

## PARISH MISSION MARCH 14<sup>TH</sup> TO 16<sup>TH</sup>, 2016

**March 12-13 - Introduction to the Parish Mission by Father Yarek at all weekend Masses.**

**March 14, Day 1 - encountering the Abba (discovering our true identity)**

**March 15, Day 2 - living under the Abba's wings (experiencing God's protection)**

**March 16<sup>th</sup>, Day 3 - Call to forgiveness (entering into the mercy of God) "FORGIVENESS: OUR PATH TO INNER PEACE AND HEALING"**

**Saturday Mass Homily:** God's love is such that we can imagine how, when he created us, he danced around us exulting to the angels, "Look at my child, whom I have made. Look at my child's beauty and see my child's gifts! I will love my child always. Rejoice with me!" And the angels sang.

**Monday Mass Homily:** In the Gospel, we understand that Jesus brings light; he brings the light to us. We look around at our world, and we see that it has gone crazy. Good is called evil, and evil is praised and encouraged as though it were good. Our young people are often so confused. Everywhere they go—to school, to their peers, to their entertainments—they walk amidst the darkness.

We who have been given the light, however, have to watch out for a great danger. That is, the danger of looking down on those in the darkness. Have we always been perfect followers of Christ? Have we been without sin, without failure? What were we like without light?

If we look down on those who do not have the light, we will never be able to approach them with the light of Christ.

### **Encountering Abba and Finding Our True Identity**

**Monday, First Mission Homily:** This is a true story written by a young woman with Down syndrome. She tells how she used to pray thinking that she would have been so much happier if she had been born without Down syndrome, how maybe God had made a mistake in

her creation. She wanted to deny her problem, to be like everyone else. Her parents, though, assured her they couldn't love her any more than they already did.

The kids at school were a different story. They insulted her and called her names, and she would often get off the school bus in tears.

Her mother challenged her to look in scripture to see what God said about his beloved children, and offered her daughter \$5000 if the girl could find any reference to her being a mistake. Instead she read phrases like, "I will guard you as the apple of my eye....You are the Lord's precious gift, his treasured possession...." and she understood that God does not make mistakes. And, she recounted, she never got her \$5000.

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God has made us for joy, and we can't experience that joy unless we know about the Father's love. He is Abba, a title of personal affection, in Aramaic, my own dad...even 'Daddy.' Our practice of religion must involve a relationship with the Father that brings healing to both our sins and to our experiences of rejection.

As children, most of us have known harsh words and rejection, whether from our parents or teachers, our siblings or our peers. As children we believe those negative words, and they dwell in our unconscious as feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy. Jesus saves us from these lies when we confront them with his truth.

In scripture we read that the devil is the accuser of our brothers...and of us. He accuses us of both sins we have committed, and of false issues. He uses the words of past insults until we find ourselves living in negative darkness.

Even when we make a sincere confession and have been forgiven, the devil accuses us of not telling our sins correctly, or of not doing our best. Sometimes the sin that we have confessed is so serious, abortion, for example, that even though God has forgiven us, we have not been able to forgive ourselves. We go on carrying the weight of our guilt. The devil can also act on wicked people who may accuse us too, for no true reason.

What we must realize is that all forgiven sins and all of our guilt have been overcome by the Blood of the Lamb, by Jesus's expiation on the cross. We must accept that sacrifice, appropriate it, and apply it to our suffering souls. We must immerse ourselves in the Word of God to understand, and to say, "I am set free by Jesus."

Jesus didn't die to leave some sins unforgiven. His sacrifice is perfect; nothing has been reserved. When we read Isaiah 43, for example, we see that God does not ignore or make light of sin, because it destroys his beloved children. We are indeed precious, but sin destroys our

beauty. Think of a beautiful and valuable jewel, perhaps a favourite ring. When it's lost, we search for it, but we might say, "Oh, I'm so glad I found it! But it's crusted with mud." Do we throw it away? No! We clean it to restore it to its beauty.

It is when we are clean that we can reach out in love to others. It's when we are at peace that we don't pass on the condemnation that we may have suffered ourselves. None of our families has been perfect, except for that family at Nazareth: Jesus, Mary and Joseph. When we are cleansed and redeemed, though, we are engrafted into the family of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and each of us can cry, "Abba! Father!"

That is when we must let others know that they too are precious, as we shift our focus and theirs to the love of Christ. Human worth must not be judged by intellect, appearance, talent or money. We must be sensitive to the human dignity of each person. Head religion, that of the intellect, is not enough. We must speak to the hearts of others about the love of Abba, our Father.

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### **Living Under Abba's Wings: Experiencing God's Protection**

**Tuesday Mass Homily (Mass homily by Fr. Waldemar. All other Mass & Mission homilies by Fr. Yarek):** God is all merciful. God is all just. Pope Benedict commenting on these attributes, has said that in God these qualities are in complete unity. If God performs a just action, it is also merciful. If God performs a merciful action, it is also just. His justice prepares us to receive greater mercies.

**Tuesday, Second Mission Homily:** Yesterday we saw how the Father's love brings healing to our deepest wounds of rejection, and that we understand this by faith, even if our emotions don't have that awareness. We can know it.

Jesus lived his earthly life in complete 'Abba-consciousness', to reveal to us the Father's love. It was Jesus who taught us to pray to the Father, and sometimes scholars and theologians question the differing versions of the Lord's Prayer in the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

As his followers, though, we must understand that the power is not in the formula, but in the spirit of sonship that is expressed. To say 'Abba' is to pray a super-powerful prayer. And if he is Father, then we must live in the dignity of his children. Our heart must be touched by the Holy Spirit for us to pray with more than head knowledge.

Abba is passionate about us, about hearing our prayers and answering them. He rejoices in responding to our needs. When we pray in praise and thanksgiving, his joy is great, and he answers in abundance.

When we feel alone, when we are troubled by fear and anxiety, we can have recourse to the many helps God offers. Scripture, like Psalm 91, tells us to place every care in God's hands. The verses, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, offer us great promises. We are invited to shelter under God's wings, not only for protection but for the closeness that he too longs for.

In the New Testament we read Jesus's lamentation over Jerusalem and its rejection of the Messiah. He wants to gather us close too, 'like a hen gathers her chicks.' We can take refuge in that closeness to Jesus, and the power of our prayer lies in that intimacy of relationship.

The devil, the accuser, constantly tempts us to keep our distance from God, to stay away. He brings up whatever he can to alienate us: doubts, guilt and shame—anything that interferes with our prayer.

When it is hard for us to pray, that is when we should pray more. We can soak in scripture to know the Father, not relying on formulae, but praying with faith. And we must believe that God hears us and answers. Jesus tells us, as he told the father of the boy possessed by an evil spirit, "All things can be done for the one who believes." And the boy's father replied, "I believe; help thou my unbelief." If we pray with complete conviction, God will always intervene; his responses originate in his goodness.

The Bible says that we must have faith in the goodness of the Father, and have confidence that he wants to answer us. Jesus asks, "If your child asks for bread, would you give him a stone?" We all know the answer to that.

It is important to continue to pray in confidence, to avoid doubt and anger. Think of Moses responding to the complaints of the children of Israel about their poor food and lack of water. He and Aaron prayed and God answered them. But Moses was angry and impatient in striking the rock from which the water then gushed in abundance. And he was not permitted to enter the Promised Land. We must believe unshakeably in God's goodness and mercy.

Jesus told St. Faustina that his mercy is like an ocean without limits. Our trust, though, is the vessel with which we draw the water of that mercy. If we trust greatly, we can ask all things. There is no need to limit what we ask. We can go to Jesus to take everything he offers. We can ask with nerve, with courage, with confidence. We can say, "Jesus, I want everything!" We do not have to ration our prayer; we do not have to ask 'small.' We must ask without ceasing, like the man in scripture who importuned his sleeping friend for bread to give an unexpected guest: asking, believing and persisting.

How should we pray? With sincerity, and in relationship with Jesus. The Rosary is one of the treasures we can use, remembering that its heart lies in meditation on the scenes of the

Gospel. As we contemplate the mysteries, we envision the scenes of scripture, and we can ask for an increase in faith.

We can turn to the Lectio Divina, the Word of God. We read it, dwell in the Word and apply it. The Lord can speak to us through his Word; our faith will grow.

We can pray the Liturgy of Hours with faith, to transform our church and to see miracles in our own homes.

We can offer Jesus Christ to the Father, each prayer an extension of the Eucharist, our treasure. God will grant us all in the name of his Son.

We can pray the Divine Mercy chaplet. It increases our confidence in the love of the Father. He loves us not because of our own goodness, but because of his. We are all sinners, and his grace and favour rain down upon us because of his great love for us.

Jesus, I trust in you.

Jesus, I trust in you.

Jesus, I trust in you.

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### **Entering the Mercy of God: Inner Peace and Healing**

**Wednesday Mass Homily:** The love of God the Father is the foundation of truth. The devil is the father of lies. We tend to believe lies about ourselves, those we tell ourselves, and those told to us by others. As in the Garden of Eden, the devil asks us questions that can lead us to question God's rightful authority. "Does he really mean that you should not eat the fruit of that tree?" "Do I really have to give that up? Stop doing that? It pleases me so much!" We must recognize the truth in order to be happy.

A reporter once asked St. John Paul II which Bible verse he regarded as the cornerstone, the one of great importance. He replied, "...You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free. (John 8:32)

Can we always adhere to the truth? No, we are wounded by sin, our own and the sins of others. Pope Francis has compared the Church to a field hospital, where we can be healed on the fringes of combat and sent back to the fray. The devil is most anxious to alienate us from this source of truth, and he often uses past and present scandals as a means to do so. Stay in the Church of Christ always. The Church provides our moral stability, our means to measure our lives. We must stay close to Christ and to his church.

We may think that we don't need an authority telling us what to do. We are adults, we say, and we can choose our own way of life, our own entertainment. Years later, many of us who have chosen that path have found only sin, misery and addiction. It is the truth that will set us free.

**Wednesday, Third Mission Homily:** What must we do in order to accept the Divine Mercy of God? We must ask for it. We must be merciful. We must forgive ourselves and others.

For me to forgive another is to set a prisoner free, and that prisoner is myself. The old movie, "Ben Hur", has interesting things to say about forgiveness. When the formerly enslaved Judah Ben Hur is adopted by the wealthy Roman general, Quintus Arius, his adoptive father dresses him in the best robes, and gives him his ring—all the power and authority of his name. Recall the parable of the Prodigal Son, where the father embraces his son and brings out the finest robe and his own ring to restore him to the family.

But Ben Hur continues to smoulder with hatred of Messala, the Roman who destroyed him and his family. Finding that his beloved mother and sister are now lepers, Ben Hur is wracked by his desire for revenge. He remembers his years as a galley slave with just one happy memory, that of a carpenter in a small village who dared give the chained slave a cup of water. Now that Ben Hur is a rich man back in Jerusalem, he sees that same man, Jesus. The man who gave him water is now bound for execution, hauling a heavy cross up a hillside. Ben Hur in his turn attempts to offer water to Jesus, only to have it dashed to the ground by a soldier.

It is through Ben Hur's experience of the cross that he learns to forgive. And it is through his renouncement of his desire for revenge that Christ enters the heart of Judah Ben Hur and heals him of his hatred and brokenness, and by Christ's cross that Ben Hur's mother and sister are healed of their leprosy. Sin, our own and that of others, can distort our souls like a kind of spiritual leprosy. We too need to be healed.

Sometimes people will say, "I've forgiven them, but I still feel the pain." Yes, that is true. But forgiveness is a decision, not a feeling. If we do our part, God will do the rest to liberate us. It is our desire to show mercy and love that frees us, releasing the anger and hurt that torments us. Forgiveness occurs when we resign our right to extract revenge for past hurts.

Our happiness and inner freedom, however, cannot depend on the response of the persons whom we are forgiving. Our act of forgiveness does not necessarily result in reconciliation. The people who have hurt us may turn their backs on us. We may still feel pain, but we are able to pray for healing. Counselling, seeking a righteous environment, surrounding ourselves with loving friends and community, are further pathways to healing.

What may block our ability to forgive? We may be fearful that the hurt or abuse may continue. In some cases, it may be necessary to leave the situation, to report the hurt or abuse so the corruption of the abuser may be contained.

Then too, there may be smaller wrongs committed against us that at first may not seem to require forgiveness. They are a lower level of offense. They still arouse our umbrage, though, because of our woundedness, our own expectations and sensitivities. We are imperfect, and we often carry these offenses with resentment and bitterness.

Here too we need healing. Scripture tells us not to let the sun set on our anger (Ephesians, 4:6), even righteous anger. Anger and resentment give the devil a foothold; anger can remain in our subconscious and eat away at us. Rather, at night we should make a good examination of conscience, checking up on the graces, joys, sins and faults of the day that is ending. It is a time to forgive, pray, ask for healing for oneself and for others.

At church we are told to reconcile with our brothers and sisters, to get rid of rage and resentment before approaching the altar of the Lord, before approaching Holy Communion. We are meant to learn from the Lord, who said, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do."

And that is true for us too. Many people have no idea of the hurt they have caused. They will never acknowledge that they did. It is we who hold on to the anger and hurt; it is we who suffer.

Sometimes we want to hold on to these hurts because they offer us an opportunity for self pity. The devil uses our love of self pity to keep us in bondage. "Look at me," we seem to say, "I'm hurt." The devil gives us an excuse not to change. We can always remember injustices that have been committed against us, but not necessarily our own negative responses to those incidents.

Finally, in this matter of forgiveness for you and for me, the person I most need to forgive is myself. We can cling to our shame over past mistakes, even over sins that have been forgiven. God has such mercy that when he forgives us, nothing remains of our sin. We must not be our own worst enemies. When we have received absolution, we must not think that our own sins are so unique that we are not forgiven. Even if, as St. Faustina said, we were to bear the guilt of every sin in the world, God could still forgive us.

If we cling to our guilt, we will often take those harsh feelings out on other people. One well known counsellor who has helped many people, tells this story of her childhood. In the years after WWII, necessities, including medicines, were in short supply. Her mother took the girl and

her other children to the doctor, because the eldest and youngest, both boys, were very ill, in fact, she thought they might die. The girl, however, had not contracted the disease.

The doctor confirmed the mother's fears; her sons were dying. He had enough lifesaving medication for only one of them. Whom would the mother choose to save? Whom would she allow to die? The mother chose to give the medicine to the elder boy. The younger one died. Because of the terrible choice she had been forced to make, the mother bore the weight of guilt though she had done no wrong. False guilt ate her up, just as it can consume us from unresolved circumstances in our lives.

The mother did not seek healing; she did not pray. She showered every particle of affection, praise and money on the boy she had saved, and rejected her daughter. She criticized her with every breath, expending her bad feelings on the child who could not fight back.

The story has a happy ending. The girl grew up and sought counselling, she prayed, she looked for Jesus as her guide back to health. Now she is helping others effectively, because the truth has set her free.

False guilt can consume us. Like the mother in the story, when we condemn ourselves, we start condemning others. If we carry shame and guilt, we can choose to cocoon ourselves to hide within them...or, we may reach out to strike at others.

Do not blame God when you have not sinned, but have yet experienced guilt. People can be choked by shame and remorse from both true and false guilt. How much of our false guilt may come from our own fears, from the experiences of rejection we have internalized? Prayer and counselling can help us to rid ourselves of that weight, and to achieve inner healing.

True guilt can be confessed. If we don't know whether or not one of our actions has been sinful and it's troubling us, it's best to get rid of it before it infects us with guilt. We can simply tell it to the priest, saying something like, "Father, I don't know if this was a sin, but this is what I did..." Once confessed, it will be utterly gone.

**Let us pray:**

**Cross of Christ,**

**Stronger than any evil or guilt,**

**Heal me.**

