

17th March 2021 - Death to Self and Alive to Glory – Wednesday Prayer Meeting

We are coming towards the end of Lent and we are looking at the Sunday readings and journeying with the Church through the revelations God is giving us. That's what we have been doing, so I won't go back because we went to the theme of sacrifice and many other places. Last week we were dealing with the power of God's grace and we looked at four things that happened in the human life:

1. We fall
2. We burn
3. We return
4. A miracle - God's salvation comes into our lives.

We fall, we have a tendency to fall. Then we burn because if you walk away from God's will it will create discomfort in our life. Your conscience is disturbed, you lose your peace, you have internal restlessness, you have a lot of other issues taking place in your life when you are not right with God. You call that burning. You also burn outside. Issues come, the grace of God is not on our lives, things become difficult and hard, blocks come into our lives and there are big issues. We burn and then the burning invites us to the third one, we return like what we saw from the Israelites.

What happened to them? They got sick of eating manna in the desert so they said, "We don't want this. We want something else. We wish we remember the onions of Egypt." When you go abroad suddenly you miss something you never even think of, like pol sambol. You eat all the foreign food but after some time you wish for kiribath, pol sambol and katta sambol. You don't even think about it here. These people were thinking about onions. God got really upset. He was giving them free meals, sending it on the ground and they were getting disgusted with it. The God of the Old Testament, the God written into the book of Exodus, the author who writes through his human understanding. God looks a little juvenile, He gets pretty angry and says, "Not only will I give them meat but I will give it until it comes out of their noses!"

Then Moses seems to be pacifying God. Moses says, "O God if you destroy all these people what on earth will happen? People will say you brought them to the desert and destroyed them." Then God grumbles a little bit and says okay and then He sends the snakes. When the snakes come they turn to God, but in actual fact you can't say they are repenting because they are frightened they are dying and that's why they turned to God and say, "God forgive us." A lot of us are like that. We give up sin because we are getting punished for it, we are getting thrashed for it, our business is failing, our problems are happening. So we say, "Please God, I won't sin anymore. Please get my business blessed."

The same thing happened in the desert with these people. When they returned God turns it into a blessing. We saw it in the Old Testament from the history of Israel. They rebelled against God, they lived their own life in Jerusalem in 500 BC. Then Jeremiah spoke to them, people warned them but they never listened to the prophets. They rejected the word and Babylon comes and takes them captive. Now they are burning because they killed people in Jerusalem and took the others captive and made them slaves.

There we saw Psalm 137 - by the rivers of Babylon. I told you how Boney M made it into a gyrating, genuflecting, jumping hit but that's the saddest psalm of the 150 psalms. By the rivers of Babylon, they remembered, they returned, they repented. What happened? The king of Babylon was defeated, and with

the defeat of the king of Babylon came the return to Jerusalem. Within 60 years, they were back in Jerusalem and the promise is given to us.

This principle holds good for our life as well. We have a tendency to fall, we have a tendency to burn. When you have a tendency to burn, it's an invitation to return. When you return to God, God is able to do something better than what you had before.

In the gospel reading of last week, we were invited, like Moses told the people to look at the bronze snake. They asked to look at the bronze snake so they could look at what they did. When they looked at it they repented and they were healed. In the New Testament we are told to look at the cross. That's the beauty of it. When you keep looking at the cross things fall into place.

From our childhood we were told to look at the cross and see how Christ suffered -- he suffered like this, he suffered like that. That's all true. But I think we have to look at the cross because the cross is the light. Why is it the light? Because in various lights you see various things. For example in twilight you see differently. Have you noticed people see ghosts only in the night? Have you met anyone who has seen a ghost during the day? (Except of course those who are wearing too much makeup.) You only see ghosts in the night because you can't see clearly and it plays on the fears of your life as well. I remember once they found out that a man had died out of fright and fear. They were wondering what on earth he was frightened about to die. When they looked around they realized it was a branch of a lime tree. In the twilight it was shaking and it was as if he was seeing a person calling him; he got such a shock he got a heart attack and died. This is a true event. Why? Because the light was not clear.

When you have clear light, pure light, you see everything properly. Therefore you can call it the light of the cross. What is the light that the cross shows on us? Last week I preached it but I preached it fast and I thought going through it slowly can be really helpful to take this to prayer, sit at the feet of Jesus and pray with it so that the Lord can really take you deeper this time of Lent.

When you look at the cross, we see a man:

1. Loved enough to be rejected by all

That means Jesus is so deeply loved by God the Father that he takes the risk of being rejected by everybody here on earth. Loved enough to be rejected by all. Actually it's a great strength, it's a great power. He was so deeply loved by God the Father that he took the risk of being rejected by everybody. I remember in school once there was this boy who sneaked on us in the hostel and the warden warned us, if you touch him you're out of the hostel and you're gone. So we couldn't do anything to him but we found an effective method. We stopped talking to him and when he came to sit somewhere, we walked off. He didn't last two weeks and he left the school. I feel so bad now because as children you don't work it out in your mind. The most effective psychological attack was rejection. When people are rejected sometimes they commit suicide. But Jesus was so loved by God that he took the risk of being rejected by the whole world. That's real power.

2. Rich enough to become poor

He lost everything including the shirt on his back. He lost everything. He took the risk of losing everything because he knew in the Father, in the kingdom, he knew he was rich. We are looking at the light that is coming from the cross.

3. Strong enough to become vulnerable to death itself

He allowed himself to be manhandled, he allowed himself to be carried, to be taken, to be crucified and he didn't do anything about it because he was strong enough in his trust in God.

4. Secure enough to forgive all those who attacked him

We can't forgive people because we are insecure. If we forgive them don't know what they will do next. If you forgive them this time the next time don't know what they will do. We are afraid to forgive. Jesus was secure enough to forgive. The light that is shining through the cross.

Now when I kept looking at the cross, I saw two sides to it. One side is called the divine side, or seeing it from God's eyes. You look at the cross from God's eyes. On the other side you look at the cross from the human side, from the natural side. You look at Jesus on the cross, if you look at it from the human side, here is a man abandoned by everyone including his main disciple, including the guy who was handling the money, who ran away and betrayed him, all the others who went and hid -- abandoned by everyone and they even chose Barabbas over him. That is the human side of the cross; it's a curse. But on the divine side, deeply loved by God the Father because he was doing the will of the Father. The Father was deeply loving him. "This is my beloved son," He said. So can you see there are two sides to the cross? One side is the human side and one side is the divine side.

Again, on the human side, you can call Jesus a deluded fool. Why? Because he would have expected God to save him. How do you know he expected God to save him? Because he cried on the cross and said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Why did he allow himself to be caught? Why did he become a victim? Was he fooled? Was he deluded? That's what the high priests and Romans told him. They laughed at him and said, "You think you are the king of the Jews? You think you can destroy the temple and build it in three days? Delusion. You're living in a delusion." That's the human side. On the divine side you have the great wisdom of God. Death itself is about to be defeated through this foolish act of faith - trusting in God, death itself is going to be defeated. Two sides of the cross.

Then on the human side, weak and powerless. They told him, "If you are the Son of God, why don't you come down?" If I was Jesus I would have got down, jumped off the cross and showed my hands and said I was fine. You know what would have happened? Everyone will worship him. He would have won the day, the film finishes in glory, everyone bows down before Jesus and says he is the Son of God. But salvation would not have been won for the world. On the human side, weak and powerless. On the divine side, what was he doing on the cross? He was reconciling heaven and earth, he was bringing eternal life, eternity to the human situation. The same thing is being looked at from two sides.

So when you look at the cross, you can ask yourself the question in this week: From which side am I looking at the cross? Am I seeing it as foolishness? Am I seeing it as weakness? Am I seeing it as something that shouldn't have happened? Or am I just sympathising with the sufferings of Christ, how sorry and sad I am he died, that we don't see the divine element of the cross? When he was most abandoned, he was closest to God. When he was seen as the weakest, he was the strongest because he was reconciling heaven and earth. When he had lost everything, he had actually possessed everything and became the Lord of the universe.

The question is important because, the next question we have to ask is, from which side do you look at your own life? Do you look at it from the divine side or do we look at it from the human side? When we

look at it from the human side, you want God to give you glory, honour, power in this world. Why? Because that's what we call a blessing. "God blessed me." How is that? "Nobody else got the promotion, only I got it. Praise the Lord! I got the breakthrough and I got through money. No one else got it. Praise the Lord!" That's humanly explainable Christianity, but it is limited to this world.

What about the one who got the promotion and crashed in the car and died? Died with the promotion. What happened to the person who won the biggest amount of money and lost his soul, and destroyed his own family and goes to hell? Then you begin to realise we have limited our understanding of God to this earth and to the things of this earth. So it's good to take this to prayer in the next week. Look at the cross, see the wisdom of God against the wisdom of humanity; see the love of God against the love of humanity; see the weakness of God against the weakness of humanity and suddenly you realise this is an amazing gift from God -- the light of the cross.

You can take the recording of this, you can download it from YouTube and take it to prayer and you keep allowing the Holy Spirit to teach you how to look at the cross and then to see ourselves in that same reflection.

Today the topic is: Death to Self Leads to Divine Glory. Death to self is really a deadly thing because death to self is unhappiness, but the readings of today will tell us death to self is the doorway to divine glory. That's our base. In the first reading from the Old Testament we have a problem that is being dealt with for several weeks now:

Jeremiah 31:31

"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."

God is saying: The first agreement failed so let's try another agreement. The USA is trying to have an agreement with Iran. The first agreement failed, that was thrown out so let's have another agreement. Here God is saying: Let's have a new agreement. Then He explains why:

Jeremiah 31:32

It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord.

The problem was not in the law because God gave us laws to make us live happily. The problem is in the human nature because if everyone follows the law of God, everyone lives happily but the problem is we don't want to follow the law because there is a brokenness inside of us. I remember when we were in school, our main target was how do you break the law and get away with it? I think boys have that strongly in their system. I remember in the hostel the greatest adventure that boys did was they slipped out of bed in the night, they made a dummy of themselves and covered it with a blanket and went for the 9:30 show, then came back at 12:30 in the night, slipped back into the dormitory and the next morning he is a hero. We broke the law and got away with it.

But why is there a law to say you can't go? Because there are so many other dangers that the mind at that age cannot work out. Somebody can kidnap you, you can be run over, somebody with a selfish motive can

catch hold of you, can abuse you, can destroy your life, can kill you, the people in charge of the hostel are responsible to the parents. That's why they want to make sure the law is kept. You don't see any of that. You see only the joy of breaking the law. Why do we think like that? Because something is broken inside.

Even today we see the same thing in the grownup world -- people who never mature to understand the necessity of law break the law for quick profits. In the end they break themselves and they destroy the lives of others.

God is saying now, these people, something is wrong with them and giving them the law is not enough.

Jeremiah 31:33

This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people."

He says, "I will put it in their minds and write it in their hearts. Then what will happen? It will naturally follow the laws of God, naturally obey His commandments. Why? Because that's coming from within.

Jeremiah 31:34

No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

God is saying, "I am going to write the law into their hearts, I am going to reveal my name to them in the most powerful name possible."

In the New Testament, God tells us how He is going to do it. In the gospel, the gospel writers reveal to us how God is going to write this law into our hearts. John 12:20-33 is the reading but I'm not going to take the first verses because of the time and I need to jump to the proper verse. Let me give you the answer first and then I'll go to explaining. Actually, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ God is writing the law into our hearts. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit being sent down, He is writing the law into our hearts. He begins to dwell inside our hearts. This is the amazing thing. But this reading explains how this happens and inviting us, in Lent, to find this beautiful place.

John 12:23

Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

When you look at the human side, to be glorified means, "I'm going to win the award." Everyone is going to come to the BMICH and they are going to call my name, and when I'm coming up everyone is clapping and cheering and glorifying me. Then when I get on the stage everyone says, "Look at this man or this woman! Here is number one," and everyone cheers. Isn't that what glorified is? The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. We have to ask from which side Jesus is talking - the divine side or the human side. I explained to you the human side, now Jesus explains what the divine side is:

John 12:24

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains only a single seed, but if it dies it produces many seeds.

What is he talking about? Glory, being glorified. Now he is saying to have that glory he has to die. Die to self. Die in the flesh. He says: When I die, many other people will also start to live. This is the deeper meaning of sacrifice. That's why we do penance, sacrifice and mortification, because it's sharing in the death of Christ. Jesus is saying, divine glory is to die to self. Why? Because you will inherit eternal life, you will live beyond this life here on earth. Let's say the person who is glorified at the BMICH as the greatest and best gets a heart attack, what happens to all the glory? It's sent to the grave. 2-3 days max, after that sent into the grave. If you try to live you die. In the Divine Law, if you die to yourself you are opening yourself to the eternal power of God. This is the beauty of the message of the gospel. If you forget this we have lost the deeper meaning of the gospel.

John 12:25

The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

How can you hate your life? Can you kill yourself? Have you ever tried if you can squeeze your own neck and die? You can't. How do you hate yourself according to the gospel? How do you die to yourself according to the gospel? The next verse will explain it so clearly:

John 12:26

Whoever serves me must follow me...

Here is the beautiful answer. How does one die while living? He tells us to die while we are living. How do you do that? You do that by choosing to follow Christ. What do you mean by follow Christ? I have my desire, I have my dreams, I have all what I have worked out for my life, but I place it at His feet and say: Whatever you want is what I want. That's dying. Every time I say yes to Jesus against my will that's dying. So this dying, is not saying, "Lord, I sacrificed this and this and this for you." Jesus asks, "Who asked you to sacrifice all that?" "But I want to die for you." "Okay, then you give me that." "That I can't give! Anything but that." Whoever serves me must follow me. What do you mean by follow? Asking the Lord what His will is and saying yes to that.

Sometimes in my own life I find, making the decision is very simple. I know what to do to solve my problem. But the problem is, is that what God and Jesus wants me to do? Sometimes I wait and sometimes people ask me, "Why are you waiting? Isn't it obvious that you should do this?" I tell them, "No, I need to be sure it is the will of Jesus and the Father." Why is that? Otherwise you will find yourself fighting God and sometimes even in religion you can be fighting God. God can be against you and you don't even know it. Why? Because you're doing what you want. Then he says, the moment you do his will:

John 12:26 continued

...and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.

In other words, we will have glory, but that glory won't come from human beings; it will come from the Father. It will come into our hearts as we obey Jesus right here and now, and it will be fully given to us when we meet Him in eternity.

Here is the death in the gospel. Dying is not choosing what to do for God. My will is surrendered to God's will. In these days as I pray I ask the Lord: Show me but don't just show me, because once I know God's

will I must have the power to do it also because sometimes it's so hard. So I say: Lead me through it, guide me through it. That's the journey. Even Jesus had to struggle for it. It's beautifully given to us in the next verse:

John 12:27

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'?"

This is John's Gethsemane. There is no Gethsemane account in the gospel of John. Those scholars who have studied the gospel of John say the gospel actually ended with the 13th chapter. It is later that 14-17 were evolved and added in the development of the disciples of John. In 12 he is actually in Gethsemane. Gethsemane is not just a place but an experience. What is this experience? His heart is troubled because he knows this is the will of God and his human nature is rebelling. The two sides of the cross -- the human look and the divine look.

John 12:27 continued

...Father save me from this hour...

Is that familiar? Where do you find that? In Gethsemane.

John 12:27 continued

...No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.

He says, "I came to live here to die." It is said that every human being came here to live and they died, but one human came to die and he lives. Who is that? Jesus Christ. So when you die you live, if you live you die.

John 12:28

Father, glorify your name!

That's God's language for Jesus' words in Gethsemane: Not my will but your will be done. Father, glorify your name is let your will be done. He aligned himself with God. The beautiful thing is, the moment he aligned himself with God, see what happened:

John 12:28 continued

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it and will glorify it again."

God spoke. The moment you align yourself with God's will you hear the voice of God. When I say you hear the voice of God, it's not just God talking to you and saying, "Hallo, how are you? What are you doing?" It's not that kind of voice but the voice of absolute inner peace. It's the oxygen of heaven. There is absolute inner peace. That's God's voice. There is stillness, you become still and there is beautiful clarity. It's as if the whole world was painted anew, so clear and it seemed so effortless to say yes to God.

We are looking at trying to find language but it can't be explained in language. I have never heard God speaking. If He said, "Hi Lalith how are you?" I would die of fright. But certainly I have heard Him and now only I can decipher it and say this is how you hear it. You have this terrible struggle because your nature fights God's mature and then you say be glorified. Let your will be done. You just surrender yourself in the

struggle. Suddenly the moment you have reached that place, absolute peace, you are at rest, there is clarity and everything slows down and everything becomes so vivid. You have heard His voice.

Do you know that you will be ruined after that? No pleasure will satisfy you anymore, no achievements in the world will hold you anymore, no greatness will hold you captive because you have touched that space. That's what we desire, that's what we have been created for - to know that place. Some receive the gift here on earth to touch it. Many look at the wrong side of the cross, like these men in the next verse:

John 12:29

The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered...

God was speaking deeply into the heart of Jesus but for the men roundabout they heard thunder. That's what is happening in the world. On the wrong side of the cross everything is noise, not a voice. It's disturbing. That's why religion and a journey with God is a disturbance to many people.

John 12:29 continued

...others said an angel had spoken to him.

This writing the law in our hearts, this God speaking deep in our spirit has been given to us through the death of Jesus Christ. He said unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains only a seed. So when he died in obedience to God's will and he lost himself, he actually rose three days later as the Glorified Lord. Now, the Risen Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit has come back to live inside of us.

That would never have been possible if he did not die on the cross. It never would have been possible. He had to die in order for him to come back and live inside us. What fascinates me is the Risen Lord because the Risen Lord is hybrid. Jesus the Risen Lord has the human side to him because he had wounds. He showed his wounds and then he asked them, "Can I have something to eat?" Who said? The Risen Lord. In other words there is a human side to him. But He is also having the divine side completely. He could hear what they were saying when he was not there, he could walk through the doors, he could appear in one place and then in another and he could ascend into heaven.

By his death, he became resurrected; by the power of the Holy Spirit if you open your heart, He will come to live inside of you. When He does that He will write the law into your mind, He will give us a new heart. Ezekiel 36 says He will take away your heart of stone and He will give you a heart of flesh. He will pour His spirit into your heart. If we lose this element of Christianity we have made it a religion. If you lose this dimension we have made it a religion. That's why every mass we celebrate this - his death and his resurrection. He comes to live inside us through the Holy Eucharist. That's why we go to the Eucharist. We celebrate His death, we celebrate His resurrection and then we receive Him into our lives. Who is he? He is having that human element and having the divine element and he is living inside of me.

What do I do? I surrender and die for Him inside. That's my inner journey. I commune with Him, I worship Him, I have intimacy with Him, I sit in His heart and presence, I find solace with Him, my loneliness and sadness are dealt by Him, I have His intimacy and companionship and in that I learn to give up my flesh and surrender to Him. Like Jesus, like mentioned in the gospel, we will have the struggle. In that struggle we hold on to Him. We remain with Him, we sit in His presence. That's what we do with the Eucharist. Quietly His energy is given into our lives.

Without that energy it is only self effort. Jesus said in John 15:4, I am the vine and you are the branches. In our prayer time, in our worship time, very simply, all the brokenness and all the struggle of my inner life I send through the vine into His heart. He takes it into His heart and puts it into the root of the Father. Then from the Father and His heart comes the nature of God, divine light comes into my heart. There is the flow of blood from Jesus. His perfect nature, His thoughts coming into my thoughts, His emotions flowing into my emotions, His nature coming into my nature, my brokenness given back to Him as I remain in worship.

When that happens death to self becomes natural. We missed the essential part of the puzzle. We thought death to self is my effort and God rewards that, so I am trying to die to myself, I can't so I fool around, pretending that I'm dying to myself but actually unable to do so. Here is the miracle of Jesus who has died, who has risen and by the power of the Holy Spirit has now come to live inside of us. Worship is to recognize Him and worship Him, to acknowledge Him and to give Him room and space inside us. When I can't do what He wants, most of the time I know what it is but I can't do it, you fall at His feet and you remain. In that relationship, in that intimacy, in that exchange, one moment comes when you are tipped over to surrender. The moment that happens you hear the voice -- this is my beloved son. In him I am well pleased. You won't hear the voice in your ear but you'll hear it with the peace that comes in your heart, the kind that comes with being loved by God. The beauty of that beautiful internal rest and clarity that comes into your heart. You have touched the moment of heaven.

I find the change. When I'm driving the car something that really annoys me is people who cheat on the road. In Kirulapone there is a traffic light and all the time there are two policemen on the other side. So people don't want to stay in the queue but they want to cross quick also. So they come near your vehicle and they paste themselves, waiting so that the moment the traffic light turns green they put you to the side and go. That really gets my goat. I don't say anything, I won't show anything but internally I lose my rest and my peace and I'm disturbed. But I've noticed, when I sit an hour before the blessed sacrament and this whole peace and rest of God comes in, the same thing happens but it doesn't reach your heart because there is something filling it -- the presence of God.

I'm thinking I wish it's 24 hours. We are human so 2 hours later we come back to our natural state but that's to be expected because we are living here on this earth. That's why we keep returning. We know we are sinners. Our natural tendency is to walk in the natural person but we keep returning and as we keep doing that, I'm sure the capacity to remain will grow stronger and stronger.

Let's learn to die and enjoy it. It's a paradox. The other world, the divine life is waiting for us. So you don't have to wait until you die to go there. The divine life is waiting for us here. Waiting in the blessed sacrament, waiting in the Eucharist, waiting in your prayer time, waiting in the worship, waiting for us to come to Him.