

VARIOUS WRITINGS

Fourth Edition

BY
ANDREW JEROME
YEUNG

Acknowledgments

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VARIOUS WRITINGS

By Andrew Jerome Yeung

4th edition.

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Ask receive, search find

(A). Internet

“What is blindness? How is it healed?” Do you want to know? On your computer or smartphone enter the questions into a search engine and you will receive answers. If some answers are not good enough search other engines, and keep asking till you find all the information you want.

Similarly, if you want to know about other topics, do the same: ask receive, search find.

(B). Jesus

In the Bible, Jesus says: “Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; everyone who searches finds; everyone who knocks will have the door opened.” (Lk 11:9-10, NJB)

Here are some examples of those who asked Jesus and received.

As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind beggar on the road asked him for mercy – the healing of his blindness. The people scolded him and told him to

keep quiet. But he persisted by shouting even louder. Jesus stopped, called him over and, on hearing his request, said to him: “Receive your sight. Your faith has saved you.” (Lk 18:42, NJB) At once his sight returned. He followed Jesus, glorifying God. And all the people gave praise to God.

One day Jesus was teaching inside a jam-packed house. Some men brought a paralytic on a stretcher seeking to ask Jesus for a healing and receiving a miracle; but they could not even get close. They persevered by climbing onto the roof, removed some tiles, and lowered the sick man into the room. When Jesus saw their determination and their great faith, he said to the sick man, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” And then, to prove to the doubters that he could forgive sins, he added: “I tell you, rise, take your mat and go home.” He got on his feet immediately, picked up the mat on which he had been lying, and went home healed, glorifying God. All the people were amazed; filled with awe, they gave glory to God. (See Lk 5:17–26, NIV)

At Cana in Galilee, a royal official whose son was severely ill in Capernaum heard that Jesus had arrived

in Galilee from Judea. He made the trip to meet Jesus, and humbly asked him to come and heal his son who was near death. Jesus complained, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” Unperturbed, the official continued to beg, “Sir, come down before my son dies.” Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed what Jesus said. During the day-long return journey to his house, his servants came to meet him on the way with the exciting news: the son’s fever had subsided, and he had received his health back. Upon enquiring when this took place, the official discovered that it happened at the exact hour when Jesus said: “Your son will live.” He and his entire household came to believe. (See Jn 4:46–53, RSV)

The next example is from Luke’s Gospel. “When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. There a centurion’s servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, ‘This man deserves to

have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.’ So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: ‘Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, “Go,” and he goes; and that one, “Come,” and he comes. I say to my servant, “Do this,” and he does it.’ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, ‘I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.’ Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.” (Lk 7:1-10, NIV).

Before Jesus died on the cross, a thief who had been crucified next to him, ignoring the impertinent criminal crucified on the other side of Jesus, asked of the Lord, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Right at that minute he received the assurance: “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (See Lk 23:42, 43, RSV)

What is the difference between (A) and (B)?

The internet *answers questions* by giving lots of *information*, independence and self-satisfaction. Jesus *answers requests for favours* by giving lots of *love and mercy, miracles, healing, faith, forgiveness, eternal salvation, life, and joy*.

We started out asking: “What is blindness? How is it healed?” Check the internet; but bear in mind that blindness does not refer to the eye only, but to the heart and the soul as well.

In your daily life, examine where you place the balance between (A) and (B). How many hours do you spend on (A)? How many hours do you spend on (B)?

Whatever you need, whomever you ask, give proportionate time to the Lord. Never forget that Jesus alone can make this promise: “In all truth I tell you, anything you ask from the Father he will grant in my name... Ask and you will receive, and so your joy will be complete.” (Jn 16:23, 24, NJB)

Inexhaustible Treasure

(1). Jesus tells his followers: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.” (Mt 6:19–21, NAB)

In the Gospel according to John, we see a boy who put his heart in the right place. He gave to Jesus his treasure of the day – the uneaten lunch which his mom packed for him as he left the house that morning – and was shown the amazing effect instantly. Imagine the surprise in his wide-opened eyes, and the smile of astonishment across his little face when Jesus multiplied the contents of his lunch-bag big time! How exceedingly delighted he must have been as he thought about it that night and throughout the rest of his existence on earth and in heaven. How happy he was for being of help to so many who needed his generosity. How joyful he is now as he prays for us to follow his example.

Here is the account. The apostle Andrew informed Jesus: “‘There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?’ Jesus said, ‘Make the people sit down.’ Now there was much grass in the place; so the men sat down, in number about five thousand. Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.” (Jn 6:9–11, RSV)

In Jesus’ hands, a few fish burgers given to him by a courageous kid could be used to satisfy the hunger of thousands. How many souls will be affected for all eternity if we heroically offer up some of our possessions, talents, energy and time in doing good, and presenting the merits to Jesus for him to multiply and distribute!

(2). Jesus stated: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail.” (Lk 12:32–33, NIV) Jesus’ exhortation is intended to encourage us to

generosity and sacrifice, hoping to spur us on to works of charity. When we do as he says, we gain unfailing treasure in heaven.

It goes without saying that in the same action, we also obtain spiritual graces for our own families, relatives, friends, and loved ones.

The wonderful passage, incidentally, provides the rationale behind which we appeal to saints for help – saints who may have lived a long, long time ago. By their holy actions, they accumulated stockpiles of treasures in Heaven that “will not wear out” and “will never fail”, and the Lord shares his glory with them by giving from their store of blessed rewards.

(3). When we ask Jesus for things, we should keep in mind that his treasures are, likewise, inexhaustible. They can never be depleted. Whatever he gives us now does not diminish the amount of future gifts that he will give to us or to others. We can request a hundred things, and he will still have plenty more to give to us at a later date, and to the rest of the world. Even when he grants our smallest wishes it does not take away the possibility of more important prayers being answered.

Jesus invites us, “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” (Jn 16:24, RSV) Therefore, let us ask him for every good thing. Ask away, and build up a trustful relationship with the Lord. He is a very magnanimous and loving friend.

He says, “I have loved you just as the Father has loved me.” (Jn 15:9, NJB)

“Your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.” (Lk 12:32, NIV)

(4). The Lukan passage in (2) contains the final part of the response which Jesus gave to the rich young man who ran up to him, knelt down, and asked: “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mk 10:17, RSV) Remember what happened? Jesus told him: “You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” (Mk 10:21, RSV) On hearing this, “his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful.” (Mk 10:22, RSV) Unlike the little boy, he kept his heart clinging tightly to where it used to be.

There are people who wish to follow Jesus perfectly, but their inner desire for acceptance by their

peers reveal an inordinate attachment to wealth, affluence, and human approval – not much different from their materialistically-minded buddies.

What sadness this could lead to! Jesus says to his disciples: “I tell you, do not worry about your life and what you will eat, or about your body and what you will wear.” (Lk 12:22, NAB) These words are meant for the poor in spirit, but they can certainly apply to the rich who worry – if they were to start giving away significant amounts of money and possessions – how they would appear to the world if they suddenly could not afford to live in keeping with their former luxurious lifestyles, or eat at the same trendy restaurants, or wear the latest fashionable clothes.

Jesus says: “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.” (Mt 6:24–25, NIV)

Little Thoughts along the Way of the Cross

Do not wait until Lent to pray the Way of the Cross. Come close to Jesus more often by spending a few short moments with him every week in a manner like the sample below. Ask him to teach you what to think about him, what to learn from him, how you can be like him, in what way you are already following in his footsteps, how you have used his good example to deal with conflicts in your family, in the workplace, with acquaintances, and with those who treat you as an enemy. Share with him your joys, your sorrows, your concerns of the day. Thank him.

It is true that this Way of the Cross version does not carry with it any official plenary indulgence from the Church. If you want, you can pray a version which is connected to an indulgence. How often you do that each year is for you to count.

Every Catholic church has the fourteen Stations of the Cross displayed prominently on the walls. Why is that?

The Enchiridion of Indulgences (Norms On Indulgences, #26 and #29) shows how to gain a plenary indulgence for making the Stations of the Cross.

To gain a plenary indulgence through making the Stations, it is necessary to move from one Station to the next, 14 in total, to meditate on the sufferings of Our Lord (no specific prayers are required), and to have the intention of gaining the indulgence. (Indulgences can always be applied to the Souls in Purgatory.)

Moreover, “To acquire a plenary indulgence it is necessary to perform the work to which the indulgence is attached and to fulfill the following three conditions: sacramental confession, eucharistic Communion, and prayer for the intention of the Sovereign Pontiff. It is further required that all attachment to sin, even venial sin, be absent.”

“The condition of praying for the intention of the Sovereign Pontiff is fully satisfied by reciting one Our Father and one Hail Mary; nevertheless, each one is free to recite any other prayer according to his piety and devotion.”

1st Station: Jesus is condemned to death

Jesus, at the time when you were sentenced to die by crucifixion, no Gospel had been compiled and no theological treatises had been written to expound on what you were doing. You faced your sacrifice silently, offering no explanation to anyone. Never once did you seek sympathy. You knew what you had to do, and did it for the eternal benefit of all.

2nd Station: Jesus carries his cross

Jesus, you were insulted, beaten, disfigured, and paraded through the streets like a filthy criminal in rags. The spectators regarded you as a disgraced failure. But, no matter what people thought, you persisted on your sacred mission without telling your foes you were doing the greatest good for them. You bore no bitterness; you did not fight back. You remained constantly meek and humble of heart. You cared not for human praise.

3rd Station: Jesus falls the first time

Jesus, you collapsed along the way. After enduring an all-night ordeal of brutality and torment, you had no

energy left. You could have used this fall as an excuse to call off the rest of the humiliating undertaking; but you got up and pressed onward.

4th Station: Jesus meets his afflicted mother

Jesus, I can imagine your Mother saying: “Son, you are doing the right thing. No matter what vicious things people say about you, keep up the good work.

“I have asked your Father: ‘Our Son’s Passion is excruciatingly agonizing. Please reduce the time of his suffering by giving the same suffering to me.’”

5th Station: Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus

Jesus, you accepted assistance from a stranger. Even though he was only forced into giving you a hand, in return you inspired the evangelists to include in the Bible his name and those of his sons and his village. Lord, how much more will you reward me if I do things for you voluntarily!

6th Station: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Going against the current, and without the slightest concern for her own safety and reputation, Veronica

braved the wrath of the soldiers and the onlookers by coming to your aid. Jesus, whenever I follow her example of devotedness to you with selfless bravery, I will become more and more your true icon in my heart and in my soul.

7th Station: Jesus falls a second time

Jesus, you were whipped and pushed, and fell again. You got back on your feet, not because you were coerced, but because of your immense love for me and your desire to save me.

8th Station: Jesus consoles the women of Jerusalem

Jesus, you always respected women, never taking advantage of them or preying on their sympathy and emotions. Even in your own hour of need, you made sure to remind them to take care.

In the four gospels, I have seen how kindly you treated mothers, widows, little girls, and women of all ages – sinners and the virtuous alike. You were always so thoughtful and considerate towards each one of them. Lord, I want to be like you.

9th Station: Jesus falls the third time

Jesus, you summoned up your last ounce of energy to complete your mission for my sake. Thank you.

10th Station: Jesus is stripped of his garments

Jesus, you submitted yourself to humiliation on my behalf in advance; that is why, time and time again, even when I could have been put to shame, I wasn't.

For your love does not apply solely to my life after death. Your love is concerned with every situation in my life now. Jesus, never should I live in darkness, with a shadow hanging over my head; when I surrender each difficulty into your hands, the light of your grace shines on all seemingly unsolvable problems. Thank you, Jesus.

And Lord, help me never to embarrass anyone.

11th Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross

Jesus, you endured unbearable pains so that I do not have to suffer much. Lord, every time I ask, you deliver me from all tribulations – mental, physical and spiritual. You never fail to make my life easier.

And Jesus, help me never to harm anybody.

12th Station: Jesus dies on the cross

Jesus, you loved me so much that even if I were the only person who needed redemption, you would have suffered for me. “The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Gal 2:20, NIV) Thank you, Lord.

13th Station: Jesus is taken down from the cross

Jesus, why did you create me? For Heaven, of course! Nothing less! Without consulting me, you fashioned me; was it for suffering or for disaster? Certainly not! You are God, what you do must be for good. It cannot be otherwise.

Thank you for creating me and redeeming me from my sins, keeping the door open for me to live in eternal happiness. Thank you for directing me onto the right path every step of the way.

14th Station: Jesus is laid in the sepulcher

Jesus, with the help of your grace, I resolve not to sin against you anymore. I resolve to live in simplicity and absolute trust in your unparalleled kindness towards me.

Jesus and private prayer

Yes, it is good to pray with family and friends and parishioners, or in prayer groups, or at charismatic meetings and conferences accompanied by music and the raising of hands. It can be very fruitful and exhilarating.

Still, sometimes, do as Jesus did: pray alone in secret! Watch.

Near the beginning of his ministry in Capernaum, after teaching in a synagogue, Jesus drove out an unclean spirit from a man, and, on the same day cured Simon's mother-in-law of a severe fever. That evening, they brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons. The whole town gathered at the door, and he drove out many demons and healed many who had various diseases. "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." (Mk 1:35, NIV)

After healing a leper, Jesus ordered him not to tell anyone. “Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” (Lk 5:15-16, NIV)

As soon as Jesus finished feeding the five thousand by multiplying two fish and five loaves, he made his disciples get into the boat, and dismissed the crowds. “After doing so, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When it was evening he was there alone.” (Mt 14:23, NAB)

“In those days he departed to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God. When day came, he called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also named apostles...” (Lk 6:12-13, NAB)

Jesus teaches: “When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their

reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” (Mt 6:5-8, NAB)

“This is my Body”

“Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’” (Mt 26:26-28, RSV)

Similar sayings are in the Gospel according to Luke and Mark, but not in the Gospel according to John – where his Last Supper scene describes the washing of the Apostles’ feet. The discourse on Holy Communion in John, however, is found in Chapter Six, starting at verse 35 and intensifying from verse 48 onwards.

“I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world” (Jn 6:51, NJB).

“In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (Jn 6:53, NJB).

“For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink” (Jn 6:55, NJB).

The above three verses are parts of Jesus’ teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. Below are the reactions from some of his listeners. “After hearing it, many of his followers said, ‘This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it?’... After this, many of his disciples went away and accompanied him no more” (Jn 6:60, 66, NJB).

Various Christian communities like to interpret Jesus’ sayings literally. The disciples described above certainly did. But, unlike some of those Christian communities, it was not the reason why the disciples stayed with him. It was the reason why they left him!

While they were walking off, an astounding thing happened. Jesus did not shout out after them in panic: “Wait. Stop. Please don’t go. I used the wrong words. I was only speaking in symbols. I don’t mean what you think I was saying. You don’t eat me – you eat bread and drink wine.” No! He let them go! He was speaking most literally!!! He meant every word he said. This was the sacrament of his limitless love, the food that would lead to life everlasting, and one tangible way he

chose to keep his promise: “I am with you always; yes, to the end of time” (Mt 28:20, NJB).

He asserted, “Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day” (Jn 6:54, NJB).

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person” (Jn 6:56, NJB).

“As the living Father sent me and I draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will also draw life from me” (Jn 6:57, NJB).

Jesus sometimes identifies himself (or someone else like John the Baptist or St. Paul identifies him) as an entity like the lamb of God, or the good shepherd, or light, love, peace, the resurrection, etc. An example is seen in the gospel according to John where Jesus says, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:6, NIV). This is different from saying, “I show the way, I proclaim the truth, I give life.” Jesus is telling us that to find the way we have to walk along him; to know

the truth we need to know him; to have life we must live in him.

So, when he says, “I am the bread of life” (Jn 6:35, NIV), what do you think he wants you to do?

Be a Shepherd

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

(Mt 9:36–38, RSV)

The prayer for labourers has risen up to the Lord countless number of times over the centuries. Have you ever considered yourself an answer to the prayer?

Who is a shepherd?

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked

him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

(Jn 21:15–17, NIV)

The person who truly loves Jesus is the one who may be called upon to feed his lambs and tend his sheep. If you love Jesus, you may be asked to shepherd for him.

The flock he gives you may not be large. It may be no more than a few relatives or friends. It may be just one member in your family or among your co-workers and acquaintances. It may even be a stranger that you meet by chance.

Knowledge and discretion

Of course, as a shepherd you should strive to become thoroughly educated in the ways of the Lord. You must work hard to become well informed. You must study; you must develop into a qualified disciple. You must not make up your own theology from your limited understanding. You must learn procedures of discernment from experienced teachers. You have to choose the right words at the right moment. You have to be tactful, discreet, wise and loving.

You have to keep his commandments, and pray for guidance and help from the Holy Spirit. Jesus said: “If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.”

(Jn 14:15–17, NIV)

What are some things you might do?

1. Genuine caring

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, *he had compassion on them*, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. (Mk 6:34, NIV)

As in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, we are told that the crowds were “like sheep without a shepherd.” In the first passage, Jesus asks for more labourers. Here he reveals how a shepherd feels and acts. “*He had compassion on them.*” His heart went out to them. He was moved with pity. He did not despise the people or hide from them, or make excuses to be rid of them. Even though he was very tired, he “began teaching them,” and he taught them “many things.”

We, too, can spend time with people who are lost for lack of direction. By kindness and understanding we can extend the comforting hand of Jesus to them. By showing our concern, we can spread his love and his good news.

By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” But he answered, “*You give them something to eat.*”
(Mk 6:35–37, NIV)

Don’t send the people away. Do something for them yourself. Without sinning or falling into temptation, do whatever you can, however little. In the above incident, when the disciples came forward with two fish and five loaves, Jesus built on their initiative and fed over five thousand people. You begin; Jesus will finish.

Youth prayer groups have been formed in many parishes throughout the world. The first steps towards organizing these were often taken by parents who saw the need for such spiritual gatherings for their sons and daughters. They did this voluntarily and without being

ordered to do so. Now their young ones have a chance to know the joy of walking with the Lord. Now they have a trustworthy companion in Jesus. Now they do not spend their Saturday nights in undesirable places or with disreputable friends. These parents are examples of concerned shepherds.

The Rosary

Another illustration of shepherding can be seen here.

Many men and women, boys and girls, pray the Rosary, and fast on bread and water, for the conversion of unbelievers and sinners. Their prayers and sacrifices are noble and unselfish means of helping to save countless numbers of human beings from unnecessary and prolonged darkness and pain. This is caring. This is love. This is compassion.

The Good Shepherd

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep.” (Jn 10:11–13, RSV)

Be like Jesus. Do not run from the problem. Stay and help. Lay down your life for God’s people. The Holy Spirit is in you by virtue of the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Use his power and the courage which he has placed in you.

2. Speaking out

Picture the scene at the first Christmas.

In the countryside close by there were shepherds out in the fields keeping guard over their sheep during the watches of the night. An angel of the Lord stood over them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified, but the angel said, “Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”

(Lk 2:8–11, NJB)

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened,

which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it *they made known* the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

(Lk 2:15–18, RSV)

As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. (Lk 2:19, NJB)

The shepherds were simple peasants. Why would anyone believe that they saw angels in the middle of the night? Why would anybody believe that they carried “good news” from “angels”? Why would even one person take them seriously about the baby in the manger being the Christ for whom all of Israel was waiting? Yet, courageously, they spoke out. “*They made known*” the message. It made the Mother of God ponder in her heart. She “treasured” their words.

To bear witness for Jesus, you simply speak out. The angel’s announcement to the shepherds was, “Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people.” Do not fear. What you say about Jesus is joyful news. It is good news. It should be shared by all.

The Gospel

Moreover, do not just speak about Jesus. Tell them to carry out what he taught. He said,

“... and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.” (Mt 28:20, NJB)

Not everyone will agree with what Jesus says. Not everyone will do all that he asks. But his words may make them wonder and think. Some may be influenced without your being aware of it.

Foul language

In Medjugorje, many homes used to display a poster which said, “U ovoj kući se ne psuje.” It means, “In this house do not swear.” This demonstrates a silent way of speaking out.

The elimination of foul language helps to control bad temper and anger, and diminishes one’s false sense of self-importance; it can promote gentleness and peace among fellow-workers and family members. It can help bring a Christian atmosphere to places where people come together.

In the Western world, it is not fashionable to place such signs in homes and offices. But if you will begin by not using vulgar expletives yourself, it might cause

others to follow your example. Let peace begin with you. To live a certain way is to speak out for that way.

Don't be shy

Never feel embarrassed by your loyalty to Jesus.

“For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

(Mk 8:38, RSV)

Make decisions in accordance with his teaching. Go off to pray even if others should ridicule you for it. Some days attend noon Mass instead of having lunch with your colleagues; take some friends with you. Acknowledge Jesus by hanging his portrait and crucifix in your home.

“He who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them.” (Jn 10:2–4, RSV)

By Baptism and Confirmation, by your love of Jesus and obedience to his commands, by your grounding in, and fidelity to, the teaching of the Church, you have entered through the gate that shepherds go through. You have the potential to be one of them. Develop that potential. A shepherd “leads them out” and “goes before them.” He is a guide, one who shows the way, one who walks in front. He starts things where there is a need.

How to wait

What are you waiting for? A more meaningful life? A better job? A physical healing? The completion of a project? A problem to go away? The conversion of a relative?

Mary

Most people are obliged to wait for one thing or another. In the gospel you will find many blessed individuals having to bear their share of waiting. Mary is a prime example. The angel Gabriel appeared to her and announced:

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.”... And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” (Lk 1:30–31, 38, RSV)

With her assent, Mary opened herself to much waiting throughout her existence. The carrying of Jesus in her womb for nine months was only the beginning.

Jesus

When Jesus was twelve years old, Joseph and Mary discovered that their son was missing on their return from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. After a three-day search, they found him in the temple, asking the learned men questions and answering theirs, astounding them with his intelligence.

His mother complained, and he gave his answer:

“My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you.” He replied, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”
(Lk 2:48–49, NJB)

Jesus yearned to start doing his Father’s work; he wanted to get on with the vocation he felt he had; his family could hardly hold him back. Yet, even with his advanced intelligence and understanding, he consented to wait. And for almost two decades he studied and worked in Nazareth, quietly growing up, and patiently getting ready for his future task.

The Apostles

The apostles waited too, though not for quite as long. Soon after his resurrection, Jesus commanded

them to proclaim to all nations repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name. But first, he said:

“I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

(Lk 24:49, NIV)

They were to await the descent of the Holy Spirit. Not until Pentecost, several days later, were they to begin their mission. It was then that they burst forth in an explosion of power given from on high.

How to Wait

Whatever we are waiting for, we should make the most of the intervening time.

How? Let us gain some skills in this matter from the apostles, from Jesus, and from his mother.

Learn from the Apostles

After being told to remain in the city until the Holy Spirit came upon them, the apostles

“returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.”

(Lk 24:52–53, NIV)

They stayed together. They benefited from each other's company and support. They missed Jesus, but, in a group, they were able to cope. They did not go about carrying sad faces and forlorn hearts. They waited with joy; they praised God; they prayed in the temple.

When we have to wait, let us do the same: staying in community with holy friends. Let us help each other, and be joyful. Since worrying and fretting do not make things any better, let us try praising God together.

Let us reserve time for prayer, especially at church in the presence of Our Eucharistic Lord, adoring him, listening to him and following his guidance. He may be priming and grooming us for an assignment that only we can be trained to perform.

Learn from Jesus

How did Jesus live before taking up his public ministry?

And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them... And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man. (Lk 2:51, 52, RSV)

Jesus placed himself under the authority of his father and mother. He lived in obedience. He remained hidden. It was not till about age thirty that he worked his first miracle at a wedding in Cana.

We, too, should be obedient to God our Father, and to Mary our mother: by keeping God's commands recorded in the Bible, and by living the messages that Our Lady passed on through her many apparitions on earth over the centuries.

“And Jesus increased in wisdom.” Many of us, as we become older, hardly become any wiser. Day after day we make the same complaints. Week after week we shed the same tears. Month after month we hold on to our hatreds and conflicts, and deal with problems through the same futile routine. We moan and groan but seldom learn from our experiences.

Jesus, on the other hand, grew in wisdom. And not only that, he also increased “in favor with God and man.” He became more and more what his Father wanted him to be; he got along better and better with his fellow human beings.

Let us seriously examine how we can improve and enhance our way of life, and how we can enrich our relationship with God and with neighbour. If we are to mature like Jesus, we should read from the gospels

every day, listening to what He says, and doing all that He tells us.

Learn from Mary

What did Mary do after being informed that she would conceive and bear a son?

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could into the hill country to a town of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth... Mary stayed with her some three months and then went home.

(Lk 1:39–40, 56, NJB)

Instead of staying cooped up in the house, moping around, and worrying about her concerns and problems, Mary went immediately to visit her saintly cousin. She went outside, she travelled. She assisted in the preparations for the birth of John the Baptist.

In the same manner, while awaiting the arrival of a future event, we should not become totally isolated. Call on good people and friends. Visit them, and invite them to visit you. Go outdoors into the fresh air and open skies. And do not just sit in your room hoping for things to happen; start something yourself. Join your parish prayer group. Cultivate holy friendships.

Volunteer some of your time and resources to help anyone who may be in need. Do not be miserly with your money.

Read the first chapter of the Gospel according to Luke and you will discover the special favour Elizabeth and Zechariah enjoyed in the sight of God. One can surmise that Mary went to see them also for the purpose of seeking their guidance. We, too, ought sometimes to ask for advice and council from a wise spiritual director, a priest, a nun, either in person or from good books or articles they may have written.

Judging also from the Spirit-filled nature of the meeting between Elizabeth and Mary (see Lk 1:39–55), we can speculate that they spent some of their time together in religious conversation and prayer. We, too, should daily devote time to pondering the things of God, and to praying.

The Hour of Deliverance

Before Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph had to return to Bethlehem to be counted in the Roman census.

And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son.
(Lk 2:6–7, RSV)

Just as the term of Mary's confinement came to completion, so will ours. The length of our waiting may be indefinite, but it is certainly infinite. We may have to wait nine months, or two decades, or a few days, but there will be an end to it all. There will finally be a moment of deliverance, of fulfillment. Then will our hearts overflow with such gratitude and peace.

Do not be impatient. Do not be cast down. Our day will come. It will come soon enough. Like the apostles, let us wait cheerfully and joyfully in prayer, supporting one another, and praising God for his far-sighted providence. Like Jesus, let us wait in obedience, improving ourselves spiritually and in other ways, growing in wisdom and in our relationship with God and with our neighbours. Like Mary, let us wait in doing good, making use of our time for the benefit of others, and getting ourselves refreshed and ready for what is to come.

Someday, like Mary, we too will give birth to Jesus – bringing Christ to those whom God has all along been preparing us to reach out to, and lead them to Him.

Mother Mary

Please examine the gospel passage below and keep these three questions at the back of your mind as you read it. In the narrative, who initiated the proceedings? Who received directives from Jesus and immediately did what they were told? What was the final result?

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

"Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim.

Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.”

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.”

What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. (Jn 2:1–11, NIV)

Jesus’ answer to his mother meant: “Why do you involve me? What has this got to do with me? My hour has not yet come, has it? Didn’t you tell me at age

twelve when you found me at the temple in Jerusalem that I should live quietly at home in Nazareth?”

Besides, at the temple in Jerusalem, the teachers who heard the young lad speak were astounded by his answers and his understanding; but there was no indication that he could perform miracles.

Jesus’ order to the servants: “Fill the jars with water.” To the servants, that must have seemed rather irrational. For, at what part of the wedding feast did this happen: at the beginning, or the middle, or towards the end? Obviously it was towards the end – otherwise the wine would not have run out. The water was for ritual-washing at the guests’ arrivals. Nobody else was going to arrive anymore. Why should all the jars be filled?

But the servants did everything as Jesus instructed them, and filled the six jars to the brim.

Then they followed more instructions: draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet to drink.

What a surprise it turned out to be, and what blessings for everyone – the wine-steward, the groom, the bride, the guests, and, especially, the servants.

What was the final result?

It revealed Jesus’ glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Who received directives from Jesus, and immediately did as they were told? The servants!

The lesson we can learn from the story is: when Jesus tells you to do something, do it! Yes, listen to him, but don't stop there. Heed his instructions and act on them. It can lead to faith in God, to revelation of his glory, and to the blessing of everyone.

The blessedness of Jesus' followers is measured by how obediently they carry out the word of the Lord, not by how impressively they perform rituals in the sight of people or how busy they are involved in spiritual activities, not by how repeatedly they come up with pious remarks or how nice-sounding are the prayers they say, not by how much theology they know or how many religious conferences they attend, not by how popular they can become or how many famous people they are associated with.

"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." (Lk 11:28, NIV)

Who initiated the proceedings at Cana that led to the first of the signs through which Jesus revealed his glory, and caused his disciples to believe in him?

It was Mother Mary!

Her purpose: draw attention to her Son and obedience to him.

That was her vocation at the time; it still is today.

And her command will always be: **Do** whatever Jesus tells you!

Notice that the good servants in the story obeyed not only Jesus, but his Mother too.

Jesus and Mary

Here are five examples of Jesus' sayings taken from the Gospel according to Luke.

1. At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children." (Lk 10:21, NIV)
2. "When you pray, this is what to say: Father, may your name be held holy." (Lk 11:2, NJB)
3. "For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (Lk 18:14, NIV)
4. "Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied... But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation." (Lk 6:21, 24, RSV)

5. And Jesus said to him [Zacchaeus], “Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham.” (Lk 19:9, NAB)

Jesus’ wisdom

The wisdom of Jesus may be quite puzzling, and offensive. It is woeful to be rich? We are blessed when we hunger? God hides things from the learned and from the wise but reveals them to lowly little children? No wonder his kinsfolk did not accept him.

He departed from there and came to his native place, accompanied by his disciples. When the sabbath came he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What kind of wisdom has been given him?... Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary...?” And they took offense at him. (Mk 6:1–2, 3, NAB)

“Where did this man get all this?”

Although Jesus is fully divine, he is also human in every respect except sin. And as a human being, he had to grow. We see in the gospel that he appeared first as a tiny baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, and it took many years for him to become a mature adult.

But not only did he grow physically, he also had to develop mentally and intellectually. The Bible tells us: “Jesus increased in wisdom.” (Lk 2:52, NJB) He was not born with all his wisdom; he had to acquire it. And as a human being, he would gain true wisdom in the same way that other human beings do – by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Now, the Holy Spirit works in us through many of our experiences; he teaches us through Scripture; he operates via some of the people we come in contact with – friends, acquaintances, teachers, priests and, perhaps in our early years, more than all the others, our parents! And Jesus most certainly received much of his wisdom by way of Mary and Joseph, for, as it is seen in the Bible, he “went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them.” (Lk 2:51, NAB)

The Magnificat

To illustrate Mary's influence on Jesus, let us look at the Magnificat. Mary said:

1. My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.
2. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown the strength with his arm.
3. He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree.
4. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.
5. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to

Abraham and to his posterity for ever. (Lk 1:46–55, RSV)

Jesus and Mary

Let us put the words of Jesus and his mother side by side, so that their similarities can be seen more readily.

1. At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.”

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.

2. When you pray, this is what to say: Father, may your name be held holy. [God is holy means, among other things, that he is mighty, merciful, to be feared, full of strength.]

For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown the strength with his arm.

3. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree.

4. Blessed are you that hunger now: you shall be satisfied... But woe to you that are rich: for you have received your consolation.

He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.

5. And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham.”

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.

An inspired canticle

Some biblical scholars suggest that the words of the Magnificat were not Mary’s own. Others declare them to be a collection of hymns and sayings from the psalms and elsewhere. Still others maintain that it was not Mary who uttered them, but Elizabeth, her cousin. The evangelist, however, was moved by the Holy Spirit to attribute the song to Mary – showing his readers the sort of person she was, revealing her thoughts and ideals, and the type of wisdom she passed on to Jesus.

Jesus’ mother

“What kind of wisdom has been given him? ... Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary?” (Mk 6:2, 3,

NAB) How could Jesus be wise if he was merely the son of Mary? How could Jesus' teachings be thought of as wisdom if he had only learned it from his uneducated mother? How could Mary know much if she lived such a solitary life in a little country village?

Our answer is this: it is precisely because he was the son of Mary, through her perfect communion and cooperation with the Holy Spirit, that Jesus was directed to appreciate this kind of wisdom. It is precisely because he was the son of Mary that Jesus was led to learn what he learned. It is precisely because he was the son of Mary that Jesus eventually taught this wisdom to his disciples.

The Bible affirms his wisdom: "And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man." (Lk 2:51-52, RSV)

By teaching her Son the wisdom she learned from the Holy Spirit, Mother Mary indirectly taught the world what was of importance, and what was not.

The Joys of Mary

Traditionally, the Church contemplates Mother Mary's sorrows. Here is a devotion based on her joys. You are invited to ponder her ecstatic moments, feeling the peace, the triumph, the surprise, the relief, the wonderment and the gratitude that she experienced.

1/. She is greeted by the Angel Gabriel: "Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you.... Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High."

2/. She is affirmed by Elizabeth who, filled with the Holy Spirit, calls her "the mother of my Lord."

3/. She can no longer contain her exhilaration and bursts out in song, humbly admitting to Elizabeth: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked upon the lowliness of his handmaid. Behold, from now on, all

generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.”

4/. The Lord’s angel tells Joseph in a dream to take Mary as his wife: what is conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit. Their Son would save his people from their sins.

5/. Joseph and Mary arrive in Bethlehem, city of ancestor David. They find a place to stay. Jesus is born. Mary is bathed in rapturous jubilation as she gazes upon her beautiful Son, pressing him ever so tenderly to her maternal heart.

6/. The angel of the Lord appears in glory to shepherds and announces that the new-born baby wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger in Bethlehem is the Saviour, Messiah and Lord. They come to tell Mary and Joseph. Mary treasures all these things and ponders them in her heart.

7/. At the presentation in the temple, Simeon, guided by the Holy Spirit, sees baby Jesus. Satisfied that he is

the Christ, he prophesies about him. Also, the holy prophetess Anna thanks God and speaks of Jesus to many.

8/. Led by a star, wise men come with gifts from the East to adore Jesus – referring to him as the infant king of the Jews.

9/. The angel of the Lord alerts Joseph in a dream to get up, take the child and his mother, and depart for Egypt by night. They are to stay there until further notice. They escape slaughter by Herod. The three wise men likewise returned home unharmed.

10/. When Herod dies, the angel of the Lord tells Joseph in a dream to go with child and mother to Israel. Informed by the angel in another dream, Joseph withdraws to Galilee, settling in Nazareth. Again and again, Joseph proves to be guided by the Lord. Mary is very happy to have a holy and totally trustworthy husband.

11/. At age twelve, unknown to his parents, Jesus stays behind in Jerusalem after the customary days of celebrating the Passover feast, while Mary and Joseph travel homeward to Nazareth. After three days of anxious searching, they find him safe and sound in the temple sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Mary is glad to hear the teachers' admiration and praise of Jesus for his understanding and his answers. She is also happy to hear Jesus himself say: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" She keeps these in her heart.

12/. Jesus lives obediently under his parents in Nazareth, and grows up a very good boy, increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

13/. Around the age of thirty, Jesus is baptized by John at the River Jordan. Immediately afterwards, the heavens open, and the Spirit of God descends on him like a dove. A voice from heaven is heard, certifying, "This is my beloved Son, with him I am well pleased."

14/. Before beginning his ministry Jesus is publicly identified by John the Baptist as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

15/. At the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, prompted by his mother, Jesus works his first miracle, changing water into wine. It manifests his glory; and the disciples believe in him.

16/. In the power of the Spirit, Jesus goes about the Holy Land doing good, preaching, healing, performing miracles, and proclaiming the Kingdom of God. His followers multiply in number.

17/. On Palm Sunday, Jesus enters Jerusalem triumphantly. The people honour him, crying aloud: “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.”

18/. At the Last Supper, Jesus institutes the Holy Eucharist. Henceforth, he is physically present on earth with his Church, and nourishing her members with his own body and blood.

19/. Jesus' love is boundless. He does not hesitate to give his life as a ransom for his people; he allows himself to be humiliated, mistreated and crucified. From the cross, he tells his Father: "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing." There is no bitterness.

20/. Jesus assures the repentant thief, "This day you will be with me in Paradise!" Mary is overjoyed to see her Son rescuing his people, for that was why he came into the world.

21/. Jesus does not forget his mother; to her, and then to the beloved disciple he says: "Woman, this is your son! ... This is your mother!" And from that hour the disciple takes her into his own home.

22/. The Son of God is the only person who can redeem the world. Jesus does not appeal to his Father for legions of angels to call off his suffering and death. He exclaims: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

23/. With his last breath, Jesus declares: “It is fulfilled.” Seeing how Jesus died, the Roman centurion asserts: “Truly, this man was the Son of God.”

24/. Jesus is placed in the tomb. He suffers no more. He descends to the dead to free the holy souls.

25/. On the third day Jesus rises after his holy death. He is vindicated in glory. The bodies of many righteous people who died are raised, and coming out of the tombs they appear in Jerusalem.

26/. Jesus shows himself to his friends and disciples. He spends forty wonderful days with them in Galilee.

27/. Jesus is taken up to Heaven and sits at the right hand of God.

28/. “Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying... They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the

women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” (Acts 1:12-14, NIV)

29/. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes upon all of them. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples go about the country and beyond, doing good, preaching, healing, performing miracles, and proclaiming the Kingdom of God and the sacred and imperishable good news of eternal salvation.

Mother Mary is overwhelmed with surprise and joy to see the uneducated fishermen so suddenly become full of spiritual knowledge and eloquence, and miraculous powers.

Thousands are converted.

30/. When the course of her earthly life is completed, Mary is taken up body and soul into Heaven.

31/. Mary is exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things.

32/. In Heaven, the Mother of God continues to care for her children. Throughout the centuries, countless

miracles are attributed to her manifold intercession. At various times, God sends her to appear on earth to guide the Church.

33/. At this very moment, as you bring her and her history into your heart, and speak with her, she is joyful beyond words.

Entrustment to Mary

God the Father

From the beginning, God the Father entrusted his Son to Mary.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, "Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you." She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, "Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High." (Lk 1:26–32, NJB)

Jesus

When he was twelve years old, well after the age of reason began for him, Jesus confirmed the

entrustment by continuing to live in obedience to Mary and Joseph.

He went down with them then and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority. His mother stored up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and with people. (Lk 2:51–52, NJB)

The disciples

As part of his last will and testament, Jesus also entrusted his disciples to her.

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, "Woman, this is your son." Then to the disciple he said, "This is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. (Jn 19:25–27, NJB)

In the gospel, when Jesus speaks to or about someone, he is not necessarily speaking to or about that person alone. Oftentimes he is addressing or referring to all his followers. For example, at the Last Supper, when he broke the bread and said, “Take and eat; this is my body” (Mt 26:26, NIV), he was not giving the instruction only to the twelve apostles gathered together in the upper room. When he commanded, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39, NIV), by “neighbor” he meant much more than the person living next door.

In the pronouncement, “Woman, *this* is your son”, “this” beloved disciple represented all whom Mary would be invited to look after as son or daughter. Similarly, “This is *your* mother,” was an injunction for all to take Mary as mother.

How?

How do we go about taking Mary as our mother?

The following passage suggests the way.

“Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call

him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.’

‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ he asked.

Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.’” (Mk 3:31–35, NIV)

That is, we become Jesus’ brothers and sisters by carrying out the will of God. And with Jesus as brother, his Mother is our mother too.

Your mother

Entrustment to Mary was not an invention by some pious and sentimental soul. It was commanded by Jesus. He chose the most dramatic moment before his death on the cross to proclaim this integral part of God’s plan. He wanted all to come to Mary as her children.

“This is your mother.” What did the disciple do when he heard Jesus say this? “And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.” (Jn 19:27, NJB) If

you hear Jesus saying to you today, “This is your mother,” we hope that you, too, like a true and beloved disciple, will, from that hour, welcome her into your own home, and into your own heart.

Love her, cherish her, honour her, and turn to her for guidance and protection.

Consecration to Mary

Mother Mary, since Jesus from the cross gave you to me, I take you as my mother. And since Jesus gave me to you, please take me as your child. All that I am and have and do, I entrust entirely to your care.

I make this act of consecration with full knowledge and understanding that it entails commitment to a way of life, a way of life like that of Jesus at Nazareth, a way of life which he exemplifies in the gospel. It is when your children become firmly dedicated to this life, it is when enough of your sons and daughters respond wholeheartedly to God’s will, it is when they listen to the Lord and do what he says, it is then that your Immaculate Heart will triumph, and an era of peace will begin to reign throughout creation.

Dearest Mother, you have looked after Jesus from the instant of his conception to the hour of his death. Under your care and guidance, he advanced in wisdom, in stature and in favour with God. I humbly ask you to similarly guide and look after me, my family and loved ones, and all your people. In complete faith and trust, I solemnly consecrate myself and all of us to your Holy and Immaculate Heart.

Apparitions

Apparitions have always been part and parcel of the way God communicated with his people. Instances of visions have been reported throughout the Bible in one form or another. Some visionaries come readily to mind: Abraham (at Mamre), Moses (in the desert), Solomon (at Gibeon), Zechariah (John the Baptist's father, in the temple), Peter, James and John (at the Transfiguration), and Paul (on the road to Damascus). Each of these seers did what was requested of him, and thereby caused great graces to descend on his fellow human beings.

The following are three apparitions described in the Bible. All occurred at a moment in time when civilization clearly needed the intervention of the loving hand of God.

The Angel Gabriel

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of

the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." (Lk 1:26–28, NAB)

Mary was subsequently asked to be the mother of Jesus. Her acceptance of God's word from the angel gave to the world its Saviour, Christ Our Lord.

Jesus (after his death)

As they were saying this, Jesus himself stood among them. But they were startled and frightened, and supposed that they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself." (Lk 24:36–39, RSV)

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger

in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” (Jn 20:24–29, RSV)

Through the disciples’ faith in the resurrected Lord, the sacred and imperishable message of the gospel has been brought to every corner of the globe.

The Holy Spirit

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven

and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1–4, NIV)

Then Peter went outside and addressed the crowd. He cooperated with the Holy Spirit; and through his cooperation, many were converted to the Lord.

As part of his speech, Peter quoted the prophet Joel.

“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.” (Acts 2:17–18, RSV)

“He spoke to them for a long time using many other arguments, and he urged them, ‘Save yourselves from this perverse generation.’ They accepted what he said and were baptised. That

very day about three thousand were added to their number.” (Acts 2:40–41, NJB)

And thousands upon thousands more would follow as the centuries went by.

Mother Mary

Apparitions may include an invitation to participate in God’s plan of salvation. It may seem too good to be true. Cooperation with God can help save thousands of souls. If Mary is appearing in some parts of the world, and if she is relating the Lord’s call to this sinful generation to turn back to him and live the gospel, think of the immense good that will come upon the world if we do what God in his mercy is urging us to do through his loving mother.

Our Lady's special messages to Mirjana

Each visionary in Medjugorje was given a specific role by Our Lady. Mirjana's was focused on certain unbelievers – those who did not know the love of God. As such, it was the reason why some of the messages given through her on the second of each month from December 2004 to March 2020, were different in tone and content from the ones received by Marija for the whole world.

And who were these unbelievers? Atheists? Agnostics? Non-Christians? Those who did not go to church? No! Millions of them knew nothing about Medjugorje or Mirjana. They had never heard of Mother Mary's apparitions. They had no idea she was giving messages. They wouldn't be on the lookout for what she said because they had no awareness that such records existed, or where to find them.

Mother Mary could not be speaking to them; no, not to them. Not at that time anyway.

Then who was Our Lady's audience? Who, when in Medjugorje on the second day of the month from 2005 to early 2020, used to wake up early in the morning so as to get to a spot near her apparition site at Cenacolo or the Blue Cross? Who around the world awaited eagerly the account of her message given through Mirjana over the internet that day? Who read information like the material which is presented here? Who? Who? We, that's who! We, the ones who are reading this article right now, including, particularly, the one who wrote it! We, the ones who know Medjugorje. We are the ones who must pay attention, and repent, and change!

At the apparitions to Mirjana, Our Lady was sometimes crying and sad. She cried for those of us who continually ignored her warnings, who paid heed only to her words which made us feel happy and above reproach, who hid behind the phrase "accentuate the positive," who closed our hearts to all 'negative' exhortations or, worse still, applied them only to others.

Why was Our Lady sad? Was it not because we did not truly love God; was it not because we did not truly love our neighbour; was it not because we were conceited, and egotistic, and full of ourselves?

And was it not because we did not notice our pride, our arrogance, our jealousies, rivalries, hatreds, angers, malice, darkness, wickedness, hot temper, ambition for glory, bullying, deceitful scheming, and delusions about our supposed superiority? Among our holy group were we not the ones who stirred up controversies, quarrels, lies, gossips, slanders, suspicions; and set up factions?

[Before the usual person starts gloating or complaining how pessimistic is the writer of the above paragraph, let him know that the words therein are taken from these Scriptural passages. Rom 12:3; 16:17. 1 Cor 3:3, 18-20. 2 Cor 12:20. Gal 5:15. Eph 4:14. Col 3:8-9. 1 Tim 6:3-5. Titus 1:16. Jas 1:19-21, 26; 3:14-16. 1 Pet 2:1. 2 Pet 2:1. 1 Jn 2:9, 11.

Let him look them up.]

Here is Mirjana's report on June 2nd, 2008: "Our Lady said, 'Dear children, I am with you by the grace

of God to make you great, great in faith and love, all of you, you whose heart has been hard as a stone by sin and guilt.’... As Our Lady was saying ‘you whose heart has been hard as a stone by sin and guilt,’ *she was looking at those present to whom this refers* with a painful expression and tears in her eyes.”

On December 2nd, 2007, Mirjana had given this description: “Our Lady was very sad. Her eyes were filled with tears throughout the whole time. She said, ‘*Dear children, today, while I am looking at your hearts, my heart is filled with pain and shudder. My children, stop for a moment and look into your hearts. Is my Son, your God, truly in the first place? Are his commandments truly the measure of your life? I am warning you again.*’... I asked Our Lady painfully not to leave us and not to give up on us. Our Lady painfully smiled to my request and left. This time she did not finish her message with the words ‘Thank you.’”

“‘Dear children. In this holy time full of God’s graces and his love which sends me to you, I implore you not to be with a heart of stone.’... Our Lady’s face

during the entire time was one of pain and sorrow.”
(01/02/2007)

“My children, do not deceive yourselves with false peace and false joy.” (07/02/2006)

“Many think that they have faith in God and that they know his laws. They try to live according to them, but they do not do what is most important: they do not love him.” (10/02/2006)

Jesus himself said: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment.” (Mt 22:37–38, NJB) “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments...* Whoever holds to my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me... Anyone who loves me will keep my word... Anyone who does not love me does not keep my words.” (Jn 14:15, 21, 23, 24, NJB)

No doubt, the same person will brand as ‘negative’ the writer who picked out the above quotations. Does he not remember that of the Ten Commandments, eight of them contain the words: ‘thou shalt not’? Was God therefore ‘negative’?

Was Jesus ‘negative’ when he singled out five of these when the rich young man came and asked him: “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” and he answered: “You know the commandments: You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honour your father and your mother”? (Mk 10:17, 19, NAB)

Was the apostle John also ‘negative’ when he wrote this in his epistle? “Whoever says, ‘I know Him,’ but does not do what He commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person... Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness... They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.” (1 Jn 2:4, 9, 11, NIV)

We hope that nobody dares to accuse Jesus as ‘negative’ because of his remarks below.

“How rightly Isaiah prophesied about you hypocrites in the passage of scripture: ‘This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. Their reverence of me is worthless; the

lessons they teach are nothing but human commandments.” (Mk 7:6–7, NJB)

“You are the very ones who pass yourselves off as upright in people’s sight, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed in human eyes is loathsome in the sight of God.” (Lk 16:15, NJB)

“For words flow out of what fills the heart. Good people draw good things from their store of goodness; bad people draw bad things from their store of badness. So I tell you this, that for every unfounded word people utter they will answer on Judgement Day, since it is by your words you will be justified, and by your words condemned.” (Mt 12:34–37, NJB)

“Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.” (Lk 6:26, NIV)

We hope none would stoop so low as to label St. Paul being negative in his writing of the following.

“Though I command languages both human and angelic – if I speak without love, I am no more than a gong booming or a cymbal clashing. And though I have the power of prophecy, to penetrate all mysteries

and knowledge, and though I have all the faith necessary to move mountains – if I am without love, I am nothing. Though I should give away to the poor all that I possess, and even give up my body to be burned – if I am without love, it will do me no good whatever.” (1 Cor 13:1-3, NJB)

“Certain persons by swerving from these have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions.” (1 Tim 1:6-7, RSV)

“They profess to know God, but they deny him by their deeds; they are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good deed.” (Titus 1:16, RSV)

The apostle James, “a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ”, in his epistle, shows how to judge the religiosity of a person. “Nobody who fails to keep a tight rein on the tongue can claim to be religious; this is mere self-deception; that person’s religion is worthless.” (Jas 1:26, NJB)

“Remember this, my dear brothers: everyone should be quick to listen but slow to speak and slow to human anger.” (Jas 1:19, NJB)

“Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show his works by a good life in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. Wisdom of this kind does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” (Jas 3:13-15, NAB)

Jesus says: “Remain in me, as I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a branch – and withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire and are burnt.” (Jn 15:4–6, NJB)

“As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my

Father's commandments and remain in his love." (Jn 15:9–10, NAB)

Jesus, John, St. Paul, James, and Our Lady, all speak the truth. Let us pay serious heed to them. Let us stop causing Mother Mary more tears of sadness, but humble ourselves and admit our arrogance and sins. With faith in our loving Mother's help and guidance, with our own willingness and cooperation, we can be corrected, and so move quickly forward to becoming holy and fruitful servants of the Lord.

St. Paul tells us: "So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears." (Acts 20:31, NIV)

"For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears, not that you might be pained but that you might know the abundant love I have for you." (2 Cor 2:4, NAB)

Mother Mary says the following through Mirjana.

"God is sending me to warn you and to show you the right way. Do not shut your eyes before the truth, my children. Your time is a short time. Do not permit delusions to begin to rule over you." (11/02/2006)

“Reject your arrogance and kneel down before my Son. Understand, my children, that you have nothing and you can do nothing. The only thing that is yours and what you possess is sin. Be cleansed and accept meekness and humility.” (07/02/2007)

“I will help you to triumph over the errors and temptations with my grace. I will teach you love, love which wipes away all sins and makes you perfect, love which gives you the peace of my Son now and forever.” (03/02/2010)

“Apostles of my love, make yourselves little; open your pure hearts to my Son so that he can work through you.” (05/02/2018)

“To love each other is what he asks for – that is the way to eternal life.” (01/02/2019)

“When you love the people whom you meet, you are spreading the love of my Son. It is love that opens the doors of Paradise.” (05/02/2019)

“Dear children, your pure and sincere love draws my motherly heart. Your faith and trust in the Heavenly Father are fragrant roses which you offer to me – the most beautiful bouquets of roses which

consist of your prayers, acts of mercy and of love.”
(03/02/2020)

“Pray and love with sincere feelings, with good works; and help so that the world may change and that my heart may win.” (03/18/2020)

Am I a saint already?

Jesus said, “Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to destruction is wide and spacious, and many take it; but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” (Mt 7:13–14, NJB)

I did not kill anybody, or set fire to someone's house, or committed adultery. I go to church regularly, read the Bible and other spiritual books daily, and pray a lot. I fast on bread and water twice a week. I have travelled to hallowed places of worship on scores of pilgrimages. I took pilgrims with me, and they came home converted. I am far better informed on religious matters than my acquaintances. I gain deep insights into Scripture and theological studies by attending conferences; I always understand everything the speakers say, and thoroughly enjoy the programmes from beginning to end. I know all the standard formulary prayers, hymns and rituals; I can compose pious supplications and meditative thoughts instantaneously. I have been instrumental in organizing

numerous devotional events. I am the richest member of all the religious organisations to which I belong, and I donate thousands of dollars to worthy causes, help people who are in need, do multiple voluntary works expertly and say many holy things. Surely I am the salt of the earth and the light of the world, am I not? Surely my friends will speak of me as a saint after I die!

Right?

But have I paid any attention to the teaching of James quoted in the chapter above? “Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.” (Jas 1:26, NIV)

When was the last time I opened my mouth to say malicious things against someone whom I consider inferior to me? When was the last time I spread vile rumours about the person I envy? How many times have I spoken angrily about those who did not agree with my brilliant observations?

If I am guilty of any of the above, then, according to Jesus, should I not be condemned? He warns, “A good person brings forth good out of a store of goodness,

but an evil person brings forth evil out of a store of evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will render an account for every careless word they speak. By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Mt 12:35–37, NAB)

A person speaking good may be a good person, or may be an evil person pretending to be good. However, a person speaking evil is not a good person pretending to be evil; a person speaking evil is evil!

Do I deem anger, envy and pride – three of the seven deadly sins – deadly for others but not for me? Do I not know that angels became devils because of pride? Do I consider myself sinless as long as nobody seems to notice my sins?

God’s Judgment

James writes: “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘You shall not murder.’ If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.” (Jas 2:10–11, NIV)

No wonder Jesus cautions: “I have much to say in judgment of you.” (Jn 8:26, NIV)

This is how he speaks to those who have the appearance of good but are not truly so. “You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.” (Mt 23:27–28, NIV)

“You are the very ones who pass yourselves off as upright in people’s sight, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed in human eyes is loathsome in the sight of God.” (Lk 16:15, NJB)

“You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.” (Mt 23:15, NIV)

“How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” (Lk 18:23–24, NAB)

Is it time to canonize myself?

Before canonizing myself, I should think about and remember the following.

“For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.” (Mt 7:13, NIV)

“When the day comes many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, work many miracles in your name?’ Then I shall tell them to their faces: I have never known you; away from me, all evil doers!” (Mt 7:22–23, NJB)

“I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day.” (Jn 12:46–48, NIV)

“I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, listens to my words, and acts on them. That one is like a person building a house, who dug deeply and

laid the foundation on rock; when the flood came, the river burst against that house but could not shake it because it had been well built. But the one who listens and does not act is like a person who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, it collapsed at once and was completely destroyed.” (Lk 6:47-49, NAB)

“Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.” (2 Jn: 8–9, NIV)

“Whoever teaches something different and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the religious teaching is conceited, understanding nothing, and has a morbid disposition for arguments and verbal disputes. From these come envy, rivalry, insults, evil suspicions, and mutual friction among people with corrupted minds, who are deprived of the truth.” (1 Tim 6:3–5, NAB)

“But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny

the truth. Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.” (Jas 3:14–16, NIV)

Now, should I not examine myself more carefully, therefore, and in a totally honest and truthful way? Otherwise, should I not fear that, even though I may have been invited, I may have been chosen, and I may even be at the gate, in the end I may be locked out if self-satisfaction sets in?

Jesus already said: “Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.” (Lk 13:24, RSV)

“When once the householder has risen up and shut the door, you will begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us.’ He will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity!’” (Lk 13:25–27, RSV)

“Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.” (Lk 14:34–35, NIV)

“Many who are first will be last, and the last, first.” (Mk 10:31, NJB)

St. Paul asked: “What have you got that was not given to you? And if it was given to you, why are you boasting as though it were your own?” (1 Cor 4:7, NJB)

Should I crown myself today? Only a fool would do that. God alone can make saints – at the moment he chooses, if he opens the door into Heaven for me after a period of sincere self-examination, repentance and conversion on my part.

Repent; obey Jesus the Advocate

In the last book of the Bible, God warns me: “These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have

acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked... Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.” (Rev 3:14–19, NIV)

John writes in his first epistle: “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

“We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” (1 Jn 2:1–6, NIV)

“God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus,

his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 Jn 1:5–9, NIV)

Jesus says: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth.” (Jn 14:15–17, NAB)

Love

In Colossians 3:7–9, St. Paul says that I must put away all these things: anger, hot temper, malice, slander, abusive language, and filthy talk. “Stop lying to each other!” he cautions.

In the First Letter to the Corinthians, he demands, “Follow the way of love.” (1 Cor, 14:1, NIV)

In chapter 13 of the same letter, he describes love as the highest theological virtue. Concerning this, I had better look inside my own heart seriously. And I had better not make these mistakes: to merely speak about the well-known passage without putting it into practice, giving advice, reciting the lines and using

them to judge others instead of applying them to myself – none give any evidence of saintliness. But, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, if I meditate on the famous verses honestly, sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase, word by word, then change and carry out everything in them – towards everyone and at all times (even when nobody is watching) – then perhaps I will progress in the right direction.

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects,

always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.” (1 Cor 13:1– 7, NIV)

Jesus promised

“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.” (Jn 15:11–14, NIV)

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Mt 11:29, NIV)

Repentance

How many days does it take a person to be justified who sincerely repents from the heart?

Jesus spoke this parable. “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all

that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other...” (Lk 18:10–14, RSV)

On the day that the humble person acknowledged his sinfulness, he arrived home justified.

Soon afterwards, Jesus travelled through Jericho. “And there was a man named Zacchae’us; he was a chief tax collector, and rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchae’us, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today.’ So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it they all murmured, ‘He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.’ And Zacchae’us stood and said to the Lord, ‘Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I

restore it fourfold.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house.’” (Lk 19:2–9, RSV)

‘Today,’ the same day that Zacchaeus responded to Jesus’ invitation, and made haste and came down from his lofty position, and welcomed Jesus joyfully, and reformed his ways, salvation came to him.

On Calvary, two criminals were crucified beside Jesus. “One of the criminals hanging there abused him: ‘Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us as well.’ But the other spoke up and rebuked him. ‘Have you no fear of God at all?’ he said. ‘You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case we deserved it: we are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He answered him, ‘In truth I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.’” (Lk 23:39–43, NJB)

‘Today!’ Again – for those who honestly admit their guilt and look to Jesus for mercy.

How long does it take someone to decide seriously for repentance? Not long! Nobody should spend another day on earth going through life staying as evil as before.

Guidance from Peter

“God opposes the proud but accords his favour to the humble.” (1 Pet 5:5, NJB)

“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.” (1 Pet 2:1, NIV)

“Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble... For, ‘Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech.’” (1 Pet 3:8, 10, NIV)

Guidance from Paul

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.” (Phil 3:12–15, NIV)

“So, my dear friends, you have always been obedient; your obedience must not be limited to times when I am present. Now that I am absent it must be more in evidence, so work out your salvation in fear and trembling.” (Phil 2:12, NJB)

My prayer

Jesus, you said: “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Lk 5:32, RSV)
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Repent!

This chapter is addressed to all sinners, but especially to us children or spouses who, unknowingly, have been the source of grief to our long-suffering relatives. “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.” (Acts 17:30, NIV)

How we respond to this call for repentance will result in how God will deal with us. There are three general models.

First

The story in the *Book of Jonah* illustrates very well the best case scenario.

Jonah was sent to tell the people of Nineveh that if they continued in their ungodliness they would be destroyed. “Jonah began his journey through the city, and when he had gone only a single day’s walk announcing, ‘Forty days more and Nineveh shall be overthrown,’ the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth.” (Jon 3:4–5, NAB)

Even the king reacted positively. He made this decree: “... Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who

knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.” (Jon 3:8–9, NIV)

“When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.” (Jon 3:10, NIV)

We pray that, like the Ninevites, we will heed the Lord’s warning, and stop offending God and our kinfolk.

Second

When God’s gentle appeals fall on deaf ears, he will apply more pressure.

“Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them.” (Pr 13:24, NIV)

“My child, do not scorn correction from Yahweh, do not resent his reproof; for Yahweh reproves those he loves, as a father the child whom he loves.” (Pr 3:11–12, NJB)

“Those whom I love, I reprove and chastise. Be earnest, therefore, and repent.” (Rev 3:19, NAB)

Are any of us at the moment experiencing broken relationships, family conflicts, and pointed criticisms from friends or foes, illnesses, accidents, failures...?

These are not punishments from the Lord, but may have been permitted as promptings for us to set straight some things which are not right.

With a contrite heart let us turn to the Holy Spirit and implore him to help us discover where our problem areas are. Let us ask him reverently to assist us in repairing the damages we have done to ourselves and to those near us.

Third

As a last resort, God may have to deal drastically with the most recalcitrant of his people. “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.” (Heb 10:26–27, NIV)

In the following discourse we hear Jesus alluding to two Old Testament incidents. “As it was in Noah’s day, so will it also be in the days of the Son of man. People were eating and drinking, marrying wives and husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and the Flood came and destroyed them all. It will be the same as it was in Lot’s day: people were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but the day Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone

from heaven and it destroyed them all.” (Lk 17:26–29, NJB)

We pray that this last stage will never have to be reached in any part of the world. God does not want sinners to die, but that they reform. “Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? ... For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!” (Ezek 18:23, 32, NIV)

What Should We Do?

Listen to the people’s question after John the Baptist spoke to them at the river Jordan. “He said therefore to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits that befit repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our father”; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.’

“And the multitudes asked him, ‘What then shall we do?’” (Lk 3:7–10, RSV)

God's reply could well be: "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God, obeying his voice, and holding fast to him." (Deut 30:19–20, NAB)

Like the thousands who heard the apostles' pleas on Pentecost Day, let us make the resolution to repent. "Hearing this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'What are we to do, brothers?' 'You must repent,' Peter answered." (Acts 2:37–38, NJB)

Serve the Lord

Besides turning back to God, besides healing the wounds we may have brought about to friends and relatives, besides avoiding the chastisements which await those who disregard Jesus, we can go one step further: take part in the Lord's work.

This is a much better way to resolve family problems than sitting around all day watching television, or reading one story book after another, or playing games, or listening to music, or talking on the phone. Why not try engaging ourselves and our families in performing good deeds for our neighbours or for the Lord.

Matthew the tax collector is an example of someone who answered God's call. "As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him. While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples." (Mt 9:9–10, NAB) Besides taking time off his lucrative job to join Jesus, Matthew began bringing his colleagues to Jesus.

Peter and Andrew, too, when they heard Jesus' invitation, accepted instantly. "As he was walking by the Lake of Galilee he saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and his brother Andrew; they were making a cast into the lake with their net, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Come after me and I will make you fishers of people.' And at once they left their nets and followed him." (Mt 4:18–20, NJB)

Jesus needs labourers to continue the tasks he left for his followers after his ascension into heaven. "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few." (Mt 9:37, NIV)

"My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest." (Jn 4:34–35, RSV)

Will you consider becoming one of Jesus' harvesters in your home or among your acquaintances or in your parish? Whatever walk of life you are in, there may be one or more persons who, through contact with you, will be saved from a great deal of spiritual hardship because of your courageous and unselfish decision to be allied with the Lord's work. Will you let yourself be a channel of his graces and redirect your life for the benefit of all?

"Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father." (Jn 14:12, NAB)

One of Jesus' many wishes is this: "It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and be my disciples." (Jn 15:8, NJB) Let his wish be fulfilled in you and your family, and so bring great glory, honour and praise to your loving Father in heaven.

Fools: from the book of Proverbs in the Bible

In our lives and in our relationships it is important to recognize fools and those who proclaim themselves to be wise but are not. If we know how to deal with them we will have greater peace and sympathy.

Let's take a few moments to think about whether there are people in our family, among our kinfolk, co-workers, acquaintances or friends who behave like fools. Here are some ways to identify them.

“Whoever spreads slander is a fool.” (Pr 10:18, NAB)

“Fools take no delight in understanding, but only in displaying what they think.” (Pr 18:2, NAB)

“The lips of fools walk into a fight.” (Pr 18:6, NAB)

“It is to one's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.” (Pr 20:3, NIV)

“As dogs return to their vomit, so fools repeat their folly.” (Pr 26:11, NAB)

How to distinguish fools from the wise or prudent

“The way of fools is right in their own eyes, but those who listen to advice are the wise.” (Pr 12:15, NAB)

“Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult.” (Pr 12:16, NIV)

“All who are prudent act with knowledge, but fools expose their folly.” (Pr 13:16, NIV)

“A fool’s mouth lashes out with pride, but the lips of the wise protect them.” (Pr 14:3, NIV)

“The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception.” (Pr 14:8, NIV)

“The wise person is cautious and turns from evil; the fool is reckless and gets embroiled. The quick-tempered make fools of themselves.” (Pr 14:16-17, NAB)

“The crown of the wise is their wisdom, but folly is the garland of fools.” (Pr 14:24, RSV)

“The heart of the wise seeks knowledge, a fool’s mouth feeds on folly.” (Pr 15:14, NJB)

“Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe.” (Pr 28:26, NIV)

“Fools give vent to all their anger; but the wise, biding their time, control it.” (Pr 29:11, NAB)

How not to handle a fool

“Fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Pr 1:7, NIV)

“A single reprimand does more for a discerning person than a hundred lashes for a fool.” (Pr 17:10, NAB)

“Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool bent on folly.” (Pr 17:12, NIV)

“Do not speak in the hearing of fools; they will despise the wisdom of your words.” (Pr 23:9, NAB)

“Wisdom is too high for a fool.” (Pr 24:7, RSV)

“Snow no more befits the summer, nor rain the harvest-time, than honours befit a fool.” (Pr 26:1, NJB)

“A thorn branch in a drunkard’s hand, such is a proverb in the mouth of fools.” (Pr 26:9, NJB)

“Though you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding them like grain with a pestle, you will not remove their folly from them.” (Pr 27:22, NIV)

“If a wise person disputes with a fool, there is railing and ridicule but no resolution.” (Pr 29:9, NAB)

How to deal with fools

Before all else, heed Jesus' warning: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." (Mt 5:21-22, NIV)

The book of Proverbs puts it this way: "Whoever mocks the poor reviles their Maker; whoever rejoices in their misfortune will not go unpunished." (Pr 17:5, NAB)

In the above quotation, "the poor" are not just those who have few monetary and material possessions, but also those who are poorly gifted in psychological maturity, pleasant personalities, or wisdom.

In the following Gospel reading, the "little ones" can also be applied to the same group of individuals. "See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold

the face of my Father who is in heaven.” (Mt 18:10, RSV)

Here is what we can do. First, love them. Jesus commands: “Love one another, as I have loved you.” (Jn 15:12, NJB)

Second, pray for them. We cannot change the hearts of fools by arguments and exhortations, or by shaming and rebuking. It is only by the grace of God that fools can be transformed to abandon their sin of pride and the desire for self-aggrandizement.

Third, rather than fuming with anger while a fool around us rages on and on with endless complaints and jealous boasting, let us do as these proverbs advise:

“Do not answer fools according to their folly, lest you too become like them.” (Pr 26:4, NAB)

“Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge.” (Pr 14:7, RSV)

Revenge: from the Holy Bible

This article contains Biblical quotations only – without commentaries. Obey God and he will raise you to the heights of honour.

No revenge; leave vengeance to the Lord

“Do not say, ‘I’ll pay you back for this wrong!’ Wait for the Lord, and he will avenge you.” (Pr 20:22, NIV)

“Do not say, ‘I’ll do to them as they have done to me; I’ll pay them back for what they did.’” (Pr 24:29, NIV)

“For we know him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’” (Heb 10:30, RSV)

“Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated... So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you

have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For, ‘In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay.’” (Heb 10:32–37, NIV)

Do good; love

“Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.” (1 Thes 5:15 NIV)

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself.” (Lev 19:18, NIV)

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also... Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (Lk 6:27–29, 36, NIV)

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse... If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed

him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Rom 12:14, 18–21, NIV)

“Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.” (Heb 12:14–15, NIV)

“When ridiculed, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we respond gently.” (1 Cor 4:12–13, NAB)

Be Humble. Bless. Shine

“Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, ‘Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes

of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.’ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.” (1 Pet 3:8–14, NIV)

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place...

“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure,

‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky.” (Phil 2:5–15, NIV)

What God has joined together

This chapter is for couples whose marriages have been constant daily struggles. Please let Jesus help. He said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Mt 11:28, NIV)

“I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, listens to my words, and acts on them. That one is like a person building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when the flood came, the river burst against that house but could not shake it because it had been well built.” (Lk 6:47–48, NAB)

You Are Blessed

An effortless marriage is one in which there are no problems, and the husband and wife get along very easily with each other as best of friends.

Not all marriages are like that. Those of you who do not live in ‘ideal’ situations should take heart in knowing that it is in troubled marriages that more opportunities may exist for meritorious conduct. Jesus said, “For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?... And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you?” (Lk 6:32, 33, NAB)

Those of you who have to summon up all your strength every day to hold your tongue, to overlook snarly remarks, to stop yourselves from letting arguments get out of hand, to forgive, to make peace... deserve a great deal of praise. You are leading a life that is nothing short of heroic. You exemplify many of the beatitudes that are so dear to Jesus.

“This is what he taught them:

‘Blessed are the gentle: they shall have the earth as inheritance.

‘Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted.

‘Blessed are the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers: they shall be recognized as children of God.

‘Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.’” (Mt 5:2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, NJB)

And what does ‘blessed’ mean? Blessed ones are those on whom God bestows his favour and special predilection. Continue to live by the beatitudes and you will eventually receive the fulfillment of all the promises attached to them.

The Little Ones

“See that you never despise any of these little ones.” (Mt 18:10, NJB)

The ‘littleness’ of your spouse may exhibit itself in many ways. A few examples are given here.

The individual in question is disgracefully ill-tempered, shamelessly demanding and blatantly self-centred. The person harbours an inflated and destructive sense of superiority, gets angry at anything remotely disagreeable, insists on being right and reiterates this supposed rectitude ad nauseum, retells a problem over and over again while putting little effort to finding the right solution; always looks at the gloomy side of things, offers no support in difficult situations but spews forth ugly invectives at everyone instead; poisons the family’s minds against you, creates tempests in teacups and makes mountains out of molehills. Every answer to your questions is a dagger-like insult, every request – a threatening ultimatum. He or she is born with excellent gifts from on high (such as a fine memory), but instead of thanking God for them, uses them to attack you and scold, and to belittle the dignity of those who do not have the same.

The list goes on and on. To live with this man or woman is like walking through a mine-field: a

ferocious explosion erupts at any moment with the slightest ‘wrong’ step. You have to coax and carry this person through countless ‘crises.’ There is no peace in the home.

How do you handle ‘little’ people like that? On the previous page, in Mt 18:10, Jesus asks you never to despise them. He asks more.

“He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.’” (Mk 9:36-37, NIV)

Small Kindnesses

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me

something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'" (Mt 25:31-40, NIV)

In God's sight you love greatly if you do kind-hearted things such as occasionally preparing for your spouse a cup of coffee, or organizing a nice meal either at home or in a restaurant, giving to your spouse a greeting, a compliment, friendly support in situations of embarrassment, attention during illness and discomfort, conversation and companionship when the other is imprisoned in discouragement and loneliness.

Forgiveness

"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus

answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’” (Mt 18:21–22, NIV)

Amiable Discussion

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you.” (Mt 18:15, NIV)

It is fruitful to talk things over with your spouse in a friendly way. This is not done for the sake of justifying yourself or of accusing the other, but to halt the festering of bitterness and resentment.

Of course, it is understandable that bashfulness and timidity are often massive deterrents to heart-to-heart dialogue. Please pray to the Lord for the resolution of this predicament.

Bless and Pray

“Bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly.” (Lk 6:28, NJB) To bless people is to speak well of them and to them.

Here is a nice exercise. On a night when you are calm, try to recall something good that your spouse did that day. When you look for goodness you will find it! Perhaps you will gradually get into the habit of noticing and appreciating the positive elements in your marriage.

Pray, both for your spouse and for yourself, that there will be healing and conversion. Try to involve your spouse in concerted prayer. Jesus said, “Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Mt 18:19–20, RSV)

Look Inside Yourself

Use the following readings as check-points in your relationship with your spouse.

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mt 20:25–28, NAB)

“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.” (Lk 12:48, NIV)

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the

interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant..." (Phil 2:3–7, NIV)

"You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other." (Gal 5:13–15, NIV)

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." (Mt 5:21–22, NIV)

"I tell you, on the day of judgment people will render an account for every careless word they speak. By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." (Mt 12:36–37, NAB)

“Put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” (Mt 26:52, NAB)

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye?” (Mt 7:1–4, RSV)

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Lk 6:31, NIV)

“As the chosen of God, then, the holy people whom he loves, you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other if one of you has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, put on love, the perfect bond. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together in one body.” (Col 3: 12-15, NJB)

Live Jesus' Teaching

“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” (Jn 15:11, RSV) Live by the things that Jesus has spoken to you and his joy will come into your soul. Live by the things that Jesus he has spoken to you and your joy will be full. Live by the things that Jesus has spoken to you and nothing will ever erase that joy. He promised, “So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.” (Jn 16:22, RSV)

Live by the things Jesus has spoken and you will find that what God has joined together he will help keep together.

A Simple Prayer

Whenever turmoil arises again with your spouse, or whenever you feel trouble brewing, turn to the Lord in quiet trust with these words, “Jesus, we need you. Help us.” And stay calm. Do not worry. Do not be afraid. Do not be agitated. He will restore harmony. He will do it very quickly. He will bring peace.

Prayer

Under “What is Prayer?” in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* this definition is given through a saying of St. John Damascene: “Prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.” (Paragraph 2559)

The topic on prayer is very large. Here, we can only touch briefly on three types of prayers – meditation, vocal prayer and contemplation.

(1) Meditation

“Meditation is above all a quest. The mind seeks to understand the why and how of the Christian life, in order to adhere and respond to what the Lord is asking. The required attentiveness is difficult to sustain. We are usually helped by books, and Christians do not want for them: the Sacred Scriptures, particularly the Gospels, holy icons, liturgical texts of the day or season, writings of the spiritual fathers, works of spirituality, the great book of creation, and that of history – the page on which the ‘today’ of God is written.” (CCC, paragraph 2705)

“Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion and desire. This mobilization of faculties is necessary in order to deepen our convictions of faith, prompt the conversion of our heart and strengthen our will to

follow Christ. Christian prayer tries above all to meditate on the mysteries of Christ, as in *lectio divina* or the rosary. This form of prayerful reflection is of great value, but Christian prayer should go further: to the knowledge of the love of the Lord Jesus, to union with him.” (CCC, paragraph 2708)

Now let us try our hand at meditation. We will use the following Gospel passages as starting points, and watch how Jesus handles personal attacks, comparing his actions with how we react to our colleagues, relatives and those we reckon to be inferior to us.

(a) “The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree... Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, ‘Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?’ But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer.” (Mk 14:55-56, 60-61, NIV)

(b) “And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no answer. Then Pilate said to him, ‘Do you not hear how many things they are testifying against you?’ But he did not answer him one word, so that the governor was greatly amazed.” (Mt 27:12-14, NAB)

(c) “When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. So he questioned him at some length; but he made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him.” (Lk 23: 8-11, RSV)

(d) “Meanwhile the men who guarded Jesus were mocking and beating him. They blindfolded him and questioned him, saying, ‘Prophecy! Who hit you then?’ And they heaped many other insults on him.” (Lk 22:63-65, NJB)

“Pilate then had Jesus taken away and scourged; and after this, the soldiers twisted some thorns into a crown and put it on his head and dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him and saying, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ and slapping him in the face.” (Jn 19:1-3, NJB)

“And they spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head with it. And when they had finished making fun of him, they took off the cloak and dressed him in his own clothes and led him away to crucifixion.” (Mt 27: 30-31, NJB)

(e) “So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull,

which is called in Hebrew Gol'gotha. There they crucified him.” (Jn 19:16-18, RSV)

(2) Vocal prayer

As the name implies, this type involves speaking. “Vocal prayer is an essential element of the Christian life. To his disciples, drawn by their Master’s silent prayer, Jesus teaches a vocal prayer, the Our Father. He not only prayed aloud the liturgical prayers of the synagogue but, as the Gospels show, he raised his voice to express his personal prayer, from exultant blessing of the Father to the agony of Gethsemani.” (CCC, paragraph 2701)

“Because it is external and so thoroughly human, vocal prayer is the form of prayer most readily accessible to groups.” (CCC, paragraph 2704)

“By words, mental or vocal, our prayer takes flesh. Yet it is most important that the heart should be present to him to whom we are speaking in prayer: ‘Whether or not our prayer is heard depends not on the number of words, but on the fervour of our souls.’” (CCC, paragraph 2700)

Now, let us put into practice a vocal prayer by saying one decade of the Rosary while meditating on

some Scripture passages. We will pray the third Glorious Mystery: the Decent of the Holy Spirit. The Bible texts are from Acts 2, NJB.

(a) “When Pentecost day came round, they had all met together, when suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of a violent wind which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and there appeared to them tongues as of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak different languages as the Spirit gave them power to express themselves.” (vs. 1–4)

Our Father, two Hail Mary’s.

(b) “Now there were devout men living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven, and at this sound they all assembled, and each one was bewildered to hear these men speaking his own language... Everyone was amazed and perplexed; they asked one another what it all meant. Some, however, laughed it off. ‘They have been drinking too much new wine,’ they said.” (vs. 5–6, 12–13)

Two Hail Mary’s.

(c) “Then Peter stood up with the Eleven and addressed them in a loud voice:

‘Men of Judaea, and all you who live in Jerusalem, make no mistake about this, but listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you imagine; why, it is only the third hour of the day. On the contrary, this is what the prophet was saying:

In the last days – the Lord declares – *I shall pour out my Spirit on all humanity. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young people shall see visions, your old people dream dreams.*” (vs.14–17)

Two Hail Mary’s.

(d) “‘Men of Israel, listen to what I am going to say: Jesus the Nazarene was a man commended to you by God by the miracles and portents and signs that God worked through him when he was among you, as you know. This man, who was put into your power by the deliberate intention and fore-knowledge of God, you took and had crucified and killed by men outside the Law. But God raised him to life...

‘Now raised to the heights of God’s right hand, he has received from the Father the Holy Spirit, who was promised, and what you see and hear is the outpouring of that Spirit.’” (vs. 22–24, 33)

Two Hail Mary’s.

(e) “Hearing this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘What are we to do, brothers?’ ‘You must repent,’ Peter answered, ‘and

every one of you must be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’... They accepted what he said and were baptised. That very day about three thousand were added to their number.” (vs. 37–38, 41)

Two Hail Mary’s, and the Glory Be.

(3) Contemplation

“What is contemplative prayer? St. Teresa answers: ‘Contemplative prayer [*oracion mental*] in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.’” (CCC, paragraph 2709)

There are many degrees of contemplation. But a simple way to begin is by examining the word itself. “Contemplation” is a combination of the prefix ‘*con*’ which means ‘with,’ and ‘*templum*’ which means ‘a place set apart.’ To contemplate is to be with God in a place set apart. This place is the heart.

“One cannot always meditate, but one can always enter into inner prayer, independently of the conditions of health, work or emotional state. The heart is the

place of this quest and encounter, in poverty and in faith.” (CCC, paragraph 2710)

“Do you not realise that you are a *temple* of God with the Spirit of God living in you?” (1 Cor 3:16, NJB) The word “temple” also comes from “*templum*.”

In contemplation, there are no books or aids involved. We purposely make time for God and focus on him who lives in us and loves us. Ideally this happens in a quiet environment such as a chapel, and for a set duration; but whenever and wherever we desire to be conscious of God’s presence we can always turn our attention to him – at home, in the car or bus, at the office, on the street, in the park, while waiting in line, when we cannot fall asleep, when we are dealing with a problem, ...

We can try that now. Just relax and look inside yourself for Jesus – Jesus who conquers all in heroic silence, who prevails victoriously with absolute trust in his Father, and who gives you the Holy Spirit so that you may bear fruit according to your station in life.

[We remain silent now for a few minutes, *taking time to be alone with him who we know loves us.*]

Exhortation

Each day let us spend some quiet moments with God through contemplation and meditation. The radio, the television, the phone, and all audio and visual devices should be turned off. Let us also pray the Holy Rosary or other vocal prayers daily, not by rote but from the heart, accompanied by contemplation and/or meditation.

Other books by Andrew Jerome Yeung

Do Whatever Jesus Tells You!

The Fruitful Servant

Parents, Peace!

The Rosary – A Worried Parent Prays

Mother Mary Speaks from Medjugorje

The Way to Medjugorje

You can read these books online.

Here is the link:

<http://medjugorjeca.org/books>

