radical Men, where I help form future leaders of our community; my friends and relatives; my investments and businesses; and of course, my spiritual life.

Because I take the time to care for these areas of my life, at the same time entrusting them to the Lord, I also enjoy rewards from these very same things. What's more, He prospers what I've entrusted to Him with more of His blessings. What a great joy to see God blessing the work of my hands!

Friend, entrust and enjoy! *Obet Cabrillas (kpreacherobet@gmail.com)*

Reflection: The biggest room in the world is the room for improvement. Therefore, never stop growing!

Lord, You have entrusted me with much. May I be a faithful steward in managing Your blessings. Amen.

Ezra 1:1-6 • Psalm 126:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6
Luke 8:16-18

SIMPLE YET PROFOUND

"For there is nothing hidden that will not become visible."
– Luke 8:17

During some free time at a retreat, I shared with some retreatants something I heard in the news. "When somebody is wounded in an accident or crime, you can use even just a crumpled piece of newspaper or plastic bag to stop the bleeding. Just put it on the wound, hold it and apply pressure," I said.

Two weeks later, I saw one of those I was with at the retreat. She had a plaster on her chin and wounds on her fingers.

She narrated how she was walking on a sidewalk, singing even, when she stumbled. "Blood came out from my chin. Then I remembered what you said so I put my hankie on it and applied pressure. The bleeding lessened. When I arrived home, I saw my flesh was exposed. My nephews accompanied me to the hospital where my wound was sewn," she related. She was so grateful for that piece of info I shared.

One simple sharing yet it was a big help to someone in need. Let's listen well to what we hear no matter how simple it may be. At the moment we need it, the wisdom that may have been hidden from us, God will bring it into the open at the right time. *Ma. Luisa De la Cruz (theessence_byluisa@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What is God telling you right now? Do not just hear, but listen well!

Dearest Lord, remove the blindness of my heart that I may see Your light. Remove my deafness that I may listen to Your voice.

Ezra 6:7-8, 12, 14-20 • Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5
Luke 8:19-21

ARE YOU A FAN OR A FRIEND?

"My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it." – Luke 8:21

I must confess that I was a Bo Sanchez fanatic years ago.

I would buy all his books, recorded teachings and anything that would remind me of him.

Don't get me wrong. I don't have any romantic feelings for him, neither am I his stalker. He just inspires me to be a better person. And I was just a fan... that's all. Bo has played a vital role in my healing and life direction. He has shown me that I have the power to change and become the person God wants me to be.

Through the years of being a fan, I eventually became his friend. Now I serve as a missionary for the Light of Jesus Family, the community that he founded.

Today, Jesus reminds us that His true family and friends are the ones who obey the will of God. Yes, I have become a friend of Bo, but most of all, through him I have realized that I am a friend of God. *JC Libiran (jclibiran@ymail.com)*

Reflection: Are you a fan or a friend of God?

Jesus, today I celebrate our friendship.

MOVE ON

"And as for those who do not welcome you, when you leave that town, shake the dust from your feet." – Luke 9:5

As a broadcast media practitioner, I am exposed to the criticism of my radio listeners and TV viewers. There will always be somebody who will oppose my views, or comment about my weight, or simply say that they don't like me.

One day, a listener expressed his or her disagreement with me and sent an offensive text message while I was on the air. That affected me. I shared this incident with a priest-friend of mine because the bad feeling lingered for a couple of days. He replied, "There was nothing wrong with what you said, so shake the dust from your feet!"

In other words, "Move on."

The Twelve Apostles surely faced a great amount of criticism and rejection. Yet they journeyed on from town to town to spread the Good News because they carried the Truth in their hearts — the Truth was their source of strength.

In similar situations, if after examining our conscience we find that we are on the side of Truth, just move on. We cannot please everybody anyway. *Nova Arias-Sevilla (nova.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: How do you deal with criticism?

When there are bumps on the road of life, give us the strength and courage, Lord, to continue our journey. Amen.

A LEAK IN THE PIPES

Whoever earned wages earned them for a bag with holes in it.
– Haggai 1:6

Our water bill usually amounts to P2,000. One month, to my mom's surprise and shock, our bill skyrocketed to P51,000! There was a leak in the pipes under the house so no one noticed it. Good thing we were able to have it fixed right away.

There are many things that can act as leaks in our lives. Materialism can leak out hard-earned money we try to save. Anger can leak out love we receive from others. Sin leaks out the self-confidence and peace we have. And ingratitude can leak out the joy in our lives. As for me, there was a time when I allowed my negative attitude to leak out all the joy in my life. Blessings were flowing into my life, but I was focused on the things that went wrong, the things I wasn't getting, the things others had which I didn't. This resulted in my being sad, burdened and depressed. It cost me a lot of happiness.

One day, God fixed my leak. I saw a man lying on the sidewalk curled up in his torn-up T-shirt, shivering in the cold. I then realized that my problems are so small compared to his: he didn't even have the basic necessities of life. I made the decision to stop focusing on the negative and to be grateful for all my blessings. When I put on that attitude of gratitude, joy started to fill up my heart once again. *George Tolentino Gabriel (george.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: When was the last time you counted your blessings? Start again, now.

I bless You, Lord, for everything that I have

BLUE MOON

"But who do you say that I am?" – Luke 9:20

I've always been fascinated by a full moon. I get mesmerized when I look up and see this big, yellow and perfectly round moon up against the darkened sky. Oftentimes I would be awakened by its bright light peeping through my windows, as though it was beckoning me. And I would get up sometimes in the middle of the night just to bask in its light before going back to sleep.

One time, I asked God casually why I'm so enthralled with the moon. His answer came immediately, as casually as I had asked my question — because it has no light of its own!

The moon shines so brightly in the night, illuminating the darkness of the night enough to be seen by half the world. Yet it has no light of its own. It merely reflects the light from the sun.

Then I realized that that's how I should be — merely reflecting the "Son-shine" to help illuminate the lives of others and never trying to shine on my own or passing off the light as my own. I have been called to be a light in this world by reflecting Jesus, the Light of the World. *Ronna Ledesma (ronna_ledesma@yahoo.com.ph)*

Reflection: Learn to associate ideas worthy of God with all that happens in nature.... Then your imagination will never be at the mercy of your impulses but will always be at the service of God. (Oswald Chambers)

Thank You, Lord, for letting me feel Your love every time I look up in the darkest night.

RUIN IS THE WAY

"Pay attention to what I am telling you. The Son of Man is to be handed over to men." – Luke 9:44

"Ruin is the way to rebuilding."

Alex has been my plumbing savior. When I needed him again, I went to his place. I nearly passed out when I saw that what was once a tiny, weather-beaten, old shack, was now a nice two-story concrete house.

Alex explained, "A few months ago, this entire colony was razed by a fire and nothing was left. We were hopeless then. But since the "undesirables" were driven away, the entire place opened up to an NGO that offered to buy lots for us and help build decent houses. With an extremely affordable financial scheme, I now own this house and lot!"

"Ruin" was about to happen to Jesus, and He wanted to make sure that the disciples knew that He knew — that He was in control, and that He was about to build something new, beautiful and glorious over what was to be destroyed. From the "ruins" will come the resurrection!

Friend, is ruin happening in your life now? An unhealthy relationship ending. A job you're losing to redirect you to a more promising opportunity. An endeavor failing to give you time and space for a new ministry. Remember, God is building something new! *Jon Escoto (faithatworkjon@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Have there been "destructions" in your life recently? What is God building over the "ruins"?

Lord, let me remember your faithfulness in the "destructions" of my life. Give me grace to hope in You today and every day.

Amos 6:1, 4-7 (or Daniel 7:9-10.13-14 or Revelation 12:7-12)
Psalm 146:7, 8-9, 9-10 (or Psalm 138:1-2, 2-3, 4-5)
1 Timothy 6:11-16 • Luke 16:19-31 (or John 1:47-51)

HOLY PURSUIT

But you, man of God, pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness. – 1 Timothy 6:11

Modern man is busy nowadays with the pursuit of many things. Some people are busy pursuing their studies, careers, wealth or their interests. Many seek happiness and success. Running after these things is not bad in themselves. What makes them bad is when chasing our personal goals and interests cause us to sin and destroy our relationship with God. When the things we pursue take the place of the things that God wants us to aim at, then we know that we are chasing the wrong things.

How much of your time do you spend striving for the things of heaven? Compare this to the time that you spend pursuing your personal goals and interests. Are these the things that God wants you to seek? Are the things that you spend most of your time on bringing you closer to heaven and making you a better man or woman of God?

There are things that God wants us to seek first as Christians. These are righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience and gentleness. Let us examine our lives based His desires. *Teresa Gumap-as Dumadag (teregmps@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Among these things or virtues that God wants you to pursue, where do you need to improve most?

Lord, help us examine our lives so we can see how we can grow in being a Christian and living out these virtues.

Feast of Sts. Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, archangels

Sts. Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, archangels, pray for us.

Zechariah 8:1-8 • Psalm 102:16-18, 19-21, 29, 22, 23
Luke 9:46-50

CHILDLIKE FAITH

Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. For the one who is least among all of you is the one who is the greatest." – Luke 9:48

I decided to serve and stay in the Awesome Kids Ministry for four straight years because of my passion for teaching young kids. I also needed to heal the wounded child in me, so God anointed me to minister to His children.

Because of my background in guidance counseling and psychology, I thought of first serving in the Counseling Ministry when Bo Sanchez exhorted The Feast attendees in Valle Verde Country Club, Pasig City, to start serving and giving back to God our time, talents and treasure. But I heeded God's call and joined the Awesome Kids Ministry instead. It was there that I found a spiritual family.

True enough, I was healed as I served. Through the hugs and kisses I got from the kids I ministered to. Through the unconditional love of my ministry heads and the unwavering friendship of my co-servants because I've seen a glimpse of Christ in them.

To this day, I've never ceased to thank God for bringing me to this ministry. *Ems Sy Chan (havenofleeanne@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Have childlike faith in God. He wants only the best for His children.

Father, thank You for always giving me nothing but the best. Thank You for entrusting me for something in line with my core [illegible]

Feast of St. Jerome, priest and doctor of the Church

St. Jerome, priest and doctor of the Church, pray for us.

Zechariah 8:20-23 (or Isaiah 66:10-14)
Psalm 87:1-3, 4-5, 6-7 (or Psalm 113:1, 2, 3)
Luke 9:51-56 (or Matthew 18:1-4)

DREAM BIG, START SMALL

He resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem. – Luke 9:51

One day, a friend tells me, "Bo, I'm talking with some Japanese billionaires. They're selling a prime property of 200 hectares for a *malunggay* factory." Wow.

On another day, he tells me, "I'm brokering a deal with the Koreans. They want to invest 100 billion to start an herbal company." Amazing.

And after each conversation, he'd tell me, "Bo, once this deal is finished, I'll donate P25 million to your ministry." But sadly, I've been talking to the guy for 13 years, and not a single deal has pushed through.

What's wrong with him? He's not starting small. He's trying to catch big fish before small fish.

Start small. If you start small, you make small mistakes. But if you start big, you'll make big mistakes. That's very costly and painful.

This applies to our ministries, too. We dream big for God, but we start small. As we get better in our service, we grow bigger.

God uses us in Jerusalem first — in our home ground. If we persevere and are faithful in doing His will, He will expand our impact to the entire world. *Bo Sanchez (bosanchez@kerygmafamily.com)*

Reflection: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed... Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree...." (Matthew 13:31-32)

Help me to grow in the virtue of perseverance, Lord.

Memorial of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, virgin, Patroness of the Missions

St. Therese of the Child Jesus, virgin, Patroness of the Missions, pray for us.

Nehemiah 2:1-8 • Psalm 137:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6
Luke 9:57-62 (or Matthew 18:1-5, 10)

RAISE THEM WELL

"Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven." – Matthew 18:4

I'm 48 years old and have witnessed countless episodes of so-called "politics" at the office, within religious congregations, non-profit foundations and church organizations. Sadly, I myself became a victim of it a number of times, which led me to take legal action against the perpetrators, withdraw from the service, cut off ties with people, and resign from the job.

My son is 23 years old and a neophyte in the corporate world. Slowly, he is finding out that mean people abound and ill intentions exist. He is disoriented.

In one of our mother-son talks, I made him aware of such realities and reminded him to be on his guard. More importantly, he should never be the cause of the pain and downfall of people. His gentle response was, "You raised me to be good, Mama. Don't worry." I was overjoyed.

Parents have the primary responsibility for inculcating the right values and forming the character of their children to make them good and productive citizens. What a peaceful and happy world it would be if only all parents would teach their children well and their children would live up to the good example of their parents. *Marie Franco (mariefranco_pie@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What other positive influences can you pass on to the next generation and to the people around you?

Lord, continue to guide us that we may be good examples to those You have put under our care.

Nehemiah 8:1-4, 5-6, 7-12 • Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11
Luke 10:1-12

NEVER OUT OF HIS HANDS

"The kingdom of God is at hand for you." – Luke 10:9

There are certain places where I feel God in a special way. My favorites are before a tabernacle, wide open spaces surrounded by nature, and silent places.

But that is me. For other persons, playing praise songs may make them feel God's presence. For others, it may be time spent with the less fortunate.

We have different ways of recognizing God but as the verse above states, the Kingdom is already at hand. We just need to open our eyes to recognize it.

In the midst of unmoving traffic, recognize God in the window of opportunity He gives you to slow down.

When money is short and you don't know where to turn, see the hand of God in the strength He gives you to be able to look for work. When it seems all doors have been closed and you're too tired to struggle, stop and surrender yourself into the arms of God who is always there with you.

We are never out of His hand.

That's why the kingdom of God is at hand. *Joy Sosoban (jsosoban@gmail.com)*

Reflection: See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. (Isaiah 49:16)

Dearest Lord, may I never forget that Your Kingdom is already here. Help me see it. Help me live in it.

THE TEST

"We have neither heeded the voice of the Lord... nor followed the precepts which the Lord set before us." - Baruch 1:18

I'd like to ask you to make an interactive reflection today by taking this test. Look at the directions one at a time (no peeking at the conclusion).

1. Get a sheet of blank white paper.
2. Write your name at the top.
3. Read all the directions first.
4. Think of the important things in your life (family, health, work, service, etc.) and draw a pretty heart for each.
5. Fold the paper in half. Fold again.
6. Draw 12 evenly spaced dots (4 across, 3 down) on the folded paper.
7. Connect the dots to make squares.
8. Punch a hole in the middle of each square.
9. Ignore directions 5 to 8.

This is an obedience test. What does your paper look like now? Is it unblemished with just your name and the hearts on it or is it full of holes?

The blank paper is like our soul. When we follow God's commandments, we'll be able to return it to Him in a beautiful state. When we fail to obey, our life is tarnished — peppered with ugly sins. *Lella M. Santiago (mirellasantiago@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: How well do you listen to God and follow His instructions?

Forgive me, Lord, for the times I turned a deaf ear to Your commandments

Baruch 4:5-12, 27-29 • Psalm 69:33-35, 36-37
Luke 10:17-24

LOOKING THROUGH THE EYES OF GOD

Turning to the disciples in private he said, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see." – Luke 10:23

Meryll was feeling depressed because she still didn't have work since she migrated to Canada. She had sent her application to a number of companies but none of them were willing to take a risk on a new migrant like her.

Then one day, I was surprised to see a chat message from her. She relayed to me that she already got a job.

The biggest blessing was that her work at the new company was almost exactly the same as what she had in Manila. This helped her adjust to her work at a much faster pace. She told me that she would no longer question the timing of God. The delay in finding her job was well worth it. She realized that God had just been preparing the "perfect" work for her.

Most of the time, we see events that are happening differently from how God sees them. Our eyes don't immediately see the purpose behind our circumstances. We may not see yet the blessing in a trial because God is still preparing something better for us. *Alvin Fabella (alvinfabella@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: The ability to see beyond the trial to the blessing behind it is a grace and blessing in itself.

Lord, open my eyes and heart that I may see the blessing that is hidden in the trials I am facing or may be facing in the future. Amen.

Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4 • Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9
2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14 • Luke 17:5-10

COURAGE

For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control. – 2 Timothy 1:7

I never imagined myself as a speaker or a crowd engager. My heart would pound madly once my feet got anywhere near a platform. Unless it was a school requirement, I would not take the center stage.

Until one day, a nun friend asked me to help them teach Catechism to the kids because their congregation was having a three-day conference. I agreed. When the first day of teaching arrived, I realized I was alone, but it was too late to back out. Aside from teaching the kids and their parents, I also had to facilitate group activities for everyone. I was really nervous! I prayed to God, asking for the Holy Spirit to be my partner all throughout the day.

Before I knew it, it was already the third day. What I thought would be a disaster turned out to be fun! From that time on, I learned to submit all my strengths and limitations to God. I realized that even though we are not always confident with what we can do, we can constantly rely on the power of God's Spirit. His guidance never falls short. *Maymay R Salvosa (cmsalvosa@yahoo.com)*

REFLECTION: What holds you back from serving the Lord? Surrender it to God today.

Lord, let Your Spirit move me to put my love for You into action.

THE POOR IN OUR HOME

"And who is my neighbor?" – Luke 10:29

Mother Teresa shared during her Nobel Lecture on December 11, 1979 an unforgettable opportunity she had when she visited an institution for the elderly. She asked a sister: "How is it that the people have everything here, (but) why are they all looking towards the door, why are they not smiling?" And the sister replied, "They are expecting, they are hoping that a son or daughter will come to visit them."

Mother Teresa said, "That poverty comes right there in our own home, even neglect of love. Maybe in our own family we have somebody who is feeling lonely, who is feeling sick, who is feeling worried, and these are difficult days for everybody. Are we there to receive them? Is the mother there to receive the child?"

We generally think that our neighbor is somebody out there and not inside our own homes. But as Mother Teresa said, "The poor you may have right in your own family. Find them. Love them. We must make our homes centers of compassion and forgive endlessly." *Judith Concepcion (svp_jmc@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: It is easy to love the people far away. It is not always easy to love those close to us. (Mother Teresa)

Lord, please remind me whenever I forget that my family is also my neighbor. Help me to strike a balance between my ministries and my service to my family.

Jonah 3:1-10 • Psalm 130:1-2, 3-4, 7-8
Luke 10:38-42

BECOMING MARY AGAIN

The Lord said to her in reply, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things." — Luke 10:41

Our coworker, Nova, was leaving for the US for good and the office was giving her a *despedida*. Since she was from our department, we were in charge of the refreshments after the program. We were busy at the back of the room, making sure the food would be sufficient and distributed efficiently. But we got a bit noisy while our other officemates were honoring her that our president had to call our attention.

We got so busy with the preparations that we almost forgot the purpose of the gathering.

It's just like what happened to Martha in today's reading.

And it's what happened to me in 2011.

I got too engrossed in my work that I spent less time for prayer, for quiet recollection, for communion with God.

And it had affected the way I saw things, the way I treated people, the way I looked at events in my life.

And I didn't like the person I was becoming.

I've since decided it's time to go back to being a Mary again so I can be a better Martha. *Tess V. Atienza (svp tvatienza@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: How much time do you spend each day listening to God and just being with Him?

When I lose focus on You, Lord, draw me closer.

PRISONER

"And forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us..." – Luke 11:4

"He doesn't deserve my forgiveness!" Michie regularly posted this as her status on her Facebook account to indirectly assault her ex-boyfriend. It had been months and Michie was still bitter.

Her best friend Anna couldn't take it anymore. After one church service, she asked Michie if she prays the Lord's Prayer with her heart, especially the part that says, "as we forgive those who sin against us."

Michie saw this as an attack. But Anna explained, "Remember when we were in college? Billy was courting me. But you made ways to be closer to him. When the two of you became a couple, I died inside but forgave you anyway. I forgave you even before you said sorry. Michie, you've been hurting people and you always think you're the victim. We all don't deserve forgiveness but it's through God's grace and mercy that we receive it — the same way I asked God to help me forgive you, again and again. Your ex is very happy now, but look at you, miserable. Don't be a prisoner of your unforgiveness."

Michie cried and embraced Anna. *Carlo Lorenzo (carloflorenzo@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: It is not about who deserves forgiveness. The more unforgiveness and grudges we hold, the farther our hearts move away from our Father.

Holy Spirit, help me to forgive. I cannot do this on my own. Help me forgive as to how much You have forgiven me, again and again and again.

A FATHER'S LOVE

"If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" - Luke 11:13

My daughter's friend "desperately" wanted an iPad for Christmas. Her dad agreed on the condition that she reach a certain grade in Math, as she was failing miserably then.

The girl's grade improved but it was still way below the minimum set by her dad. In spite of this, the girl managed to get her iPad after much cajoling.

When I heard this, I struggled to appreciate the dad's gesture. I asked, *What values is this guy teaching his child? That it's OK to reward mediocrity?* Then I realized maybe that's just how he shows his love for his child, regardless of how misguided it seemed to me.

This is how it is with our Heavenly Father as well. Regardless of our imperfections and our errant ways, His love for us never wanes. His acceptance of us in spite of ourselves goes beyond all understanding.

Today's Gospel reminds us that when we turn to God and make things right with Him, He sees our hearts' intent. He delights in that and blesses us as He wills. *Erwin Roceles (erwin_roceles@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: How much do you think God loves you? Never underestimate His love.

Lord, [illegible] eternal life

St. Francis Borgia, pray for us.

Joel 1:13-15; 2:1-2 • Psalm 9:2-3, 6, 16, 8-9
Luke 11:15-26

ABRACADABRA

"But if it is by the finger of God that I drive out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you." – Luke 11:20

When I was a kid, I loved watching TV shows of magic and fantasy, with heroes and villains, wizards and sorcerers.

With just one wave of his hand, the powerful wizard saves houses from being ruined. Poof! With lightning coming out from his fingers, he defeats the monstrous enemy and protects people from further havoc. Poof! Then he waves his hand again and disappears. Poof! He saves the day!

Our Lord is also like that. No, it's not because He performs magic or creates fantasies. With His majesty and wonder, He created the heaven and the earth, all that is in it, and man in His own image and likeness.

By His healing hand, broken hearts are mended, burdens are lightened, fears are dispelled and sins are forgiven. With His infinite wisdom and love, He bought salvation for us. And because He is omnipotent and omnipresent, God can do whatever He wills in the past, present and in the future.

Definitely, it's more than just abracadabra! *Analiza Obiasca (aobiasca_cute@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Have you ever in your lifetime commanded the morning and shown the dawn its place? (Job 38:12). Our mighty God does it every single day.

Omnipotent God, I praise You because You hold all things in Your hands, including the minor details of my life. I entrust everything to You. Amen.

Joel 4:12-21 • Psalm 97:1-2, 5-6, 11-12
Luke 11:27-28

BLESSED AMONG WOMEN

"Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed." – Luke 11:27

Many of us probably know that October is the month of the Holy Rosary. We honor Mama Mary as the mother of Jesus, and our mother as well, by praying the Rosary regularly. We ask for her intercession and pray to be more like her — obedient to God's will and ever close to her beloved Son. As the mother of the Savior, Mary was truly "blessed among women."

As a mother of two, I can testify to how carrying life in my womb and nursing both children beyond two years have blessed me in so many ways. Both my children were born while my husband and I were on mission in Timor Leste. They are God's gifts to us and have taught us that life is indeed precious.

I only hope and pray that other women who are pregnant or are mothers will see their children in the same way — as blessings, and not burdens; as sources of joy, and not sources of stress. Indeed, to be bearers and nurturers of life is truly a gift, no matter what our circumstances may be. *Tina Santiago Rodriguez (teachermamatina@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Never be afraid of loving the Blessed Virgin too much. You can never love her more than Jesus did. (Saint Maximilian Kolbe)

Lord, please help me to love and honor Your mother the way You did

2 Kings 5:14-17 • Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4
2 Timothy 2:8-13 • Luke 17:11-19

THE RAINBOW FOR KCON

If we are unfaithful he remains faithful… – 2 Timothy 2:13

My husband, Ed, and I lead the Media Ministry that covers the annual Kerygma Conference, the biggest Catholic inspirational event in the country.

Covering KCon 2011 was not easy. There were seven streams that happened simultaneously in the Philippine International Convention Center (PICC) and the other buildings nearby. I worried that if ever one or two of our reporters were absent, we would not have a complete coverage. Also, the grand closing event was held outdoors. And my husband, who led our team of photographers, was worried that if it would rain, their cameras would get wet.

So we prayed to ease our anxieties. As Ed drove toward PICC on the first day of the conference, I sat quietly in the car wishing for a sign that the conference would go smoothly.

And then, there it was. In the clouds above PICC, a rainbow appeared in all its colors! (In the book of Genesis, the rainbow was a symbol of God's promise of grace and salvation.)

Seeing a rainbow on the first day of the conference assured me that God would be with us, as promised in today's reading, and that the event would be a success. And indeed it was. *Cynthia U. Santiago (cusantiago@gmail.com)*

Reflection: What are you worried about?

Lord, make me faithful as You are faithful to me.

PROMISES, PROMISES

Which he promised previously... – Romans 1:2

We prayed incessantly for our son Peevee as we said our goodbyes and left him in New York to pursue his Masters in Business Administration at Fordham. He was going through life-changing experiences all at the same time — living alone in a new place so far from home, being a full-time student once again, and having ended a seven-year relationship. All we could do was pray.

Unlimited free phone calls through Magic Jack and free video conferencing through Skype made the separation easier but nothing could take the place of physical presence. His home visit on his first Christmas break brought so much joy to our family, especially to his only sister, Trina. But all good things must come to an end and visits were frequent but never long enough. Our prayers remained intense for the Lord to watch over him constantly.

Two years went by very quickly and the Lord kept His promise. "Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22). Peevee was a straight A student and graduated summa cum laude. He immediately got a job offer from a leading multinational firm in the U.S., doing brand management, which is exactly what he loves to do.

We serve a faithful God. *Mari Sison Garcia (mari_sison_garcia@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Have you been praying long for a special intention? Just keep believing.

Romans 1:16-25 (or Romans 8:22-27)
Psalm 19:2-3, 4-5 (or Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11) • Luke 11:37-41

DANGEROUS KNOWLEDGE

For although they knew God they did not accord him glory…
– Romans 1:21

I have said and written about it before. I'm saying and writing about it again. Knowledge of God is important. But it is never enough. (Even demons know God, remember?) At best, it is a means to an end but never the end itself.

Jesus spoke against the Pharisees and the scholars of the Law in His time. (Read the Gospel today and see how fiercely Jesus denounced them.) But Jesus was not against their persons or their knowledge per se. Being a person of knowledge, especially of Scriptures, should be something good and desirable. But what He spoke against was how they handled that knowledge and what it did to them. It made them arrogant, oppressive and legalistic. They found fault in everything that the other person did (as when Jesus "failed" to observe the prescribed washing ritual before the meal.)

Yes, by all means, know, learn, study about God, His Word and our faith. But always remember not to stop there. Because knowing God should lead you to love and serve Him more, by loving and serving others more. *Alvin Barcelona (apb_ayo@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What has your knowledge about God made you? Think about this: "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge… but do not have love, I gain nothing." (1 Corinthians 13:2)

Dear God, may I know more about You. But may this knowledge lead me to love and serve You more. Amen.

Memorial of St. Teresa of Avila, virgin

St. Teresa of Avila, virgin, pray for us.

BIASED

Therefore, you are without excuse, every one of you who passes judgment. — Romans 2:1

Young children have no biases. I've seen kids play with other kids just because they are kids. They do not care what their new playmates look like. They can play even if their languages differ. They overlook their differences in the way they dress. They do not ask how much money they have. They do not mind that their families barely know each other or that their fathers have grudges against each other. All they care about is that they have someone to play with.

It's a pity that many grown-ups condemn other people based on what they hear on the news or see on social networks, only to find out that the media just wanted to sell more papers or that a malicious person was great at manipulating digital images. I almost joined a petition against a beauty queen who allegedly said bad things about our country, only to find out that none of it was true.

We judge too harshly, too fast. We fail to practice due diligence. We do not exercise restraint and instead unleash the vile from our mouths or the venom from our keyboards.

When will we learn not to judge? *Jun Asis (mabuting.balita@gmail.com)*

Reflection: How many times did you judge someone today?

[illegible]

Romans 3:21-30 • Psalm 130:1-2, 3-4, 5-6
Luke 11:47-54

THE KEY THAT UNLOCKS

"Woe to you, scholars of the law! You have taken away the key of knowledge." – Luke 11:52

A key is a very simple tool with two basic functions — to lock and to unlock a door.

In each one of us lies a key that performs the very same functions.

There is a key inside of us that locks. And this is shown through a negative mindset that we may unknowingly have. It gives in to arrogance, bitterness, hopelessness, worry and hate. Such a key hinders us and stops our growth. It kills our spirit.

Then there is this other key inside of us that unlocks. And this is manifested through having a positive mindset. It opens countless doors towards having more wisdom, joy, hope, faith and love. It nurtures our growth. It strengthens our spirit.

Always use the key that unlocks. And be the key that opens the door for others to God's amazing love and grace.

Orange V. Garcia (orange_garcia@hotmail.com)

Reflection: What key will you use today?

Lord, may I always use the key in me that unlocks so that I may open for others the door that leads to You.

RELATIONSHIP EXPERT

But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the proclamation might be completed... – 2 Timothy 4:17

My toes curled as I read the description before my name. "Relationship expert." Yikes! Was he referring to me? Bo Sanchez had asked me if I could join him as he launched his OneTrueLoveClub.com. It's a website that provides support and lots of resources for the single person in search of his or her lifetime partner. Since the success of my first book, *Confessions of an Impatient Bride*, I knew that the Lord had called me to minister to single women. So I readily accepted Bo's invitation.

But I had to contest Bo's write-up about me in the website. "Me? A relationship expert? I'm the one who gets into snags with my closest friends, remember?" I wrote him in an email.

Bo simply replied, "The best of us learn the most from our mistakes." *Ay*. There he goes again with his simple, cut-to-the-chase wisdom.

When I think about it, that's how God is with us. We're not yet the expert that we're described to be, but in His eyes, He already sees the finished product. As He pours out His grace upon us and as we respond, we are tranformed from glory to glory into the very image of His Son. *Rissa Singson-Kawpeng (justbreatherissa@gmail.com)*

Reflection: God has a great plan for your life, a destiny to fulfill... Nothing will be able to keep you from becoming all that God created you to be. (Joel Osteen)

Lord, teach me to cooperate with Your grace that I may grow into the person You've called me to be. Amen.

TAKING A STAND

"But whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God." – Luke 12:9

Many teens play online games — boys, especially, are into action, sports and war games.

One young teen I know takes exception to some of the game titles. If he thinks a title includes the name of Jesus in an arbitrary way, he makes sure to comment to his friends that he thinks it's blasphemous.

I applaud the way he makes his stand. It's not every day one sees or hears a teen defending the Lord even amid his leisure activity.

Are we that vigilant? I'm sure we don't brazenly disown the Lord but we may inadvertently do so when we choose to be silent before acts of moral indecency or corruption. Let our actions lend themselves to the glory and the name of God. *Gina Verdolaga (mgjver@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Do you remember to honor the Lord through your words and deeds?

Lord, give me the courage to be a strong voice for Your name. Amen.

Exodus 17:8-13 • Psalm 121:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8
2 Timothy 3:14-4:2 • Luke 18:1-8

BIGGER THAN MY INCONVENIENCE

Proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient or inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching. – 2 Timothy 4:2

It was December 26, 2011 when my family went on an outreach for the kids of Smokey Mountain. We played softball with them, had a dance workshop, and I gave a talk about God's love and having big dreams.

I'm used to giving talks but in English. So my problem was I had to talk in Filipino and I wasn't good at it. (I got a flashback of my 5th grade Filipino remedial classes.) Although I can speak conversational Filipino, I found it hard to express my thoughts in the vernacular. That's why weeks prior to the outreach, I started to worry.

However, I knew that the need for these kids to hear God's Word for their lives was bigger than my inconvenience to give a talk in Filipino. So in spite of my limitations, I did it.

I know not everyone is called to be a preacher, but everyone has a call to share God's Word and serve, even in inconvenient circumstances. In spite of the challenges, let's live out His Word and love others. We never know the impact we can make in someone else's life. *Mike Vinas (mikemichaelfcv@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Demand is all the needs in the world. Supply is all of God's resources to meet those needs. Have you ever wondered what's in between demand and supply? You are.

Lord, I am [your name] to be your servant. Use me, Lord, to be a blessing to those who are in need around me. Help me to love and serve others especially to those who need it the most. Amen.

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

Abraham did not doubt God's promise in unbelief; rather, he was empowered by faith and gave glory to God. – Romans 4:20

For more than 30 years, parts of my family life were in darkness, then in semi-darkness. My children and I were in the shadows of violence.

During that "walk through the valley of darkness," I did not fear for I knew God was at our side. His rod and staff gave me courage (Psalm 23) to lead the family towards the light of love, forgiveness and understanding.

I clung to the promise of Romans 8:28, "We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called to his purpose."

My eldest is now a lawyer. The second works at the United Nations. The third is a doctor. The fourth is a French major and the youngest is in his last year of Commerce.

We are all glorifying God in our divine purposes here on earth. The experience shaped me for the work I do for the Philippine feminized labor migration which is sometimes an escape from domestic violence. *Grace Princesa (grprincesa@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Do you doubt God's promises when the dark night is too long?

Please, Lord, always reassure me that You carry me in the palms of Your hands when life is at its darkest.

Romans 5:12, 15, 17-19, 20-21 • Psalm 40:7-8, 8-9, 10, 17
Luke 12:35-38

KEEP THE FIRE BURNING!

"Gird your loins and light your lamps." - Luke 12:35

I used to be a strong distance runner. Life then was all about running: wind against my face, heart rate in an upbeat tempo, lean body and sturdy legs built to run for hours on end. I thought I would be strong forever.

Until I gradually stopped running. I lost the "fire" and enjoyed vices with wrong friends. Undisciplined days turned into months, then years. Worse, I had the illusion that I was still strong.

So when friends challenged me to run, I sneered and underestimated every opponent. When the gunshot signaled the start of the race, I ran as confident as a racehorse. Competitors ate my dust. But just as I passed the 100-meter mark, I started panting. I had difficulty breathing, then I got dizzy. I had cramps in my chest and was brought to the hospital. If not for the doctors, I would have been dead meat!

Pride ruled. I started strong but ended wrong. I repented and made a resolve to follow God. Now I run a new marathon — the marathon of faith. With Him, I'll finish strong!

Empowered by grace and the Holy Spirit, all of us can win the gold! Champions, let's get it on: "Ready, get set, go!" *Obet Cabrillas (kpreacherobet@gmail.com)*

Reflection: God's love is fire; and it is our mission to spread this fire to all His people. (St. Vincent de Paul)

Lord, keep the fire of the Holy Spirit burning in my heart.

FINISHED OR UNFINISHED

"You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come." – Luke 12:40

Teachers often say to their students after a test, "Finished or unfinished, pass your papers." This reminds me of my elder sister who died at the age of 31.

My sister, mom, brother-in-law and I were talking in the car on the way to get her MRI results. Out of the blue, I told her about the organ donor card I had gotten, just to be ready when my time comes. I even encouraged her to get one before her operation. She didn't want to talk about death. It was too morbid for her. I told her she didn't have to be scared to die because we're all headed for heaven. I sensed the fear in her voice when she told me I wouldn't understand because she had three small kids to leave behind.

Two days before our father's 57th birthday, she had an unsuccessful operation from a benign tumor (meningioma). She passed away unprepared.

Even though I know that the Lord has me covered for eternity, I am now working doubly hard to buy myself life insurance and memorial plans for practical purposes. I even know what I want to put on my epitaph: Emerald, a simple child of God who searched for love and found it in the arms of her Father. *Ems Sy Chan (havenofleeanne@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: We don't have to fear death when we're prepared to go anytime and when we know what awaits us on the other side.

Father God, prepare us for our death. Prepare our loved ones, too. May we be able to say, "We finished" before You call us home.

Romans 6:19-23 • Psalm 1:1-2, 3, 4, 6
Luke 12:49-53

HAVE FUN BUT SIN NO MORE

But now that you have been freed from sin... – Romans 6:22

As a teacher, I have observed that most students during class are shy to actively participate in recitation and even in school presentations.

I would ask them why and they would reply, "*Nahihiya po ako*" (I am shy).

Every time I would hear this, I remember the saying of one Dominican priest when I was still in college at the University of Sto. Tomas.

He would always say to Thomasians who were shy, "*Kasalanan lang ang nakakahiya*" (Only sin is shameful).

Those words give me a sense of relief regarding my faults and weaknesses — that God is indeed merciful and forgiving.

It serves as a gentle reminder that in everything I do, as long as it is not a sin and it brings more glory to God, then all the more I should do it.

Friends, since God has prevailed over sin and death, let us run and have fun... but sin no more. *JC Libiran (jclibiran@ymail.com)*

Reflection: Where our sins increase, His grace increases all the more.

Lord Jesus, because of You I am free to run and have fun!

SPITFIRE

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. – Romans 7:20

I didn't want to confront her, but I needed to come to my niece's rescue.

A 27-year-old woman whacked my teenage niece's face after a heated basketball game where they rooted for competing teams. Face to face, this hostile stranger reasoned that she had the right to hit anybody she wanted to hit.

That did it. Hell broke loose.

No, I didn't touch her, but I spat fire like I had never done before, so much that she ran out of words to throw back at me.

Back home, I couldn't stop crying. My friend Vincent called and asked why I was crying when I had done right by defending my niece. I heard myself say, "This isn't like me. I was so mean."

There are times when anger is the right response to a situation. But there is still a right and a wrong way of showing our indignation. It says in 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." In angry moments, may we learn not just to exercise self-control, but to unceasingly seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to overcome sin. *Nova Arias-Sevilla (nova.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Are you the master of your emotions?

Forgive me, Lord, for the times when I was uncharitable to my neighbor. Remind me to be gentle with words when my emotions get the better of me. Amen.

A DROP IN THE OCEAN

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. – Romans 8:1

I was walking along the beach one day and I decided to pick up a few stones to see how far out to sea I could throw them. I hurled one so far that I didn't even see it hit the water. I was captivated by the vastness of the ocean before me.

I've committed a lot of sins in my life. A number of them, I said to myself I'd never get into — but I did. For a long time, I condemned myself. I walked around with a heavy heart and a guilty conscience.

One time I went to confession, the priest told me that God allows us to experience failure so we will know His mercy. After confessing my sins, he told me that my penance was simply to be grateful for my blessings. Instead of focusing on my sin, he asked me to focus on the goodness in my life. That helped me a lot.

Our sins are like a mere drop in the ocean of God's mercy. God notices them, but He doesn't focus on them. He focuses on our potential — on the vast goodness in us that comes from His overflowing heart. He doesn't want us to be complacent about sin, but He does want us to always remember that His forgiveness is ready and available for those who sincerely repent and return to Him. *George Tolentino Gabriel (george svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Nothing can separate us from His love.

Lord, I repent of my sin and return to You now. Thank You for Your love that does not condemn.

Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18 • Psalm 34:2-3, 17-18, 19, 23
2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18 • Luke 18:9-14

TRUST FUND

The Lord is a God of justice, who knows no favorites. Though not unduly partial toward the weak, yet he hears the cry of the oppressed. – Sirach 35:12-13

It is often said that it is easier to surrender your life to God than to surrender your wallet. A person will consecrate himself when he is touched by a moving worship song but may struggle when the love offering basket comes. Just like the rich young man who obeyed every law since he was a child. He couldn't obey that one thing he lacked to have eternal life: to give up his riches.

You see, surrendering your wealth is not about obedience. It's about trusting.

That's why tithing is a sacred act. You shouldn't tithe because your elder tells you so. You tithe because you're declaring: "Lord, I'm trusting You to provide me with what I don't have yet by giving you what I have right now."

That's when something becomes sacred — when you turn over to God what is yours. There's not much return of investment if you are merely being obedient. But when you give because you trust Him, the returns are out of this world.

Ronna Ledesma (ronna_ledesma@yahoo.com.ph)

Reflection: There is a thin line between obedience and trust in everything we do.

Abba, Father, let not my trust in You waver or falter when I am in need.

Ephesians 2:19-22 (or Romans 8:12-17)
Psalm 19:2-3, 4-5 (or Psalm 68:2, 4-6, 7-20-21)
Luke 6:12-16 (or Luke 13:10-17)

YOUR SONG

When day came, he called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also named Apostles… – Luke 6:13

Beatles road manager Mal Evans accidentally found John Lennon's handwritten lyrics to "A Day in the Life," the haunting final song on the 1967 No. 1 album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. This double-sided page of writing went under the hammer at the auction house Sotheby's on June 19, 2010 in New York, and sold at $1.2 million!

What's worthless trash to a simple street sweeper is a gold mine to an art collector and a fanatic follower.

Ordinary as fisher folks of their day, Jesus saw immeasurable beauty in His disciples. Unnoticed from the "shelves" of society, Jesus singled them out. He knows He was calling back to Himself fantastic poetry written by God Himself.

I know of a love song that has infinitely more value than all auctionable musical pieces. It's entitled "The Song of Your Life." It's written by God. It may be marred by your sins and mistakes, but He still put in a bid to have it back. It cost Him not just millions of dollars but the blood of His Son.

Friend, God is humming in His heart "The Song of Your Life." Hear Him sing His love for you today. *Jon Escoto (faithatworkjon@gmail.com)*

Reflection: God sings His song for you today. What do you think is a fitting "title" for this song?

Father, let me remember that You have created a happy ending for the story You wrote about my life. Thank You.

MY GOD, MY BOSS

But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance.
– Romans 8:25

I am a singer. The year 2001 was when God revealed strongly His desire for me to use my talent in a massive way. In 2002, I started singing background vocals for "Asia's Nightingale" Lani Misalucha, and soon after, for "The Concert King" Martin Nievera and "Asia's Songbird" Regine Velasquez. I now remain a freelance session singer.

Freelance work is never easy as it tests one's patience and perseverance big-time. Often, I've waited for projects to happen without knowing that they had already been cancelled. Yet, even more frequently, projects that I never even knew were being conceived come my way. There are the sudden free trips to the US, the Middle East and Asia — where I get to sing and earn at the same time!

It all happens while I just maintain a hopeful disposition believing that my God, who is my Boss, has my entire career planned well for me. *Eugene Cailao (eugenecailao@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Why is it so difficult for you to trust in God's promises?

Father, You are my Creator and God. Allow me to believe and hold on to Your words. You have the best in store for me.

INTERCESSOR

The one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will. – Romans 8:27

I was already asleep in my parents' room but I was awakened in the middle of the night by someone's controlled weeping. In the dark, I could see my mom's figure with her arm around my eldest brother, who was then in his twenties. He was hunched and crying. I couldn't make out what they were talking about but what I knew was that my brother faced a problem big enough to make him cry.

I'm sure that wasn't the first time — or the last — that he got into trouble. All of us had more than our share of misdemeanors in our younger days. But thank God we had a mom who was a prayerful woman. I grew up seeing her attend Mass daily, pray the rosary before she slept and went to prayer meetings every week. Now that I'm a mother, I wonder if she was doing all that because she had six children to pray for! We were blessed to have a mom who was also an intercessor and knew what to pray for us.

Now think about this: the Holy Spirit constantly prays for you and me. And His prayers are perfect because He prays according to God's will! So the next time you get into trouble and don't even know what to pray, call on your Intercessor. He'll know what to do. *Rissa Singson Kawpeng (justbreatherissa@gmail.com)*

Reflection: God sent us His Holy Spirit so He can be with us in every moment of our lives.

Holy Spirit, pray for us.

Romans 8:31-39 • **Psalm 109:21-22, 26-27, 30-31**
Luke 13:31-35

A COMPLIMENT COMPLEMENTS

I will speak my thanks earnestly to the Lord, and in the midst of the throng I will praise him. – Psalm 109:30

I have been married for 31 years. One of the ingredients to our durable marriage is my many ways of complimenting or honoring my wife. Today, she celebrates her birthday and I will do just that — honor her with a verse from the book of Proverbs 31:10, which says: "When one finds a worthy wife, her value is beyond pearls. Her husband, entrusting his heart to her, has an unfailing prize." She is God's gift to me, a suitable partner and a part bigger than myself.

Complimenting somebody has a big effect on the recipient. It raises self-esteem, encourages, energizes and invigorates. It brings joy and gladness, it honors a person. The person giving the compliment is drawn closer to the recipient and vice-versa. In the process, a relationship is developed and strengthened. And that is life's biggest wealth — relationships.

The person who honors others, honors God because we follow His commandment to honor one another and encourage each other. God rewarded my honoring. I have a wife who makes my journey in life joyful, meaningful and complete. *Rolly España (rolly@homeliving.com.ph)*

Reflection: When was the last time you gave a person a true and meaningful compliment?

Lord, let me be a Barnabas, a person who encourages and builds relationships.

DO YOU REFRESH OR RIDICULE?

"Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you..."
— Matthew 5:11

When I was a kid, I was never good in sports. So I dreaded Physical Education. Whenever I had P.E. class, I always wished that I'd get sick that day. Because in almost every class, kids would ridicule me. It didn't matter if it was basketball or volleyball or soccer. I was always so uncoordinated.

When I was nine years old, my P.E. was baseball. And I was even more terrified.

True enough, at practice, I couldn't catch the ball — even if I had an oversized glove. I was so bad at catching, the teacher assigned me to the farthest spot in the field. And with his booming voice, he told everyone, "Try to hit your ball towards that kid over there," pointing to me. "Because he won't catch the ball, and you'll get a home run!" He laughed loudly, slapping his knee many times. And all the kids laughed with him.

I pretended to laugh, too. But my little heart was crying inside. For the next 15 years, I never joined any sport.

Be careful with ridicule. Be careful with negative humor. Here's my realization: Nothing hurts more than words. Nothing can be more hurting than humiliation. *Bo Sanchez (bosanchez@kerygmafamily.com)*

Reflection: On this All Saints Day, use your words to upbuild, not destroy.

Lord, my tongue ... Lord, that I may speak only good words to others.

2 Maccabees 12:43-46 (or Wisdom 3:1-9)
Psalm 23:1-3, 4, 5, 6 (or Psalm 103:8, 10, 13-14, 15-16, 17-18)
Romans 8:31-35, 37-39 (or Romans 6:3-9)
John 14:1-6 (or Matthew 25:31-46)

DEATH WORRIER

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me." – John 14:1

I was once a chronic worrier. I would worry about a lot of things. The sad thing about it was that almost all the things I fretted about were out of my control.

Perhaps the most worrisome of all topics for me was the topic of death. Going to the cemetery reminded me of the inevitable end of my life. The thought of dying scared me. Having an imaginative mind, I always worried about the way I would die. I sometimes even had nightmares of the most horrible and gruesome way of dying.

But that changed when I realized that what triggered my anxiety was the fear of the unknown. Not knowing what lies in the future made me anxious and restless. It's not a good feeling if you ask me.

But when I came to know Jesus Christ, everything changed. He gave me the best gift ever — peace. I felt so loved, so significant and secure. He calmed my heart by making me focus not on the unknown things surrounding my life, but on the truth that He loves me. His love that transcends even after death. *Erika Pauline Mendoza (epaulmendoza@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrows; it only saps today of its joy. (Leo F. Buscaglia)

Lord, thank You for bringing peace to my heart.

Wisdom 11:22-12:2 • Psalm 145:1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13, 14
2 Thessalonians 1:11-2:2 • **Luke 19:1-10**

A FRIEND OF GOD

Jesus looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house." - Luke 19:5

I received a call from an irritated customer because of his poor Internet connection. I did my best to assist him with his query but all I heard were foul words. He called me horrible things that brought my ego down to the pits.

After that call, I was stunned. I talked to my manager about the incident. To my surprise, she told me that she's had similar experiences, some of which were worse than mine. I clearly recalled what she told me, "Just brush it off and step up." Then she reminded me that I was one of the top agents in her team.

Maybe you have done wrong in the past. You've tagged yourself as a nobody, a sinner.

You cannot undo your past even if you wanted to.

Today, Jesus knocks at your door and calls you friend. Be a Zacchaeus. Invite Him into your heart. Forget your past and start anew with your friend, Jesus. *Jan Carlo Silan (jan@makatieast.com)*

Reflection: The Heavenly Father welcomes us with open arms into His Kingdom. When was the last time you opened your heart to Jesus to receive His mercy and grace?

Dear Lord, I am forever grateful that You accepted me as Your friend. Grant me the grace to extend the same to my fellow brothers and sisters. Amen.

Romans 11:29-36 • Psalm 69:30-31, 33-34, 36-37
Luke 14:12-14

MORE BLESSED TO GIVE

"Invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be." – Luke 14:13

My friend Susan loves the poor so much and she is so generous. When we were in college, she was our class president. She would organize outreaches for our class. We went to orphanages, homes for the aged and prison cells.

When she got married and had a child, we celebrated the first birthday of her daughter, Yannah, my goddaughter, in an orphanage. The kids in the orphanage had so much fun. They ate to their hearts' content. We helped feed the little ones. They played games. Smiles, laughters, shouts of joy filled the whole place.

Before we left, the kids serenaded us with some songs and some dance numbers. We went home so blessed.

There's truth in the saying, "It's more blessed to give than to receive."

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son." God always gives the best. He gave us His Son, Jesus. If we want to be like Him, let's give the way He gives by giving our best and giving it generously.

Meann Tee (meanntytee@yahoo.com)

Reflection: Do you want to be blessed? Give and be a blessing to others.

Father, thank You for all the blessings that we receive from You. Teach us to be generous like You.

NO BIG OR SMALL ROLES

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly. – Romans 12:6

I once had a wound in my right big toe. It wasn't a big wound but the cut was deep. It bled for some minutes before I was able to stop it. But my worries didn't end there because the pain stayed on. The discomfort was too much that I had to make a few adjustments. I stopped wearing closed shoes for a couple of days. I avoided activities that required long walks and I was more cautious about the things around me so that I wouldn't accidently bump my wounded toe. The wound bothered me for a number of days. It was amazing how a small wound located in a trivial part of my body could create a big impact on my daily routine.

This is similar to our individual roles in the church or community. We may think that our role is insignificant. We may think that we don't create any impact. If we don't hold any leadership position or aren't part of any ministry, we assume that our absence won't matter.

But each one of us has a role to fulfill in the church. There are no big or small roles. Like the wound on my toe, the whole body is affected if one "small" part is not working properly. Be involved in your church so that the Body of Christ may function like a well-oiled machine. *Alvin Fabella (alvinfabella@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Are you doing your part in building up the Church of Jesus and are you doing it well?

Jesus, use me to help build up Your Body here on earth.

Romans 13:8-10 • Psalm 112:1-2, 4-5, 9
Luke 14:25-33

THE VALUE OF THINGS

"If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." – Luke 14:26

If I slapped a friend just for kicks, she'd probably never talk to me again. If I did the same to my boss, I'd likely be suspended. Still, if I hit the President, I'd be thrown in jail or shot on site. See the pattern? Even if the offense is the same, the weight of punishment follows the rank of the person offended. So what do you think happens when we offend God?

As the weight of punishment varies according to the person we offend, so should our love and loyalty naturally change according to the responsibility we have towards people. While my kids were having a conversation, one of them asked, "Who is more important, Mommy or God?" My other kid replied, "God, of course, because Mommy wouldn't be around if it weren't for God."

In being called to follow Christ, we are also called to know the weight and value of our relationships. We are tasked to grow in knowing each person's place in our lives. God most certainly should always be first. It is not, after all, worthy of being called Christianity if it isn't Christ-centered.

Rod Velez (rod.velez@gmail.com)

Reflection: If you were to stack rank the people you love, where would God be in the list? No, really?

What does it mean, Lord, for the psalmist to say, "A day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere?" He must have really loved You to want to be in Your presence so much. I want to love You that way, too.

REUNITED

"Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep." – Luke 15:6

Babita's biggest nightmare came true: her five-year-old daughter, Suhani, was missing.

She left her alone at home because she went to visit a nearby hospital while her husband, a vegetable vendor, had already gone to the market early that morning. Together with her husband, they looked for Suhani but she was nowhere to be found. Later, they went to the police station to report the missing child. The police informed them that their child was in the safe custody of Childline. A good Samaritan noticed their frightened-looking daughter around 12 noon. He took her in his custody before he handed her over to the police. After seven agonizing hours of frantic searching, the child was reunited with her parents.

Just like the parents of Suhani, God searches for those who are lost. And He never stops until He finds them and brings them back to His fold. Each person is valuable to the Lord. No matter how far deep you are in your sins, He continues to love, search and woo you. And when He finally finds you, He rejoices together with His angels and saints.

Judith Concepcion (svp_jmc@yahoo.com)

Reflection: Has someone lost his or her way because of your own doing? What should you do to bring that person back to the right path?

THE MISSION

A minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in performing the priestly service of the Gospel of God, so that the offering up of the Gentiles may be acceptable... – Romans 15:16

Many years ago, I watched *The Mission*, a movie about three Jesuit priests who brought the Good News and evangelized the Guarani natives in South America. The priests, headed by Fr. Gabriel (Jeremy Irons), established a mission that became a sanctuary and a place of education for the Guarani natives. By God's grace and the perseverance of the missionary priests, the pagan Guarani natives embraced Christianity.

But trouble began when the land upon which the mission stood was ceded to the Portuguese. The mission was to be closed, and sadly, the Portuguese intended to enslave the natives. Fr. Gabriel and Fr. Rodrigo decided to fight and taught the Guarani natives the art of combat. For a while they were able to defend the mission but they were outnumbered. The Jesuit priests and their converts perished in defense of the mission, in defense of their faith.

The Jesuit priests brought the Gospel to the pagan Guarani natives. Their martyrdom inspired more missionary priests to serve and defend indigenous people all over the world so that Christ's mission may continue to this day. *Dina Pecaña (dpecana@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: God is a God of missions. He wills missions. He commands missions. He demands missions. He made missions possible through His Son. He made missions actual in sending the Holy Spirit. (George W. Peters)

God of missions, grant me the courage to go wherever You lead me that I may be Your hands and feet in serving those who have yet to know You.

Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12 • Psalm 46:2-3, 5-6, 8-9
1 Corinthians 3:9-11, 16-17 • **John 2:13-22**

HOUSE OF GOD

"Zeal for your house will consume me." – John 2:17

The Binondo Church is one of the most beautiful churches in the Philippines with its amazing frescos, intricate altar, and Spanish baroque architecture that dates back 400 years.

In contrast, the Binondo Chinese Parish, located just at the back of the Binondo Church, seems so small, boring and utterly plain. Then I started to notice the fresh flowers that are beautifully arranged every week. I began to appreciate the different choirs who shared their talents and made every Mass more vibrant and sincere. I learned to value the lectors and commentators who took extra care to pronounce the English words clearly despite their Chinese ancestry. The work of volunteers transformed the plain parish into a warm and welcoming place of worship, a place to call home.

Church architecture and design does matter. It shows how we try to reflect God's glory by praising and honoring Him through the material things He has provided. But each of us should contribute something so that the church will not just be a museum of art, but a living Church proclaiming the goodness of God. *Cecil Lim (cez_lim@yahoo.com)*

REFLECTION: What was done here, as these walls were rising, is reproduced when we bring together those who believe in Christ... by catechizing, baptism and instruction they are, as it were, shaped, squared and planed by the hands of the workers and artisans. Nevertheless, they do not make a house for the Lord until they are fitted together through love. (St. Augustine)

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings, that in all our works begun, continued and ended in You, we may glorify Your Holy Name

HAPPY AND SAD DAY

"He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for to him all are alive." – Luke 20:38

My dad would have turned 73 years old yesterday. I can imagine him waking up early to get ready for Mass. He would wear a red polo shirt with his favorite jeans. Over the years, Dad would wear a red top for his birthday because he says it's a color for celebration. In church, he would sit at the left side, the area beside the park from where the cool breeze blows. Mom and I would be with him as he gives thanks to the Lord for the blessing of another year in life.

Yesterday, November 9, was both a happy and sad day as I remembered my beloved dad who passed away four years ago. Yesterday, it was only my mom and I who woke up early for Mass. Yesterday, it was only Mom and I who thanked the Lord for giving us 40 years with Dad.

But I believe Dad also celebrated his special day in a different way. I believe he wore white for purity. Instead of Mass, I believe Dad is at the heavenly throne room, singing praises to God with the angels and saints.

Dad may no longer be with us in this earthly life but I know he lives eternally in heaven. Praise the Lord, the God of the living, for to Him all are alive! *Dina Pecaña (dpecana@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23:6)

Lord, give me the grace to live a life worthy of spending eternity with You in heaven.

Wisdom 1:1-7 • Psalm 139:1-3, 4-6, 7-8, 9-10
Luke 17:1-6

CAN'T HIDE THE TRUTH FOREVER

Because God is the witness of the inmost self. – Wisdom 1:6

Last year, the hearings on the impeachment case against Supreme Court Justice Renato Corona filled the daily news.

This isn't the first time that we have witnessed investigations like this. We've seen it all — Ninoy's assassination, the Vizconde massacre, Maguindanao massacre, Estrada's impeachment, and even the much-celebrated Katrina Halili-Hayden Kho sex video scandal.

Despite voluminous evidences and countless testimonies presented, we cannot know for sure the truth behind the cases. A poor set of lawyers, even if they possess the truth, can still be outwitted in court. No matter how glaring the truth is, legalism and, sadly, corruption still rule.

But there's one Judge who doesn't need all those evidences and witnesses to know the truth. He knows everything — and one day, His court will open and no one can escape His brand of justice.

Let's make sure we have not denied others their right to life and freedom by concealing the truth. *Tess V. Atienza (svp_tvatienza@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Do you have a tendency to conceal the truth when you're pushed against the wall?

Forgive me, Lord, for the many times I have suppressed the truth to save myself.

MY PARKING ATTENDANT

"We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do." – Luke 17:10

"Your unworthy servant...." I was struck with these words as the Archbishop of Port Moresby was saying the prayer at a Mass referring to himself being Bishop of the Diocese. Maybe this is a regular prayer but this time, it rang differently in my ear.

On another occasion, the good Archbishop, who arrived a minute ahead of me at a Talleres Convent, guided me with hand signals as I parked my car.

"This is too much!" I mumbled to myself. "The Archbishop as my parking attendant?"

Considering his stature, the Archbishop's humility and readiness to serve his flock touched me deeply.

As a servant-leader, it's natural to delegate the "dirty jobs" to the "low ranking" servants. But not with this man of God. He really lives up to the title of "servant." He lives up to what Jesus said, "If anyone serves me, he must follow me" (John 12:26). Just like our Lord, He "came not to be served but to serve" (Matthew 20:28). *Danny Tariman (dtariman.loj@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Are you following the footsteps of the Lord whom you serve?

Lord, I am sorry for being "title-oriented" as I serve You. Grant me the grace to serve You in others. Amen.

Wisdom 6:1-11 • Psalm 82:3-4, 6-7
Luke 17:11-19

LIBERATING HOPE

Desire therefore my words; long for them and you will be instructed.
– Wisdom 6:11

Every New Year's Eve, I seek God's message through a word from Scripture, with my mind focused on receiving it as an instruction. This year, I got Lamentations 3:21. I didn't understand it at the beginning. But not too long after, a serious situation caused me to resign from my real estate company affiliation. I had worked with that company for over a decade and leaving it was not easy.

But God's Word from Lamentations rang in my mind. He promised that the "favors of the Lord will not be exhausted. His mercies are not spent; these are renewed each morning, so great is his faithfulness." Many other messages from Him made me peaceful in my decision. I even felt a sense of liberation and freedom. He placed hopeful joy in my heart through His Word.

I claimed His promise that "to the faithful, He is faithful." I know in my heart that when I put my hope and trust in Him, the God of the universe will cause prosperity and abundance to fill my future. *Donna España (donna@homeliving.com.ph)*

Reflection: The Lord's Word is alive and effective and He is faithful and true in fulfilling His promises.

He grew Lord, to be grateful and glad when Your gracious hand is upon us.

St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, virgin, pray for us.

Wisdom 7:22-8:1 • Psalm 119:89, 90, 91, 130, 135, 175
Luke 17:20-25

ON WISDOM

She is the refulgence of eternal light, the spotless mirror of the power of God, the image of his goodness. – Wisdom 7:26

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

I love this prayer. I was in college when I first heard it from my professor and, for some reason, I fell in love with its wisdom.

When I was active in a Charismatic community, I would often ask the Lord for this particular gift of the Holy Spirit. I've read quite a number of biographies and autobiographies of saints and holy people. If there is anything common among several of them, it is wisdom. With gentle courage, they wouldn't budge from the right thing to do.

Using saints as my model, my formula of wisdom is: an active prayer life + total surrender to the Lord = wisdom. That's because on our own strength, power and resources, I'm convinced it is next to impossible to be wise. *Cristy Galang (cristy_cc@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Do you value intelligence, popularity, achievement and other mundane things over the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

Lord Jesus, help us to tune in to Your Holy Spirit all the days of our life so that we may be endowed with wisdom and win the Father's deep friendship.

FIND GOD IN ALL THINGS

For from the greatness and the beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen. – Wisdom 13:5

My spirituality is summed up in the title above: "Find God in all things." (No, that's not my original writing. The Ignatians and Jesuits beat me to that.)

Because yes, God can and should be experienced in His creation. In fact, we should see God in every person — God's highest creation.

But no, you shouldn't start worshiping everything and every person as God. That's what some people initially thought I was — a long-haired New Age guru who promoted pantheism, the belief that "all things are God." That's not what I believe. That's not what the Catholic Church believes.

I believe that the beauty of creation should point you to its Creator. "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1). It would be foolish to marvel at a work of art and miss knowing and appreciating its artist.

Above all, the greatest honor we could give the Creator is when we become faithful caretakers and responsible stewards of the creation He has entrusted to us. *Alvin Barcelona (apb_ayoc@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: For if they so far succeeded in knowledge that they could speculate about the world, how did they not more quickly find its Lord? (Wisdom 13:9)

O Divine Creator, help me to see Your wisdom, Your greatness, Your goodness and love in the beauty of Your creation. Let me hear Your voice in Your work by taking good care of it. Amen

Wisdom 18:14-16; 19:6-9 • Psalm 105:2-3, 36-37, 42-43
Luke 18:1-8

INDESCRIBABLE

For all creation, in its several kinds, was being made over anew... – Wisdom 19:6

There was a time that I asked myself if there was a God. I was in my teens, and the pressure of adolescence and the need to find my own identity was at its peak. I was young in my faith and had a streak of asking.

One night, I had an epiphany. I was looking at the stars and marveling at creation — and there I knew that God was revealing Himself to me. Thinking of the complexity of the human body and the life cycle of plants and animals, I knew in my heart that God was real — He created all these things. I began to think that what I see all around me could not have been caused by some random accident. The song *Indescribable* by Laura Story captured what I felt then:

Indescribable, uncontainable,
You placed the stars in the sky and You know them by name.
You are amazing, God. All powerful, untameable,
Awestruck we fall to our knees as we humbly proclaim
You are amazing, God

God manifests Himself in creation, at Mass and in people. Do you feel His presence? *Jun Asis (mabuting.balita@gmail.com)*

Reflection: God reveals Himself daily. Are you aware of His presence?

Lord, help me to see You in Your wonderful creation. And most especially, help me to see You in people, Your most wonderful creation.

Malachi 3:19-20 • Psalm 98:5-6, 7-8, 9
2 Thessalonians 3:7-12 • **Luke 21:5-19**

ALMIGHTY ALLY

"Before all this happens, however, they will seize and persecute you..." – Luke 21:12

When I was still working, I was never an aggressive person when it came to my career. I just did my work to the very best of my ability. When I got appreciated and promoted, thanks be to God! When I wasn't, it was alright.

You could say that it was my superiors who drew my career path. They believed in me, and appreciated and acknowledged my efforts. I went up the ranks without really aiming for it. I was never threatened when there were new incoming officers. Competition was never in my mind. I just enjoyed my job and worked my heart out.

But even if I only desired what was good for everyone, there were still some coworkers who didn't like me and eventually persecuted me. They interpreted my intentions negatively, they questioned my capabilities, and they looked down on my accomplishments. Yes, I got hurt, but, with God's grace, I remained loving and kind to them. As our Lord promised, though everyone may hate us, with Him we shall not perish. We just have to stand firm and we will win in life, because we have an Almighty Ally who shall always stand for us! *Sol Soura (sol_soura@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Are there people who are persecuting you? Don't worry for God is with you.

Lord, thank You for we know that You are always with us. You will never leave us or abandon us.

St. Elizabeth of Hungary, religious, pray for us.

Acts 28:11-16, 30-31 (or 1 Maccabees 1:10-15, 41-43, 54-57, 62-63)
Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6 • **Matthew 14:22-33** (or Luke 18:35-43)

STAGE FRIGHT

"Lord, I want to see," he replied. – Luke 18:41

I don't preach as often as my friends who are Feast builders. While they preach almost every day, I do so only when a company, prayer group or school invites me. So compared to them, I'd say I'm more nervous when I am onstage.

At the same time, I suffer from another form of stage fright. Whenever I go up on a platform to preach, I know that the spotlight shines, not just on me as I deliver my talk, but on my whole life as well. People can freely scrutinize — and even criticize — me and how I live.

I take the stage with holy fear and awe knowing that I am merely a spokesman of the Lord of the universe. I don't want to misrepresent Him or give Him a bad reputation for choosing His spokespersons so poorly.

So I pray for the grace to see the truth behind my motives and actions. To see the areas in my life where I do not practice what I preach. To see that when people applaud or praise me, the glory is the Lord's, not mine.

Because ultimately, the only applause that matters is that which comes from my audience of One. *Rissa Singson-Kawpeng (justbreatherissa@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Practice what you preach. But even better, preach what you practice.

Lord, let me see the darkness in my life that I may let Your light shine.

THE CHASE

"For the son of man has come to seek and save what was lost."
– Luke 19:10

The gate was left open.

She stormed out of the house and ran as fast as she could. She prayed repeatedly while cars were honking furiously at her. Her bedroom slippers were hard to run in but she didn't care. She shouted like a crazy woman while running in the main street, "Twiiiiix, Oreoooo, come baaaaaack!!! Please don't die!"

Twix and Oreo were my family's Shitzu dogs, and the woman running after them was my sister who hated our Shitzu dogs.

If my sister risked her life for two dogs she doesn't even like, can you just imagine how fast Jesus will run after you, His most loved creation?

You may be drowning in sin right now. Everything may be falling apart. You might be stuck in idleness, or simply, tiredness may have consumed you.

Whatever state you are in right now, don't panic. The Lord will never lose sight of you. Know that you're precious and He will do everything to fill your life with overflowing love and peace. Climb your sycamore tree of troubles today and allow the Lord to save you! *Pia Angelica Suzo (piasuzo@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What is hindering you from climbing your sycamore tree?

Lift me up today! Amen

INBOX

Will give you back both breath and life, because you now disregard yourselves for the sake of his law. – 2 Maccabees 7:23

One time, I was waiting for important messages on my cell phone, but my inbox was full. The problem with a full inbox is that you can't receive any more incoming messages. So I hurriedly erased a lot of messages. After a while, a deluge of messages came in. After reading them, I was so frustrated because I could have responded immediately or availed of opportunities had I received those messages earlier. Lesson learned: you have to empty yourself first before you can have your fill again.

Do you feel empty? Perhaps it's because you are full — full of your former ways of thinking, your frustrations, your sins, your hurts and bad habits. I have a suggestion. Why don't you let go of them so you can be open for what can come after? Let go of your past in exchange for your possibilities. Let go of what is good in place of what is better.

It's only when we empty ourselves that we will understand how greatly and how desperately we need God to enter our lives.

Let your life be filled up by your giving up!

How's your inbox lately? *Jonathan Yogawin (jyogawin@gmail.com)*

Reflection: What is that one thing you need to give up and let go? Give it to God today. And let Him heal and complete you.

Lord, grant me the honesty and courage to submit to You all areas of my life. I trust You to fill me up. May Your miracles happen!

Zechariah 2:14-17 (or 1 Maccabees 2:15-29)
Luke 1:46-47, 48-49, 50-51, 52-53, 54-55 (or Psalm 50:1-2, 5-6, 14-15) •
Matthew 12:46-50 (or Luke 19:41-44)

A NEW EXPERIENCE

"You did not recognize the time of your visitation from God."
– Luke 19:44

I floated in the deep as the sun set over the South China Sea. An amber sky faded to deep purple, stars hanging overhead. "God is here," I thought to myself — here in the wild, miles from where I was used to finding Him. In awe of my Creator, I felt energized to share Him with others.

I had long been used to experiencing God through religious programs. I'd tell my friends, "Come and experience God at this Christian event." And it was true. They would experience God there.

But for years, I had grown lazy to seek God elsewhere, reinforcing the idea within myself that the world outside my religious bubble had less of God's presence.

God is waiting to be found everywhere. In Scripture, Jacob exclaims, "Surely the Lord is in this place — and I did not know it!" (Genesis 28:16). As I floated in the ocean one evening, I learned that venturing out to find God outside conventional walls can make for beautiful moments of worship. *Kiddo Cosio (twitter.com/kiddocosio)*

Reflection: Find God in a fresh experience. For some, that might mean climbing a mountain, or for others, going back to Mass after a long absence. What is it for you?

Dear God, [illegible]

1 Maccabees 4:36-37, 52-59 (or Hosea 2:16, 17, 21-22)
1 Chronicles 29:10, 11, 11-12, 12 (or Psalm 45:11-12, 14-15, 16-17)
Luke 19:45-48 (or Matthew 25:1-13)

TEMPLE MAKEOVER

"It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.'"– Luke 19:46

People want change. But they're confused as to what needs to be changed. This confusion is the reason why modern-day people are dissatisfied.

They're dissatisfied with their face. They're dissatisfied with their complexion. They're dissatisfied with their waistline. They're dissatisfied with their height (ahem). They're dissatisfied with their relationships. They're dissatisfied with their friends. They're dissatisfied with their boyfriend or girlfriend. They're dissatisfied with their school or job. They're dissatisfied with their gender.

The result? People are robbed of real joy! They're contaminated with the "out-there-icitis." They look for the beauty out there. Some do the absurd: they have a facelift, nose-lift, tummy-tuck, botox, bariatric surgery, even a sex change! They pay costly amounts for a major makeover. They don't know that God is the Ultimate Beauty Secret.

You are the Temple of God. Let Him give you an internal extreme makeover. Because God doesn't look at your appearance but your heart. Then inner beauty grows from the inside out! *Obet Cabrillas (kpreacherobet@gmail.com)*

Reflection: What does love look like? It has hands to help others. It has feet to hasten to the poor and the needy. It has eyes to see the misery and want. It has ears to hear the sigh and the sorrows of men. (St. Augustine)

Jesus, let me be a beautiful temple of Your presence. Amen.

St. Cecilia, virgin and martyr, pray for us.

LIFE BEGINS AT 80

"He is not God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive." – Luke 20:38

Many people usually get ready to die when they hit their 60s. Sister Madonna Buder, a Roman Catholic nun, born July 24, 1930, began physical training at age 48 and completed her first Ironman competition at age 55.

She is well-known in the triathlon community for her achievements in her age group races. She has completed over 325 triathlons, including 45 Ironman distances. At the 2005 Hawaii Ironman, at age 75, this nun became the oldest woman ever to complete the race, finishing one hour before the 17-hour midnight cut-off time. At the 2006 Hawaii Ironman, at age 76, she again became the oldest woman ever to complete the race, finishing with a time of 16:59:03. Was it easy? No! At one point, the wind on the big island of Hawaii was so strong that it lifted her from her bike and she became the "flying nun"!

On October 5, 2010 Sister Madonna released her autobiography, *The Grace to Race: The Wisdom and Inspiration of the 80-Year-Old World Champion Triathlete known as the Iron Nun*. A year later, in October 2011, at age 81, she completed an Iron Man triathlon in less than 17 hours.

She is not yet done. Neither are we.

God is truly the God of the living!

Praise God for life! *Ariel Diaz (adnz77@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Are you truly using your life to live?

I am thankful, Lord, for people who inspire me to live life to the fullest. May I do so for Your glory! Amen.

2 Samuel 5:1-3 • Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5
Colossians 1:12-20 • Luke 23:35-43

IL DUCE

He is the image of the invisible God. — Colossians 1:15

When we think of the majority of kings throughout history, we think of rich men decked out in fur and gold who order servants around day in and day out — often wasteful, arrogant and vile.

An example of one of these kings is the duke of fascism, Benito Mussolini. He was an Italian dictator who claimed dominion over the world in the twentieth century by using brutal force and suppressing personal liberties to create his idea of a perfect state. Also known as *Il Duce* (Italian for "the duke," not "the douchebag"), it was because of him that Pope Pius XI instituted the Feast of Christ the King in 1925 — as a reminder to all Christians that Christ's Kingship in heaven trumps any ruler on earth, however humanly powerful they may be.

As we celebrate Christ the King, let us reflect on how we share the Good News to those around us, especially those who are skeptical about our faith. Let the celebration be a reminder that lavishness, force and arrogance were never Christ's ways for evangelizing others, although He is an all-powerful King. *Ria Macasaet (ria.macasaet@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Think of ways to share Christ with others without self-righteousness or force.

Lord, give me the humility to serve others in love, simplicity and acceptance.

A LIFE WELL LIVED

"But she, from her poverty, has offered her whole livelihood."
– Luke 21:4

Paul Aguas, my father-in-law, was a man who loved God.

When he was young, he was a man of the world. He married at a young age and had a family. He earned his first million at the age of 23. He was successful in his endeavors and enjoyed life to the hilt.

In 1972, he was invited to attend a prayer meeting. Along with his family, the Lord touched them and changed their lives forever.

Paul Aguas and his family chose to live an austere life similar to that of St. Francis of Assisi. He gave up his material wealth and spent the rest of his life preaching and teaching the Word of God.

In 1993, Paul Aguas passed away.

But to this day, the lives he has changed, the lives he has enriched, and the people he has touched continue to tell us that he was a man who gave up everything for the sake of the Kingdom of God. His was a life well lived.

Just like the widow in the Gospel reading today, he gave everything he had as an offering to God. *Marisa Aguas (joyangaguas@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Think of others more than yourself — today and always.

Lord Jesus, teach me to be generous

THE RIGHT VOICE

"See that you not be deceived." – Luke 21:8

I had the biggest crush on her, but I never actually met her. One day, my phone rang and her friend told me my crush wanted to speak to me. I got a sudden rush of excitement. "She wants to talk to me?!?!" But before I could piece that puzzle together, she said hello. We chatted for a few seconds, but it seemed like eternity. I couldn't believe we were conversing for the first time! After a while, though, I started to hear giggling in the background. Then I realized her whole *barkada* was there. All of a sudden, the first girl who called me got the phone from my crush and laughingly apologized for the prank they had just pulled. I didn't just have a conversation with my crush. She was someone else. I wept a bit, but I eventually got over it. After all, I was only in grade six.

Why didn't I recognize her voice? Well, because I never actually talked to her before. It's the same in our spiritual life. When we lack familiarity with God's voice, we tend to be fooled by what other voices tell us. We get misled. But there are many ways to know Him better: reading the Bible and supplementary readings, hanging out with good friends in the faith, spending time in prayer, and attending gatherings like The Feast. If we know Him, we will recognize His voice. And when we do, we can be led by His words of eternal life.

George Tolentino Gabriel (george.svp@gmail.com)

Reflection: Do you make an effort to know God's voice better?

Oh, I want to know You more. Deep within my soul, I want to know You. Lord, I want to know You. (Steve Green)

Daniel 5:1-6, 13-14, 16-17, 23-28 • Daniel 3:62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67
Luke 21:12-19

GOD IS MY VINDICATOR

"Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand."
– Luke 21:14

It was March 2003 when I became president of a sports organization. At first, the members were all excited, but as months went by, I heard that my vice president was spreading rumors that I was a corrupt leader and I was using my position to solicit money for my personal use.

I tried to explain my side and presented documents to prove my innocence. But I was outnumbered because the other officers believed him and were already planning a *coup d'etat* to oust me. When I learned that, I immediately resigned and gave up my position to my vice president. I prayed hard because God knows the truth and my conscience was clean. I promised Him that I wouldn't take revenge because I believe that He is my vindicator. True enough, two months later, a friend told me that the group I had organized was dissolved because nobody believed in the leadership of the vice president and he had just been envious of my position.

People approached and even told me that the association was better during my term. I felt vindicated after hearing them say that. *Monty Mendigoria (montymendigoria@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: When the world is against you, don't despair. They hated Jesus, too.

Lord, thank You for Your ever-day protection. Send Your Holy Spirit to be my guide in making Your business here on earth. Cover me with Your armor of love always. Amen.

BUY A SADDLE

"But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand." – Luke 21:28

Wise words from the old American West read, "If somebody calls you a horse's rear, ignore it. If two people call you a horse's rear, look in the mirror. If three people call you a horse's rear, buy a saddle."

God, by His grace, sends "signs" to call our attention. He doesn't necessarily use falling constellations, or the splitting of mountains in the middle, or an apparition in the grotto, but simple reminders from people you love.

If three of your respected and trusted loved ones say, "You've been workaholic and you need to give time to your kids" — buy a saddle. If another three of their kind say, "You're neglecting your husband" — buy a saddle. If they say, "Get serious about your financial life" — buy a saddle. If they say, "You've been failing and you need to get serious with your studies" — buy a saddle.

Advent means "more of Jesus' victory coming into your life" this season. He may be sending signs. It's never usually the dramatic or the headline kind, but it's convicting nevertheless. So rejoice, for "redemption is near" in that specific area of your life. Obey Him. Work and pray hard. Your miracle is coming! *Jon Escoto (faithatworkjon@gmail.com)*

Reflection: What signs have God been sending you recently?

Jesus, I need more of You in the areas of my life that need breakthroughs. Let me be sensitive to Your "signs."

ALWAYS TRUE

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." – Luke 21:33

I got pregnant for the second time without any medical intervention, despite my condition of having polycystic ovaries. Thus, we consider our second baby boy another gift from God. That's one reason also why we named him Mateo.

But as most parents know, especially those with newborns, having another child means another mouth to feed, clothe and care for. It means another child who will go through a series of vaccines almost every month during his first year of life. Sometimes I am tempted to worry if my husband and I would be able to give our newborn son all that he needs. But remembering God's promise of provision and how faithful He has been in giving us timely provisions for our first child helps me overcome this doubt.

Also, the many opportunities that God gives me to earn from home through my passions such as writing and HR consulting are testaments to God's Word being true at all times. No matter how many trials and temptations I encounter, I know that they will eventually pass away while the promises of my Lord and Savior will always hold true.

Teresa Gumap-as Dumadag (teregmps@yahoo.com)

Reflection: How much do you trust in God's promises to you? Does it serve as your life's anchor during turbulent times?

Lord Jesus, grant me the grace to believe every word that You say so that whatever I encounter in life, I will stand firm, confident that You will save me.

Romans 10:9-18 • **Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11**
Matthew 4:18-22

THE PRICE AND PRIZE OF OBEDIENCE

The ordinances of the Lord are true, all of them just. – Psalm 19:10

I am a sucker for rules. Maybe it has something to do with my melancholic temperament. Maybe it has something to do with positive punishment, which was reinforced in school all throughout my childhood and adolescent days.

The OC (obsessive compulsive) in me wants to follow rules because I want a sense of predictability and control over my environment. I also long for peace and order. God is a God of order after all.

Before I became a part of a Charismatic community, I used to obey God out of fear. Now, I strive to obey Him out of my love for Him. Even though I prided myself as an obedient daughter of my Papa God, boy, was it hard to obey Him, especially whenever He'd ask me to let go of someone I really thought I wanted. But it was all worth the pain, tears and sacrifice.

As I write this, I have found my OTL (One True Love) after 30 long years of patiently waiting for him. God is skillfully writing my love story as my OTL and I take our time. *Ems Sy Chan (havenofleeanne@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: I know the power obedience has of making things easy which seem impossible. (St. Teresa of Avila)

"Hail and blessed be the hour and moment in which the Son of God was born of the most pure Virgin Mary, at midnight, in Bethlehem, in piercing cold..." (St. Andrew Christmas Novena)

Feast of St. Andrew, Apostle

St. Andrew, Apostle, pray for us.

Isaiah 2:1-5 • Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9
Romans 13:11-14 • Matthew 24:37-44

DO IT GOD'S WAY

Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. – Romans 13:12

Tom was a medical representative for a pharmaceutical company. In his province, it was standard procedure that med reps drank with doctors and gave them women. Being the rookie in the job, he was ashamed to decline, even if his conscience was telling him it was wrong.

So he went along and would drink only three bottles at the most. And while his companions would take their bar girl to a motel, he'd just chat with his the entire evening. But one day, he asked himself, "Am I more concerned about losing my face over losing my soul?" So he went to his boss and said, "Sir, I've decided I won't be drinking and offering women to my clients anymore." His boss was shocked. He asked, "Are you crazy? Why?" Tom said, "I'm a renewed Catholic. I can't go against my faith." The boss told him sternly, "Mark my words, you'll lose your job." Tom said, "Watch how God will work."

The next day, Tom gave *Kerygma* magazines to the doctors. Then he gave them *Didache* and then *Companion*. He also worked doubly hard. In three months, Tom became the top-selling, top-performing med rep in the entire region.

It takes courage to go against the tide and stand up for what you believe in. But in the end, God will reward you a thousandfold. *Bo Sanchez (bosanchez@kerygmafamily.com)*

Reflection: Are you doing something against your faith? Pray for the courage to stop now.

Grant me the grace, Lord, to follow You at all costs.

Blessed John of Vercelli, pray for us.

Isaiah 4:2-6 • Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9
Matthew 8:5-11

S.O.S.

"Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed." – Matthew 8:8

I must admit I have the S.O.S. syndrome. The "Same Old Sins" syndrome. Many times, I would catch myself going to confession bearing not new sins, but old, repeated ones. And each time, I would feel guilty because I know I should have stopped myself from doing them, but I had failed again. I ask myself, "Should I even dare say sorry to God after all these? Is my sorry sincere? Am I sure that I won't do it anymore?"

But I know that these are all insults to God's immense love for me. Who am I to doubt God's mercy and forgiveness? Once again, I am reassured that my sins are a tiny speck compared to the healing and transforming love of God! It is by this reassurance that I humbly ask for God's pardon through confession.

I know that I will never be worthy of God's love. But the beauty of His love is that He makes you worthy. He forgives you so that you forgive yourself. He transforms your Same Old Sins because He is the Savior of Souls.

The centurion knew that, too. He was not worthy of God's healing. But because of his faith, Jesus entered his life and changed him forever! *Migs Ramirez (migoy3@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Have faith in the immense mercy of the Lord and allow Jesus to change your life forever.

Dear Jesus, as we prepare for Your birth into the world, may You also be born in my heart. Help me make myself worthy of Your coming, so that I may enjoy Your presence fully. Amen.

AND THE WINNER IS...

"I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike." – Luke 10:21

The clock ticked to... 3 seconds... 2 ... then the buzzer sounded. Game over. The crowd jumped from their seats. We were the champion for the second time in a row in the Altar Servers Basketball League. High fives, big hugs and jumping here and there showed our joy. We went home and celebrated.

During the party, our parish priest congratulated the team and gave each of us words of affirmation. He reminded us that all things come from God, and that our skills and talents that helped us win the championships are blessings He bestowed on us. With this in mind, we began and ended our celebration with a prayer to show our gratitude for the God-given talents He entrusted to us.

What blessing did you receive today? Maybe you've been promoted or closed a high-paying deal. Maybe you just passed an exam or received recognition. Or you just feel extra blessed today. Remember this, at the end of the day, may we have the heart to acknowledge that all our blessings came from the Lord and we should glorify Him. *Jan Carlo Silan (jan@makatifeast.com)*

Reflection: "Thank you" is commonly known but barely used. Have you thanked someone today? Have you thanked God today?

Dear Jesus, grant me a grateful heart so that in all things I will see Your glory in my life.

Isaiah 25:6-10 • Psalm 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6
Matthew 15:29-37

IMMORTAL'S *LONGGANISA*

Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast. – Isaiah 25:6

Since we're from the Quezon province, a favorite breakfast fare in our home is the Lucban *longganisa* (native sausage). My elder son loves this so much; it's the only *longganisa* he eats. He's actually very particular about food and has funny descriptions for things he doesn't like.

Once I cooked another kind of *longganisa*. He asked, "Mom, why do we have mortal's *longganisa*?"

"What is mortal's *longganisa*?" I wondered.

"It's the one that unfortunate people eat," he replied, feeling privileged to always eat the Lucban *longganisa*. As a mother, I want to give my children the best, so I've since removed the other kinds of *longganisa* from my grocery list.

Our Father God also delights in giving us the best. He prepares a feast with His choicest blessings and finest graces every day — better than ambrosia or immortal's *longganisa*. His most precious offering is something we celebrate this month: the gift of His Son, Jesus.

Before we get drowned by the holiday frenzy, let's pause to thank God for the blessings He put on our table this year. Let's make Jesus the center of all our festivities. *Lella M. Santiago (mirellasantiago@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Is there a more meaningful way to celebrate Christmas this year?

Father God, thank You for Your lavish gifts, especially for sending Your only Son to save us.

Isaiah 26:1-6 • Psalm 118:1, 8-9, 19-21, 25-27
Matthew 7:21, 24-27

THE POWER OF A SONG

On that day they will sing this song in the land of Judah: Trust in the Lord forever! For the Lord is an eternal Rock. – Isaiah 26:1,4

It was the birthday of Tess, a sister in community, that day. Her birthday coincided with our community's monthly assembly. So Tess received a shower of personal greetings and honoring from brothers and sisters. I am sure she also had a lot of greetings via text, email and phone calls that day.

But one of the more special greetings she received that day was a song. Around 15 kids from our community lined up in front of her to sing for her. Each of them also offered her a flower. I saw the glow on her face as the kids sang.

What song did the kids render? Nothing extraordinary. They sang the regular version of "happy birthday!" It was a simple and familiar song. A performance by kids with zero rehearsal but offered with sincerity and love. The offering was simple but the joy it gave Tess was incredible.

I think offering a song to God also makes the same impact. It allows the one offering the song the chance to present his sincere love to God in another form. As the saying goes, "One who offers a song to God in worship prays twice."

Alvin Fabella (alvinfabella@yahoo.com)

Reflection: Offering songs of worship to God is also a form of honoring and thanking Him. Put some variety in your prayer time today by singing your praise to God.

Let my life be a love song to You, Jesus.

WHY WAIT?

As Jesus passed by, two blind men followed him, crying out, "Son of David, have pity on us!" – Matthew 9:27

My friend Patricia used to be a youth leader, one of the best and inspiring in fact. But when she started working, things slowly changed. She stopped receiving nourishment from her spiritual family and her life revolved around her high-paying, high-stress job and her boyfriend. Her world crumbled when her boyfriend ended the relationship and she eventually found out that another girl was part of the reason. It was only after that when she started attending the prayer meeting regularly.

Some people wait for their lives to crumble or for their problems to become so complicated before they start looking for Jesus.

Some people wait to get sick literally or figuratively before they look for Jesus to help them.

Some people will wait until they're at the end of their rope before they think of turning to Jesus.

Of course, the Lord will never say no to us, but why do you have to allow yourself to experience such anguish and suffering?

Didn't the doctors say that prevention is always better than the cure? *JPaul Hernandez (jpaulmh@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What are the areas in your life that you think are not healthy?

Jesus, remind me to seek You first even before trouble comes.

Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26 • Psalm 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6
Matthew 9:35-10:1, 5, 6-8

THE GUIDING VOICE

While from behind, a voice shall sound in your ears: "This is the way; walk in it." – Isaiah 30:21

Lea was sent by her company to Xian, China for a four-day business trip. Since there was no direct flight to Xian, she made a stopover in Shanghai and spent the night in a hotel. The following morning, she went to the domestic airport to catch her flight. But many flights were canceled due to a blizzard, causing many passengers to be stranded. Because of the language barrier, she couldn't figure out where she should check in her baggage. Fearing that she might miss her flight, she prayed to the Lord for guidance.

Then she heard a voice-over announcement in Mandarin. Surprisingly, she somehow understood what was announced. Three people out of the multitude of stranded passengers stood up and ran, and she followed them... to the check-in counter for the flight going to Xian.

In today's first reading, God spoke about His promises for the people of Jerusalem. In verse 21, God assures us that He will give clear direction as to where we should go. In our world full of confusion, it's hard to know which way to go. But if we are attuned to the voice of God at all times and follow His ways, He will lead us to the right path. *Judith Concepcion (svp_jmc@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Whose voice do you hear and follow?

Lord, help me to be sensitive to Your leading that I may not stray from Your path.

St. Ambrose, bishop and doctor of the Church, pray for us.

Isaiah 11:1-10 • Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17
Romans 15:4-9 • Matthew 3:1-12

THE LIVING WORD

Whatever was written previously was written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. – Romans 15:4

The Word of God is alive. How else are we able to draw wisdom to guide us in the same way that people from the time of Moses, Jesus and the Apostles did? It amazes me that even though the problems and circumstances that people faced in the past are different from what we experience today, Scripture remains constant in teaching us that love — the love of God and the love of neighbor — is the solution to our concerns.

Even more amazing is that in spite of the chaos, desperation and confusion our problems bring us, Scripture continues to convey to us a message of hope — hope in Jesus who rose victorious over death and sin. Our Blessed Mother Mary placed her hope in God's Word to her during the Annunciation. That is why she gave her *fiat* wholeheartedly and in joyous anticipation of the great things God will do through her simple yes.

Like Mary, let us put our hope in God's Word and see the amazing things He will do in our lives. *Dina Pecaña (dpecana@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

Lord, give me the grace to immerse my heart and soul in the deep wisdom of the Scriptures that I may live my life in accordance to Your will.

Genesis 3:9-15, 20 • Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4
Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12 • **Luke 1:26-38**

YES

Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. – Luke 1:38

Growing up I thought the Immaculate Conception was about Mary being pregnant though she was a virgin. Many Christians still think that. But, it's actually about Mary being conceived in her mother's womb without sin. She was born free from the original sin! It was her destiny to be that sinless woman who would be the mother of the Messiah.

In today's Gospel, that moment came when her free will played a major role. Angel Gabriel announced what would happen. Was Mary greatly confused? You bet. But she agreed.

At the back of my mind I asked, "What if she said no?" I don't know the answer but I'm just so happy she said yes.

My role here on earth cannot be compared to Mama Mary's, but like her, I can say yes. I have the power to say yes to smile more. Yes to listen to others. Yes to forgive. Yes to remain quiet when I'm about to burst in anger. Yes to counting my blessings. Yes to serving the Lord. *Carlo Lorenzo (carloflorenzo@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What will you choose to say yes to today?

Heavenly Father, I trust I offer You the [illegible] I will [illegible] to You. May I reflect You, my God of love and mercy.

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary

St. Juan Diego, pray for us.

THE LOST SHEEP

"It is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost." – Matthew 18:14

Rene Vargas, a drug addict who wouldn't admit it, would sing Basil Valdez's song "Lift Up Your Hands" in beerhouses. But one day, while he was undergoing drug rehab, he heard the same song. It was as if the Lord Himself was singing to him, "Cast your burdens upon Me those who are heavily laden … come to me and I will give you rest."

At that moment, Rene's rock-solid heart softened. Who was this Stranger inviting him to cast his addiction upon Him? Then Rene felt God's warm embrace and heard a whisper, "That's enough, son. I'll take care of you." Overflowing tears melted the scales in his eyes and Rene began to see things clearly. He was at peace.

This amazing testimony of my humble mentor in the Extraordinary Ministry of the Holy Communion deepened my respect for him and intensified my conviction that there is a God. Rene is a living testimony of how God searched for His lost sheep.

There is no sin so big that our God cannot forgive and there is no lost child that God will never find. *Leo Villarico (leovrico@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: In this season of Advent, bring to the Lord your burdens that drive you away from Him.

O Lord, sing to me. My heart is restless until it rests in You.

TAKE A BREAK!

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." – Matthew 11:28

Christmas break of 2011 was not a break at all for me. I brought home lots of work. Instead of spending it in quiet recollection, which I usually did in years past, I was working, catching up on deadlines.

But one day, when I felt that my mind was getting drained and I could no longer write, I went out of the house and headed to the Greenbelt Chapel.

There, I sat before the Crucified Christ and allowed Him to soothe my tired spirit.

There, I went back to His arms and availed of the sacrament of reconciliation.

There, I thanked Him for all the blessings and trials of the year about to end.

There, I talked to Him of my hopes and wishes for the next year.

After a few hours, I was back home — more at peace and inspired to face the coming year.

Before the year 2013 ends, I hope to do it again and take a break in His presence. I hope you do, too. *Tess V. Atienza (svp_tvatienza@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: How do you usually take a break? When was your last retreat or recollection?

soothe my sagging spirit

Isaiah 41:13-20 (or Zechariah 2:14-17 or Revelation 11:19; 12:1-6, 10)
Psalm 145:1, 9, 10-11, 12-13 (or Judith 13.18-19)
Matthew 11:11-15 (or Luke 1:26-38 or Luke 1:39-47)

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

That all may see and know, observe and understand, that the hand of the Lord has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it. — Isaiah 41:20

Today we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. If you are unfamiliar with her story, here it is in a nutshell:

Despite the presence of Catholic missionaries in Mexico over a period of many years, there were very few local converts to the faith. Not until 1531, when our beloved Mother Mary appeared to Juan Diego, an Aztec Indian. The signs that accompanied her apparitions — of the roses, of the uncle miraculously cured of a deadly illness, and especially of her beautiful image on Juan's mantle — convinced the people there was something to be considered in Christianity. Within a short time, six million native Mexicans had themselves baptized as Christians. (Source: www.catholic.org)

The conversion of six million people in such a short time surely must have been done by "the hand of the Lord, the Holy One of Israel!" Our Lady was His instrument of conversion, and so was Juan Diego. It just goes to show that we human beings, imperfect as we may be, can be used powerfully by the Lord, especially when we serve Him hand in hand with our Blessed Mother. *Tina Santiago-Rodriguez (teachermamatina@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Do you allow God to use you just like He did with Saint Juan Diego?

Lord, use me as Your instrument of conversion every day — and may Mama Mary be my guide every step of the way.

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us.

A GOOD HARVEST

He is like a tree planted near running water, that yields its fruit in due season. – Psalm 1:3

My husband and I had just finished serving at the Kerygma Conference in Davao. We had prayed over several attendees and came back late at the hotel really tired. We wanted to sleep long and wake up late the following day. But not too long after we had slept, the blare of a public address system woke us up abruptly. When we looked out the window, a group of people were assembling and playing loud music that kept us awake. We noted that it was a Red Cross-sponsored marathon which was happening nationwide early that day.

Instead of being irritated with them, our conclusion that this was for a good cause calmed our hearts. We hummed and sang the loud songs like a lullaby and we got our sleep despite the noisy condition. We knew that they were doing good work for others, which was also why we were in Davao — to bring people to the knowledge of Christ. By doing so, we thanked God for allowing us to reap the fruit of the Spirit: especially peace, patience and love (Galatians 5:22), a good response to an otherwise adverse situation. *Donna España (donna@homeliving.com.ph)*

Reflection: The practice of our faith doesn't end when the prayer meeting or the Mass finishes. In fact, that's where it just begins.

Dear Lord, [illegible] in every situation. [illegible]

St. Lucy, virgin and martyr, pray for us.

Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11 • Psalm 80:2, 3, 15-16, 18-19
Matthew 17:9, 10-13

IS THIS THE LITTLE GIRL I CARRIED?

…to turn back the hearts of parents toward their children.
– Sirach 48:10

Our daughter Trina and her dad have a special bond. When she was growing up, Raul would drop anything he was doing to drive for his only daughter. She was the apple of his eyes, his precious jewel. Trina is all grown-up now, a beautiful young lawyer, and the role has reversed. She is now a doting daughter to her dad, constantly watching over his diet and gifting him with a new laptop and many other surprises.

As she walked through the church doors looking like the most radiant bride in the world, I caught a glimpse of Raul holding back his tears as I was. Bringing her to the altar where her handsome groom, Jang, also a lawyer, stood waiting, our hearts were bursting with mixed emotions.

"I don't remember getting older" goes the song, and that's exactly how every parent feels on the wedding day of their daughter. "And there is a time for every event under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:10). Hard as it was, the time has come for us to let go.

We were beaming with pride and joy at what our only daughter has become. On that special day, our fervent prayer was for the Lord to say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:23) *Mari Sison-Garcia (mari_sison_garcia@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Are you being asked to let go of someone or something that means a whole world to you? Let go and let God.

Lord, bless us with the spirit of detachment from all that You have given us, knowing that we are merely stewards of Your resources.

FRONT ACT

"Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you." – Matthew 11:10

I love John the Baptist. He's Jesus' "front act." He knew when it was his time to shine, and knew when to fade out. No wonder Jesus said, "There has been none greater than him."

I am used to being introduced as someone who was once a front act of the legend, Freddie Aguilar. And I usually quip that as a front act, I'm the one who performs while there aren't many people yet. And when a sizable audience has gathered, it's my cue to exit so that the main act, the real star of the show, comes in.

When I began preaching as one of Bo Sanchez's Kerygma preachers I would always get the question, "Where is Bo? Is he coming?" It was as if my role was simply to make way for him. Yet, even now, after decades of preaching and teaching about God, I do believe I really am and really should "simply" make way as an "advance messenger."

Because when you're in the limelight where people look up to you and applaud you, it's very easy to fool yourself that it all stops with you. Thank God I had good practice as a front act so that I would always remind myself, "Hey, what you do is important. But in the end it's not about you. It's about Him – the Real Star — Jesus." *Alvin Barcelona (apb ayow@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: What you do is important. It will be more significant if it reflects the glory of God and make way for Jesus to be seen.

[redacted]

Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17 • Psalm 25:4-5, 6, 7, 8-9
Matthew 21:23-27

SPEAK OUT ANYWAY

"By what authority are you doing these things? — Matthew 21:23

"What you will do is not right," I told my friends who were about to cut classes to watch a movie. The reactions I got were some laughs and stares as if they were saying, "Killjoy! Who are you to lecture us? You are not our parents."

In a statement, the Pope said that same-sex marriage is a threat to the future of humanity. He was branded as a homophobic. His authority was criticized with comments like, "The leader of the Catholic Church is not in tune with the times. He is discriminating against homosexuals. He has no right to say that. If that is where they will be happy, he has no reason to criticize and say it is wrong."

It is hard to justify yourself to people whose perspective of right or wrong changes with the season, with what's in or what's out.

We live in a very relativistic society. Ultimately, the future of humanity will rest on God and on God alone. He is the standard by which everything will be measured.

When you speak out about things that are against God's will, you will encounter resistance that will question your authority. Speak out anyway. God is on your side. *Jun Asis (mabuting.balita@gmail.com)*

Reflection: God is the only authority of what is right and true. Don't listen to what this world tells you.

Lord, many ideas and people undermine Your authority and clamor to get my allegiance. Help me to always hear Your voice and follow it.

Genesis 49:2, 8-10 • Psalm 72:1-2, 3-4, 7-8, 17
Matthew 1:1-17

A PEOPLE MADE PERFECT

Of her was born Jesus who is called the Christ. – Matthew 1:16

When we read the genealogy of Jesus, there are two things that stand out. First, it is full of imperfect people. As we go through the list, the stories behind each name is sometimes grim. Jacob was a liar. Rahab was a prostitute. David was an adulterer and a murderer. Solomon worshiped idols. Rehoboam was a tyrant... and the list goes on. But in all their imperfection, God continued to bless them according to His will.

There is a Spanish proverb that says, "God writes straight with crooked lines." No matter how sinful or unworthy you think you are, you are unique in all the world and you have been placed here for a mission that no one else can accomplish but you. God has blessed you to see it through.

Second, the story ends in redemption. At the very end of the genealogy, buried in all the names, titles and positions, we see the reason these ancestors were redeemed. In fact, we see reflected in this list our own story of redemption and salvation. Because at the end of it all, everything rests on the Messiah; everything comes together in Jesus. *Rod Velez (rod.velez@gmail.com)*

Reflection: When the song says, "Let all who come behind us find us faithful," how true is that in our own lives?

OBEY NOW!

When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him. – Matthew 1:24

Through the years, I've read and heard Bo Sanchez talk about investing and entrepreneurship. As part of his advocacy on financial literacy, he has been coaxing his readers and listeners to have their own business, to get into real estate and the stock market, and not be afraid to fail.

I have to confess that I have not been quick to follow his advice all the time. But I know someone who is.

When Bo says, "Start a business," she looks for a franchise and starts a small food chain. When Bo says, "Invest in real estate," she goes out and buys properties. When Bo says, "Invest in stocks," that's exactly what she does. Because she is quick to obey, she immediately harvests her profits. Her food business is doing well. She now owns a number of properties. And she has been earning from her stock investments.

Now I understand why the Lord wants us to be quick to obey His commandments. We don't realize it, but when we take our time in doing what He tells us to do, we miss out on blessings that could have been already ours. But the minute we obey, we reap blessings that we didn't know had just been there waiting for us. *Rissa Singson-Kawpeng (justbreatherissa@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Be like Joseph who acted immediately at what the Lord had told Him to do.

Jesus, let me hear Your voice and be quick to obey You

Judges 13:2-7, 24-25 • Psalm 71:3-4, 5-6, 16-17
Luke 1:5-25

DIRECTOR'S CUT

"How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." – Luke 1:18

"Sabi na nga ba eh!" (I knew it!) You will hear this every time my family watches a movie. With a know-it-all tone, someone will narrate the next scene with conviction, as if that person wrote the script.

This is my personality even outside the movie house. I always need to know everything so I can control everything. I plan ahead. I see to it that everything's fixed. Uptight and restless are my traits. But eventually, I got tired.

The Lord threw in challenges in my path that reminded me that I'm not the director of my own life. He is. I can't control everything that happens: I can't bring my mom back to life nor could I dictate what people think. The Lord assures me that all I need to do is to sit back and trust Him, even if I don't understand as of the moment.

Our faith in God starts when we concede to His plans. It may be difficult now, but a life lived in total dependence on God, is a life of comfort and peace.

Make God the director of your life and, rest assured, it will be a box-office hit! *Pia Angelica Suiza (piasuiza@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Where is God leading you?

Jesus, most of late I have given more control of my life to You. Show me the way to You. Amen.

Blessed Pope Urban V, pray for us.

Isaiah 7:10-14 • Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6
Luke 1:26-38

LOST TICKET

"For nothing will be impossible for God." – Luke 1:37

I was about to go home when I realized that the parking ticket was missing from my pocket. Wah! A P20.00 ticket will turn into a P200 charge plus all the hassle of accomplishing registration documents!

"Lord, nothing is impossible. Please let the ticket be returned to me," I prayed. I went back to the mall with no idea where to start. I hummed a worship song, eyes on the ground, until... voila! A tiny folded paper from afar. Could it be my ticket? I picked it up and yes! It was my ticket! Thank you, Lord!

A year later, just as I was sharing this incident, it happened again. It could have slipped from my pocket. I smiled and prayed "Sorry, Lord, it happened again, but I know we can find it." I went back where we dined, and there it was! Amazing!

When I ask God if He will love me no matter what, He gives me a promise, "If you can find that very small folded paper in the middle of a very large mall, I will always find you no matter how big the world may seem to you."

Nothing is impossible for God. He who created everything can do anything. *Dreus Cosio (andreus.cosio@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Are you tired of using your own strength? It's time to turn to God and let Him handle it.

Lord Jesus, I lift up everything to You. I open myself to Your greater plans for me. Amen.

Song of Songs 2:8-14 (or Zephaniah 3:14-18)
Psalm 33:2-3, 11-12, 20-21 • Luke 1:39-45

DO NOT FEAR — 365 TIMES

The sorrows for the appointed feast I will remove from you: they are a burden and a reproach to you. – Zephaniah 3:18

The words, "do not be afraid," appeared 365 times in the Bible. It's as if God is telling us not to fear each day of the year that comes with a heartbreak, a struggle, failed dreams, unsuccessful plans or loss of money, loved ones, health, etc.

A long time ago, I had more than 365 days of sorrow. Each day that came would bring me tears and fears of the unknown. And when the night would come, I would lay my head on the pillow with more fear for the darkness and what it would bring. My problem seemed insurmountable, and there seemed to be no rainbow at the end of the storm.

Today, as I look back on those dark days, I realize that my God was there for me and my family all throughout that time — even on those days when I didn't want to talk to Him at all. He was faithful even if I was not. And when the time came, He moved slowly, through situations and events, peeling off the hurts and sorrows, and replacing them with joy and gladness.

Really, we should not be afraid, for He will remove the burdens in our heart. *Chelle Crisanto (ellehcmaria@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: There is no such thing as a bad day. Just bad moments we choose to carry with us all day long. Take a deep breath and let them go. Have faith that everything will be OK. (Author Unknown)

Lord, I [illegible] doubts on You [illegible] and [illegible] Your [illegible] love and hate [illegible]

St. Peter Canisius, priest and doctor of the Church, pray for us.

Isaiah 7:10-14 • Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6
Romans 1:1-7 • **Matthew 1:18-24**

CHRISTMAS IS...

"She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." – Matthew 1:21

"C is for the Candy trimmed around the Christmas tree.
H is for the Happiness with all the family.
R is for the Reindeer prancing by the window pane.
I is for the Icing on the cake as sweet as sugar cane.
S is for the Stocking on the chimney wall.
T is for the Toys beneath the tree so tall.
M is for the Mistletoe where everyone is kissed.
A is for the Angels who make up the Christmas list.
S is for old Santa who makes every kid his pet.
Be good and he'll bring you everything in your Christma$ Alphabet."

The more you sing this, the more you discover that this alphabet doesn't really spell out Christmas. Don't get me wrong. I love this song. Yet subliminally, the definition above spells out the modern-day view of Christmas: **C**ommercialized. **H**arassed. **R**ushed. **I**rritatated. **S**wamped. **T**rapped in traffic. **M**oney-wasting. **A**pathetic. **S**tressed.

Merely two days to go. Let's bring back the true meaning of Christmas. Christmas is Christ + mas = Christ + His people = Emmanuel = God is with us. Christmas is the birth of our salvation. Heaven born to earth. The Birthday of Jesus. *Obet Cabrillas (kpreacherobet@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Let's re-spell Christmas not just in a song but in our lives!

Jesus, You are the Reason for the season. May You be the center of my celebration.

Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24 • Psalm 25:4-5, 8-9, 10, 14
Luke 1:57-66

ASAP

Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her. – Luke 1:58

"Do you already have a boyfriend?" My relatives would often ask me whenever they'd see me. They kept asking me that question for many years. They would advise me to find a boyfriend fast, get married and start a family ASAP because I was getting old. They were afraid I would have difficulty conceiving, or worse, I wouldn't have a child. Actually, even my neighbors, officemates and some of my friends were worried.

Then, I had my first boyfriend at 31. We got married the following year and, in a couple of months, I got pregnant. My parents, relatives, neighbors, colleagues and friends shared my joy. We praised and thanked God for enabling me to conceive right away even though I was a bit old and had polycystic ovaries. As of this writing, I have just given birth to my second baby, Mateo. His birth brought much joy once more to many, not only to me.

God has shown me mercy repeatedly and I eagerly share my story at every opportunity, even through a magazine and a TV show. It's just one way I show my gratitude to God so that others may rejoice when they learn that God shows mercy to those who trust in Him. *Teresa Gumap-as Dumadag (teregmps@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Are you excited to share with others how God has blessed you? Or do you hesitate?

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16 • Psalm 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29
Luke 1:67-79

ENJOYING THE EVE

"And to remember his holy covenant." — Luke 1:72

According to my grand timeline, I would go to law school straight from college graduation, become a lawyer and work for humanitarian causes from there on out. It was the normal, noble thing to do.

Because I didn't plan for detours, I grew bitter when my parents asked me to try living in another country after college. I was so attached to my comfortable life that leaving it all behind — the support system, house help, the grand plan —seemed like an unjust weight on my shoulders.

Only when I let go of my timeline and enjoyed the detour did things fall into place. Soon, after learning how to earn and seeing a little more of the world, I was right where I wanted to be: a student of law making her dream come true.

Waiting is one of the hardest things we must deal with. Often we fluctuate between hope and despair, tension and anticipation, especially when what we're waiting for is extremely important to us. But God's promise is that our deepest desires will bear fruit in His perfect time, regardless of any detours and road blocks that come our way. *Ria Macasaet (ria.macasaet@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Today, offer all your eves to the Lord—whatever it is you're waiting and praying for—and let your detours work for you.

Lord, may I learn to enjoy all the eves of my life, especially tonight, as I await the gift of Your birth.

Isaiah 52:7-10 (or Isaiah 9:1-6)
Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6 9 (or Psalm 96 1-2, 2-3, 11-12, 13)
Hebrews 1:1-6 (or Titus 2:11 14) • **John 1:1-18** (or Luke 2:1-14)

THE BELEN

... and made his dwelling among us. – John 1:14

For me, Christmas is best celebrated in the Philippines. Here, we play Christmas carols as early as October. We put Christmas decors in our homes way ahead of anybody else. But a favorite custom we have that I really love is our tradition of having a *belen* (créche) at our homes.

A *belen* is a set of images that we place at a designated part of the house depicting the Nativity of our Lord. A makeshift barn with animals, shepherds, the three kings, a bright star, Mother Mary, St. Joseph, a manger filled with straw grass and Baby Jesus lying on top of it.

Some families I know have done some innovations for their *belens*. Everything is complete except the grass straw where Jesus is supposed to be lying on. Then for every good deed or sacrifice they will make as an offering to Jesus, a grass straw will be placed underneath the Baby Jesus. On Christmas day, the manger is filled with grass where Jesus is laid, signified by offerings of good deeds and sacrifices that the family members have done for others.

I love this tradition. Because in this way, every member of the family is aware to prepare their hearts for Jesus to make His dwelling among us. *Marisa Aguas (jojangaguas@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Today, make yourself aware of Jesus in every endeavor that you undertake.

Lord Jesus, I pray that You make Your dwelling in my heart not only today but for every day of my life

Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59 • Psalm 31:3-4, 6, 8, 16, 17
Matthew 10:17-22

HOMING INSTINCT

"Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.... Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" – Acts 6:56, 59

My wife, Dinah, loves to doze off in the passenger seat while I'm driving. All throughout the trip, she'll sleep. But without fail, whenever we arrive home, she miraculously wakes up. I call it her homing instinct. Somehow, her body knows when she's home.

The words above are the last words of the martyr saint Stephen right before he was stoned to death. All his life, his eyes were fixed on the prize of heaven. He was determined to stand up for his faith even at the cost of death, perhaps because he knew he didn't belong to this earth in the first place. He was a temporary visitor, as all of us are, too. Because of that, he confidently knew he would go to heaven — his home, where he truly belonged.

The Philosophy term *a priori* refers to a prior knowledge embedded in the deepest recesses of our being that we belong to God. That's why when we sin, it doesn't feel right. It may bring momentary pleasure, but in the end, we somehow know that something is wrong. It's our homing instinct. And although we often go astray in this life, I believe our inner compass will always lead us back to Him because He is our true home. *George Tolentino Gabriel (george.svp@gmail.com)*

Reflection: Are you at peace right now? Check your homing instinct.

Lord, when I stray away from You, may You always lead me back home to Your heart where I truly belong.

ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN

"They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they put him." – John 20:2

I spent more than half of my life doing bad things. I grew up as a spoiled brat and a battered child. I spent my adolescent years as a problem teenager. A few years later, I focused my attention on doing bigger sins.

I married at the early age of 20 and soon started womanizing. I got into pornography and sex addiction. That was also the time I started beating my wife. But after many years, she finally left me and took our children with her.

During those days, I felt that my soul was already dead. But one time, while riding my motorcycle on the way home, I prayed to God and asked Him to bring me back to life. After having uttered that prayer, my life started to change day by day. I rose from the dead. I reconciled with my wife and family and asked them for their forgiveness.

Today, I am a changed man. God gave me a brand new life for Jesus has resurrected in me. *Monty Mendigoria (montymendigoria@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Move the stones away from the tomb and let Jesus resurrect in your life.

Dear Lord, I'm so grateful with what You have done in my life. Your resurrection gave me hope to live my life according to Your will. Amen.

'I THINK YOU STILL SHOULD'

Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. – Matthew 2:14

Nola Ochs should have been just one of those students graduating with a degree in history at Fort Hays State University in Kansas. Except that, at 95 years old, she is the world's oldest female college graduate. Stunned? Don't be so amused yet.

While there will be many graduates alongside Nola, there is one in particular who holds a special place in her heart — her 21-year-old granddaughter, Alexandra Ochs. The two will receive their diplomas on stage, together.

People, circumstances and other competing desires may have conspired to put Nola's dream of a college diploma to death, but it didn't die. After the dream's "years of exile in Egypt," Nola summoned it back. "Should I still pursue my dream? But isn't it too late?" she asks. "I think you still should!" was her heart's answer. "But people would laugh at me!" "I think you still should!" was the same answer. "But I'll fail in the course of the journey!" "I think you still should!" her heart continued.

Could it be that God didn't allow your dream to die? Maybe you can still summon it back from exile. Then hear your heart say, "I think you still should…" *Jon Escoto (faithatworkjon@gmail.com)*

Reflection: What dream have you long forgotten but has recently caught your memory? Start praying about it again!

Father, give me the silence to hear the dream still breathing, and the courage to pursue it. Thank You.

Sirach 3:2-7, 12-14 • Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5
Colossians 3:12-21 • Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

BRAD

Kindness to a father will not be forgotten, firmly planted against the debt of your sin. – Sirach 3:14

I was not very close to Brad. Being the youngest in a brood of seven, I didn't find it easy to understand his ways, his words and especially his temper. I was oftentimes thrown off by it so I chose not to speak to him at all. We were so distant and different.

Ironically, I, of all my brothers and sisters, would spend most time with him. At home or outside traveling, I found myself being in his midst the most, allowing me to experience him in his truest form, imperfections and all.

October 2009 was when God called Brad to join His army of angels in heaven. My mom and I were by his bedside when he was gone all of a sudden.

Then I finally understood the reason why things were so with him. Because all along, I totally loved, cared for and honored Brad, my father. *Eugene A. Cailoo (eugenecailoo@gmail.com)*

Reflection: How is your relationship with the persons in your family right now?

Father God, please allow Your Holy Spirit to come upon me that I may honor my parents the way You want me to. Let me establish peace, love and bonding with them and my brothers and sisters. May my hands be in Your presence all the days of our lives.

A SIMPLE LIFE

Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. – I John 2:15

"Live simply so that others may simply live."

This had been one of the memorable lessons I learned in my RELSFOR (Religion 4 – Social Responsibility) course back in college.

Although I relatively led a simple life prior to one of the biggest setbacks in my life, supertyphoon Ondoy (a.k.a. Ketsana) taught me to let go of most of my material possessions and the mundane things in life. It taught me the art of giving up trivial stuff.

The deluge that inundated my entire house on my 28th birthday taught me to prioritize storing riches in heaven instead of accumulating material wealth on earth. It taught me to prioritize relationships more than career. It taught me to be humble enough to accept help from other people. It taught me that in the face of calamity, loved ones matter most, and God sends angels along my path. I only have to cling to His promises. *Ems Sy Chan (havenofleeanne@yahoo.com)*

Reflection: Don't wait for calamity to strike or accidents to happen before you simplify your life and show your loved ones how much you love them.

Father, thank You for Your wonderful gift of life. May I spend my borrowed life wisely by building strong relationships and storing riches in heaven

1 John 2:18-21 • Psalm 96:1-2, 11-12, 13
John 1:1-18

ADDITION TO OUR TRADITION

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. – John 1:1

The celebration of New Year's Eve is filled with tradition. People wear polkadots, serve 12 kinds of round fruits on their tables and light firecrackers to usher in prosperity and drive evil spirits away. The traditions have a more commendable side to it— it makes the evening colorful, it brings families together in emotional reunions and many other good things.

May I suggest an additional good thing to add to our traditions? May I propose that we dedicate the first hour of the year to worship and prophecy?

At the stroke of midnight, my household would worship and raise our voices to honor God in an attempt to drown the "noise" of the world. Instead of driving away spirits, we invite the Holy Spirit to join us in thanking God. Then we open our Bibles and receive a verse as a guide for the New Year, even as we consult Scripture again and again throughout the year.

This additional tradition has brought me closer to God's Word and has taught me to be guided by it. It makes my every day a New Year's Day — a celebration of the Word!

Rolly Espana (rolly@homeliving.com.ph)

Reflection: Take stock of your habits and traditions. Is it a bane or a boon?

Lord, remove all my bad habits and replace it with good ones that are led by Your Spirit.

St. Sylvester, pray for us.

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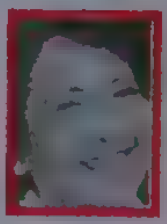
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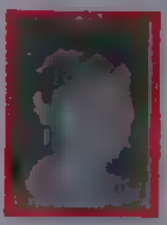
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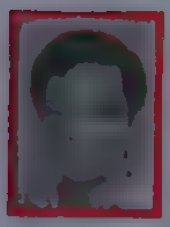
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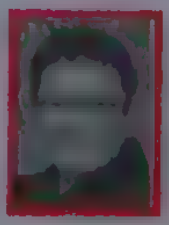
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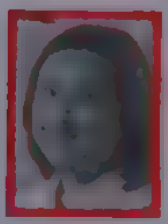


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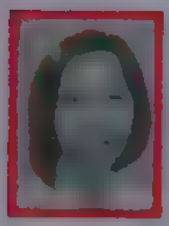
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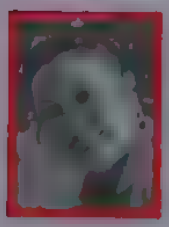
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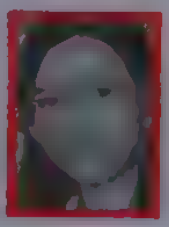
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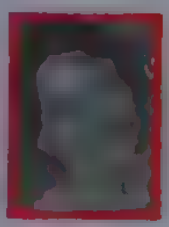
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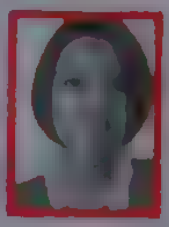
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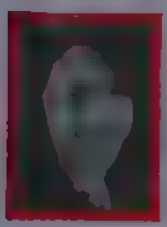
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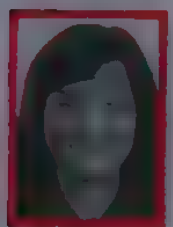
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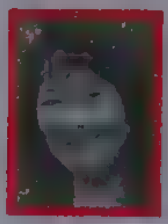
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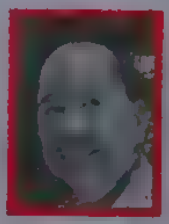
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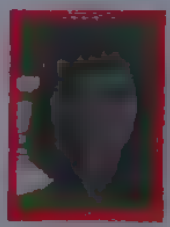
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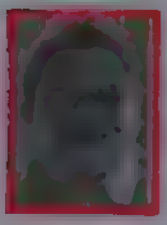
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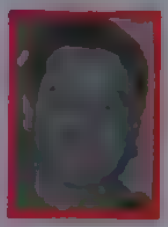
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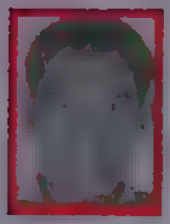


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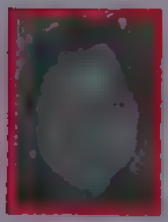
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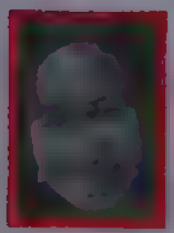
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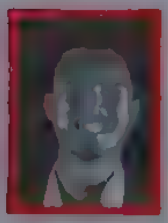
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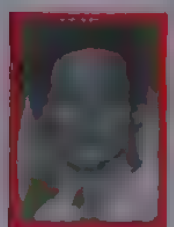
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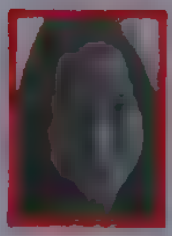
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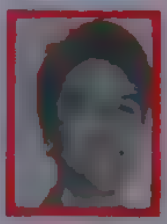
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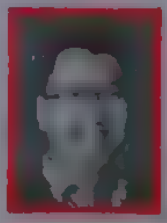
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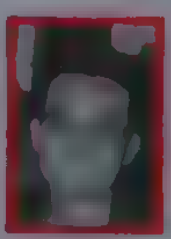
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