



“They are trees planted by streams of water; they bear fruit; their leaves do not wither; in all that they do they prosper.” Ps 1:3

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The Theme for 2011: Walk by the Spirit (Rom 8:4)

CONTENTS

- *He Is Risen-Alleluia.*
- *Jesus’s Resurrection proves His Godhood.*
- *A Sword shall pierce your Heart...*
- *The Season of Lent.*
- *Father forgive them...*
- *Smile Awhile.*
- *Answers & Winners of Bible Quiz #48.*
- *Bible Quiz #49*
- *Lent Quiz.*
- *Smile Awhile.*
- *The Conversion of Paul.*
- *St. Sebastian.*
- *Fear of God or Dread of God.*

He Is Risen-Alleluia

Easter is a spring festival...a sacred and most important celebration of Christ’s Resurrection from the dead. Easter is commemorated by all Christians and all denominations with tremendous joy and thanksgiving.

The Easter season is the most joyful and festive season of the Christian year. During the Lenten season, the Gloria is not sung. At Easter, the return of the Gloria is chanted with expressions of joy and praise.

The altars and sanctuaries are decorated with flowers, especially white Easter Lilies which symbolize gladness and holiness. The Paschal Candle burns brightly

throughout the season of Easter. The Paschal candle is the tallest candle of all sanctuary candles. This is a symbol of the Risen Lord. There is an inscription of a cross and the Greek letters: **“ALPHA & OMEGA”** – which mean that Jesus is the Beginning and the End...The first and the last!

The foundation of all Christian faith is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He died for our sins to give us life. Our Redeemer lives and is watching us. He is the light of the world.

Easter is associated with the symbol of an egg, do we know why? For the egg is like a little tomb from which new life emerges – A miracle. Resurrection is a divine joy. Our Lord has conquered sin's shackles, liberated us and won the victory for us. New life is forever yours and mine, a joy of spring and a joy of hope.

As Christ was raised from the dead, we also should walk in the newness of life. (**Rom 6:4**)

“To behold the Resurrection, the stone must be rolled away from our hearts”! And this is true! We need to allow Jesus to wash away all sins which block us from experiencing the full joy of the Resurrection of Jesus.

The Risen Christ walks among us today. All things living sing songs of joy, nothing can be sweeter. Jesus lives for those who believe in the blessed promise of Easter.

Crown Him, the Lord of life, with triumph, he rose victorious over the grave of death, for those He came to save.

I am the Resurrection & the life, He who believes in me though he may die, he shall live (**Jn11:25**)

Easter is a Celebration of the faithful sacrifice of God's Son. Through His death and Resurrection, eternal life has been won for us.

A Very Happy Easter to You and Your Loved Ones! May The Risen Lord fill each of you with Hope, Joy and Peace.

The Power that opened Christ's tomb – Opens the Door to the Fullness of Life

Ethel Fernandes

Jesus' Resurrection proves His Godhood

It is impossible for us to know conclusively whether God exists and what He is like unless He takes the initiative and reveals himself. The all important question Jesus put to his followers was, "Who do you say I am?" And when Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:15-16), Jesus praised him and handed him the keys of the Kingdom. Jesus thus identified himself as being far more than a teacher or prophet. Jesus proclaimed that He was GOD!

Jesus clearly claimed attributes which only God has. When the paralyzed man was let down from the roof seeking healing, Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven". Can anyone forgive sins other than God?

At the critical trial the high priest demanded, "Are You the Christ, the Son of

Yahweh?" Though His life depended on His answer, he confessed the awesome truth, saying, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the God and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Thus, to know Him was to know God (John 8:19; 14:7). To see Him was to see God (12:45; 14:19). To believe in Him was to believe in God (12:44; 14:1). To receive Him was to receive God (Mark 9:37). To hate Him was to hate God (John 15:23). But would the people accept His claims? He was an ordinary man living among them for 30 years in a not so well known town just like any other simple ordinary person. Only in the final 3 years of His life He did wonderful things, drawing huge crowds as followers. In the end He surrendered Himself to an agonisingly humiliating death.

Is it easy for a person to accept that Jesus is God? Before we answer this, let us take another look at the uniqueness of Jesus' life from His birth to His death.

Jesus was born in a manger, the most unlikely place for a child to be born. His first visitors were simple shepherds who came searching for him to check if what they heard the angels proclaim was really true. A star came to rest at the place that this insignificant child was born. This star was followed by the wise Kings who left the comfort of their royal life-styles to come searching for this child in order to pay Him homage. King Herod was so afraid that this baby would usurp his king-ship, that he planned to get rid of Him immediately.

At the temple when His parents went to make an offering, the Prophet Simeon prophesied with joy at having seen the Messiah. Thee prophetess Anna also prophesied, but with a dire warning to Mary. At the age of 12 the scribes marvelled at His wisdom and knowledge. In His 3 years of public ministry, He worked several miracles. He drove out demons, healed the sick, raised the dead, gave sight to the blind, calmed the sea, multiplied loaves and fish, fed the hungry and with just twelve simple men, He laid the foundation of the Church that today spreads throughout the world.

His death on the cross was just his humble acceptance of His Father's will for the salvation of all so that we may have eternal life.

Who, in all of history before or after Him could claim such accomplishments? Is there anyone who can stand in comparison?

But the greatest and most solid evidence of His being God is His resurrection. Five times in the course of His life He predicted He would die. Speaking of his resurrection, He likened it to the demolition of the temple and raising it up again in 3 days. He predicted that three days after his death He would rise from the dead and appear to His disciples. Surely this was the greatest test. It was a claim of Godhood that was easy to verify. Either it would happen or it wouldn't.

The Jews planned an inescapable death for Jesus, with nails piercing his hands and

feet, a lance through His Heart, His head crowned with thorns. He hung on the cross for 3 hours, His blood seeping from his mangled body. The Jews weren't taking any chances. They were afraid that he would rise again. They had to be absolutely certain that He was dead. Jesus' dead body was placed in a solid rock tomb, with a 2 ton boulder securing the entrance. Trained Roman soldiers guarded the tomb night and day.

In spite of all this, on the third day the body had disappeared. The body could not have been stolen by anyone. The security was just too tight.

The tomb was empty because Jesus Christ had truly risen from the dead as He had claimed He would.

Both friends and enemies of the Christian faith have recognised the resurrection of Christ to be the foundation stone of the faith. Paul wrote, "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (I Cor 15:14). Paul rested his whole case on the bodily resurrection of Christ. This was the most sensational event in all history.

Since Christ rose, we know with certainty that God exists, what He is like, and how we can personally encounter the living God in our daily life. Jesus said, "Behold I stand at the door (of your heart) and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him..." (Rev. 3:20)

All of us seek meaning in our life. We dread emptiness. Jesus offers us a truly meaningful and abundant life, which comes only through a relationship with Him. Jesus said, "I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). By His death He paid for our sins. Through His resurrection, He offers us eternal life with Him in Paradise.

He gave His all for us. Are we willing to do the same for Him? All we need to do is to walk by the Spirit!

Richard Mascarenhas

A Sword Shall Pierce Your Heart.

Forty days after Jesus' birth, his parents Joseph and Mary, took Jesus to the temple as was customary according to Jewish tradition, to be presented to God (Lk.2:27). Being very faithful in keeping God's law, they also took with them two turtle doves as a sacrificial gift from Mary as part of her purification (Lev.15:31). After the ceremony was over, they approached a priest to carry out the redemption of the first born (Num.18:15-16). Hence, they found Simeon, the priest, who was a man of deep faith and enjoyed the presence of the Holy Spirit and presented their dear son to him. He was waiting anxiously for the day when the Messiah would come and fulfill the promise of comfort given to his people. When Simeon held Jesus, led

and inspired by the Holy Spirit, he immediately knew He was **THE ONE**, Israel and he were waiting for, and proclaimed with great joy a thanks to God and a blessing upon the child and the parents. The parents were amazed at the wonderful things he said about their child and then, he added a prophecy to his mother, *“This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed --- and a sword will pierce your own soul too.”* (Lk:2:34-35)

Every parent when presenting their new born to their family and friends, waits with great joy and expectation, to hear nice things being said about their child.....how cute they look, what beautiful eyes or hair they have, or cute long fingers which would some day make them a great artist or musician. These praises give great hope and expectation for their child. Can you imagine what our reaction and feeling would be, if we had heard the same prophecy made of our child, as Mary did? Perhaps we would first be in shock, and then indignant and resentful of the person who made such a prophecy. However, we are told that humble, submissive Mary, **treasured and pondered all this in her heart.** I'm sure at that very moment and from then on, his words must have brought her such agony that it would have been like having a sword driven through her very soul. Pondering over those words, she would have realized that before her son became Israel's glory, He would become a marked man, constantly being opposed, and causing the fall and rise of many in Israel. This was His destiny.....to bring to light the true schemes of humankind's wicked heart, and even Mary his mother, would not be able to escape the impact of her little one's life. Instead of exhilaration, she would have to suffer the pangs of agony along with her son.

Ever since her son's birth, she felt his rejection. He was rejected by King Herod as the foretold future King of the Jews and hence, she had to take flight to Egypt in the dead of night with her infant babe. That must have been the first time, that the sword pierced her heart to know that her child's life was threatened. Which mother's heart would not be in fear and pained in such a situation. Then again, still a child, Jesus at the tender age of twelve, was lost for three agonizing days, when they took him to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. The fear and anxiety that must have gripped her heart, to know that the child God had entrusted into their care, was lost. When her son Jesus started his Public Ministry as a Preacher and Teacher, he constantly met with calumny and rejection, as he did not match up to the people's expectation of who the Messiah would be or what he could do. Mary was her son's first and faithful disciple and must have experienced the pain of his rejection. She still does, when we reject Jesus every time we sin!

Mary walked the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Suffering with her son, never leaving his side. When Jesus was innocently condemned to death like a common criminal, every time he was lashed, spat upon, kicked, derided, nailed to the cross and bled,

she must have felt the agonizing pain of her heart being pierced. And then finally, to see her son hanging for three hours, begging for water when thirsty and not being able to quench his thirst. Bleeding his last drop of blood mingled with water, after being pierced with a lance, must have wrenched the very soul off her body. Yet she stood stalwart and strong, bearing it all. All those years of pondering of what would become of her son had reached it's climax and what an end! She must never have envisioned such a shameful end for her beloved son, who prophets prophesied would bring salvation to the Jews. In her simple, naïve mind, she must have expected and hoped for something better, as all mothers hope. They always want the best for their children. Was this it, for her beloved son, who a few days earlier was welcomed with waving Palms and Hosanna?!! She would not have expected such a turn of events. How she must have felt the pangs of pain, stabbing her gentle heart! The words of Simeon many years ago, must have sprung to her mind and it was now being unraveled before her very eyes!!! That is why, the Presentation is so important in the Catholic Church, because when she presented her son to God, she presented him as a victim for the **Salvation of Mankind**.

“The Sword” in prophetic language is **THE WORD**, which divides truth from deceit, light from darkness, and bone from marrow. The Word when read and understood, pierces our heart like a two-edged sword and **Jesus, The Word** comes alive in our lives, just as he did in the life of Mary his mother. Through the special grace of God, the Holy Spirit over shadowed the Virgin Mary and pierced through her very soul and the **Word became flesh!** So in actuality, the Sword pierced the Blessed Virgin Mary right from the conception of Jesus, until his crucifixion and death. She lived a life of anxiety, sorrow and suffering, along with her beloved son. For they shared one flesh, blood and heart, so whatever affects one, is felt by the other. Hence, if we reject Mary the mother of Jesus, as some people do, we indirectly reject Jesus too, and He feels the pain of rejection once again.

Charmaine D'Souza

The Season of Lent

The Season of Lent is a time of prayer, fast and abstinence. Just as we make new year resolutions, during the season of Lent we decide to abstain from many things, thinking that these sacrifices are ways we can show our love for Christ who took up the Cross to save us.

Have we ever wondered if avoiding a meal or giving up alcohol or non-veg or spending more time in prayer is going to benefit anyone, or will be really pleasing to God? Micah 6: 8 says that what he requires from us is to do justice, to love steadfastly, and to walk humbly with God.

In Mk 12:42 Jesus says, “Out of her poverty she has given her all”. That is the kind of sacrifice the Lord wants from us today. This old woman has set a great example in showing her true love for God. Let's try doing something different

this Lent not for our self satisfaction but to satisfy or make someone else happy. To make this Lent a fruitful one, let's sacrifice our time, talent and money which are God's gifts to us. Let's do something we have never done or have often failed to do, like spending quality time with our children, playing, communicating or taking up their studies. Let's make our spouses happy by taking up one job at home which we have always neglected or failed to do. Could you give your maid same time off? Instead of offering 10% of our salary can we give perhaps 20 to 40 % of our money by which we will experience that unexplainable joy in our heart? Let's strive to do something which will benefit others or bring joy and a smile to them. Let's strive and truly eradicate grudges, hatred and unforgiveness from our hearts, let's mend broken relationships by calling up a friend or relative who is not on good terms with us in our office or back at home. The season of lent is a great opportunity for all of us to build up our souls. These sacrifices are difficult but not impossible for, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil 4:13). Let us not just be hearer's of the word but doer's of the word for "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven (Mt 7:21) so let this season of lent bring about a new awakening in our lives, let's practice unconditional love, for which our Lord Jesus took up the cross.

Sagaya Mary

"Father forgive them..."

Webster's Dictionary provides the following definitions of the word "forgive":

1. To give wholly; to make over without reservation; to resign.
2. To give up resentment or claim to requital on account of (an offense or wrong); to remit the penalty of; to pardon; - said in reference to the act forgiven.
3. To cease to feel resentment against, on account of wrong committed; to give up claim to requital from or retribution upon (an offender); to absolve; to pardon; - said of the person offending.

While all these definitions are correct, to us Christians, the meaning of the word "forgive" is so unique and special, as we can immediately relate it to those precious words of our Lord at Calvary, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*" **Luke 23:34.**

So what does "forgiveness" really mean, both as a Christian and as a man / woman of this modern world?

The true meaning of this is embodied by Christ on the cross. In all His pain and suffering, Jesus offers this prayer to the Father for the sake of His tormentors. He pleads for mercy to be shown to them, as they knowingly or

unknowingly put the Son of God to death. It was not, however, just for these people who were around Him in that moment in time that He died; rather, He died to purchase and procure for us the forgiveness of our sins for all eternity. This is the very epitome of forgiveness, and one cannot imagine any greater example than this.

The Bible is filled with so many instances where the message and importance of forgiveness is clearly shown. No other religion "teaches" people to pray for the forgiveness of their enemies. We read that we need to forgive because God has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32), we need to forgive in obedience to God (Matthew 6:14-15; Romans 12:18), we forgive others to help ourselves gain control of our lives and release all the hurt emotions (Genesis 4:1-8) and we forgive so we don't become bitter and affect those around us too (Hebrews 12:14-15). There are many more examples like these.

In our day to day lives, when it comes to forgiveness, the key to remember is that in "forgiving" someone, we are really helping ourselves more than the other person as we release all the hurt and resentment within us and move to a more peaceful state within our souls, more in communion with our Lord and the teachings of our faith.

As one author put it, "Forgiveness means that we are not going to allow the experiences of the past to dominate our future". In other words, forgive means to forget; but then, one might say that this is easier said than done! We often hear or even say, "I can forgive but I can't forget". Yes, to forgive is not easy and Mahatma Gandhi once said, "The weak can never forgive; forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." However, as Christians, we just have to look at the great example on the cross and nothing in our earthly lives can ever compare to that.

Suddenly, all our excuses not to forgive suddenly seem so petty and trivial. The truth of the matter is that we are not really forgiving if we do not forget. When we ask God for forgiveness, He forgives in totality, time and again, and remembers our sins no more; Psalm 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." So who are we not to forgive our enemies?

Why do we need to forgive?

First, we need to forgive simply because our Father always wants us to forgive and forget the sins of others, and our Lord Jesus Christ has set us the eternal example in forgiving his murderers while on the cross.

Secondly, if we do not forgive, we actually prevent blessings from reaching us. The Bible says that before you pray for anything, first forgive those who wronged you, and then your Father in heaven will forgive you your sins. So there is a direct

connection between the blessings that flow to us and our capacity and ability to forgive others.

Lastly, if we look at it on a physical or scientific level, forgiveness frees one from bitterness and hate. Hate, when stored inside our bodies, for years together, eats away at us and makes us sick, causing stress-related illnesses and it is well known that lots of people are in hospitals today, not because of physical ailments, but due to mental stress. If they could only forgive and let go, they would start on the road to recovery.

So how do we go about forgiving? Is there a formula for it?

Well, there is no standard reference-book or recipe for this, and different experts have suggested so many ways. We, however, have a trump card here because we are Christians – it is so simple really, we have to just compare our grievance or what anyone has done to us at any time in our lives against what was done to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and there we have it.

What we go through is absolutely NOTHING compared to what He went through for our sake!

If we still need some step by step guidelines, here are 4 basic steps as recommended by both medical as well as religious experts.

1. Acknowledge pain and hurt, do not deny what has happened.
2. Relive and Reflect; pray and ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind all the people you need to forgive and the events you need to forgive them for. Remember that forgiveness is not for the other person, it's for you to free yourself from the poison of hatred.
3. Work It Out - This step is difficult, but you need to put your life back into perspective, praying and mediating will help and this can be by oneself or even one to one with the other person. Again, we have the Holy Spirit to call on at such times of need.
4. Renounce Your Anger and Resentment – finally let go; release the person from the debt you feel is owed you for the offense. Say, "You are free and forgiven" and truly make peace with him / her.

As we approach Easter, it is a time for forgiveness and remembering all the sacrifices Jesus made for all of us. We are proud to say that we are an Easter people - a resurrection people...people who proclaim life and forgiveness in a world of death and destruction.

May we always follow the path of our Lord Jesus Christ and truly “forgive and forget” all our enemies from the bottom of our hearts.

Daniel Sequeira.

Answers to Bible Quiz #48

1- Gerasa or Gadara 2- Bethany 3- Joppa 4- Lystra 5- Jerusalem

Winners of Bible Quiz #48

Yohan Yesudas (10), Albeni Bosco Correia (8) Rhea Yesudas (12)
Jason D’Souza (10), Alfred Menezes (13), Samantha Pinto (12)
Sneha Noella Sequeira (11)

Bible Quiz # 49

The Answers to the following questions can be found in Joshua Chapters 1 to 7:

1. Why was Rahab’s family spared?
2. What valuable items were taken from Jericho that God had forbidden to be taken?
3. How many days did the Israelites march around the city of Jericho before the walls fell?
4. Which man’s sin caused the Israelites’ defeat at Ai?
5. What did Rahab tie to the window of her house so they would be spared by the attacking Israelites?

Lent Quiz

- 1) Which is the first day of Lent?
- 2) Which is the last Sunday of Lent?
- 3) Lent is said to be 40 days, but we count 46 days on the calendar. Why?
- 4) Which Saints’ feast day always occurs during Lent?
- 5) How is ash for Ash Wednesday made?
- 6) On which day is Chrism Mass?
- 7) Which devotion has special place during Lent?
- 8) What great feast does Lent end in?

Smile Awhile

- I asked God for a bike, but I know God doesn't work that way, so I stole a bike and asked for forgiveness.
- Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car.
- The last thing I want to do is hurt you, but it's still on the list.
- If I agreed with you, we'd both be wrong.
- War does not determine who is right - only who is left.
- Evening news is where they begin with 'Good evening', and then proceed to tell you why it isn't.
- To steal ideas from one person is plagiarism;
To steal from many is research.
- A bus station is where a bus stops. A train station is where a train stops.
On my desk, I have a work station.

The Conversion of Paul

The Apostle Paul started out as Saul, a tentmaker. He was a Pharisee and persecutor of the Christians. What happened to transform this man's life? What does it mean to me today, 2000 years later?

It begins with the stoning of Stephen. We read that Saul fully supported the stoning (Acts 8:1). Saul was a rabid persecutor of early Christians. "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and dragging off men and women to prison" (Acts 8:3)

Saul gets permission to go to Damascus to search for Christians there and haul them back to Jerusalem -- to prison. On his way, a bright light surrounds him. "He falls to the earth, and hears a voice saying unto him "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? -- (Acts 9:4)"

Saul rises from the ground and finds that he has gone blind. His companions lead him the rest of the way into Damascus city. In Damascus the Lord speaks to Ananias in a vision, telling him to find Saul of Tarsus. The Lord said to him 'go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel' (Acts 9:15)" Saul too has a vision.

He sees a man named Ananias laying hands on him and his sight is restored. Ananias arrives and lays hands on Saul. His sight is restored and Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit and is baptized. He stays on in Damascus for several days and preaches Christ in the synagogues (Acts 9:18-22). That's how it all began; the Ministry of Saul, now Paul. Why would God choose a persecutor of the Church to be an Apostle? What was there about Paul that made him useful to God? What significance does Paul's life have to us, today?

Paul, a Pharisee, was a devout Jew with profound knowledge and understanding of the Law and Scripture. After his encounter with Christ, his knowledge of Scripture made him an authoritative preacher of the gospel. He was able to apply the Old Testament teachings to the new covenant in Christ making him uniquely effective. Paul was also a Roman citizen. Due to this he could enter many cities and had considerable stature. We know him as the Apostle to the Gentiles. Why? It is because his ministry focused on non-Jewish Greeks and Romans.

The Lord looks at all of our talents and circumstances, putting them to use for His service. Paul's fire and zeal were powerful qualities. These made him a successful missionary. His devotion to Christ helped him spread the Word further than any other Apostle. God used Paul's single-mindedness and dedication to their best advantage. The story of Paul's conversion has many lessons about God's approach to salvation.

God meets us where we are, whether on the road to Damascus preparing to persecute His people; whether on the road to be ruined from drugs, alcohol or any other kind of self-destructive sin. Jesus went to the homes of sinners to share His Good News with them. In the same manner He comes to us where we are, to offer His salvation. Like Paul, we just have to say 'yes' to His invitation. Paul's blindness before his conversion is typical of our own spiritual blindness, before we accept salvation. Paul was blind to the nature of Christ; he only saw the threat to his own set of beliefs. When Christ opens our eyes, we see the reality of things, these paths to damnation. When Paul's spiritual eyes were opened, he immediately repented and devoted himself entirely to the service of Christ.

The story of Paul is a testimony to the absolute forgiveness that we are offered by Christ. Paul should have been condemned because went hunting after innocent Christians, sending them to prison, perhaps even to torture and death. Yet, the Lord

forgives him completely, making him one of the greatest Apostles in Christian history.

No life is useless or too far gone for God. He has a purpose for all of us, forgiving us no matter what. We should be willing to ask for His forgiveness and accept it as His gift to us. What miracle life might He have in store for us?

Bernhard Thamm Contributed by Richard Mascarenhas

St. Sebastian (Martyr) A.D. 283 Feast: Jan 20th

St. Sebastian's parents belonged to Milan, in Italy. He was a fervent servant of Christ. Though he hated the military life, so as to be better able, without suspicion, to assist the confessors and martyrs in their sufferings, he entered the army under the emperor Carinus about the year 283 in Rome.

Many were converted to Christianity through his miracles. Zoe, the wife of Nicostratus had lost her speech for six years. St Sebastian made the sign of the cross on her mouth and she could speak again. She fell at his feet and with her husband Nicostratus, who was master of the rolls, the jailer Claudius, and sixteen other prisoners, were all converted. Nicostratus, who had charge of the prisoners, took them to his own house, where Polycarp, a holy priest, instructed and baptized them.

Chromatius, governor of Rome learned of this and also that Tranquillinus, the father of Sts. Marcus and Marcellianus, had been cured of gout by receiving baptism. He desired to be instructed in the faith, and since he too suffered from gout, sent for Sebastian. He was cured and was baptized with his son Tiburtius. He then freed the converted prisoners, set his slaves free, and resigned his Governorship. Chromatius, with the emperor's consent, retired into the country in Campania, taking many new converts along with him.

Pope Caius instructed Sebastian to stay in Rome as a defender of the church. In the year 286, the persecution of Christians intensified and so the Pope and others concealed themselves in the home of one Castulus, a Christian officer of the court.

St. Zoe was first apprehended while praying at St. Peter's tomb. She was hung by the heels over a fire and was suffocated to death by the smoke. Tranquillinus, ashamed to be less courageous than a woman, also went to pray at the tomb of St. Paul. He was seized and stoned to death. Nicostratus, Claudius, Castorius, and Victorinus were taken, and after having been thrice tortured, were thrown into the sea.

Tiburtius, betrayed by a false brother, was beheaded. Castulus, accused by the same wretch, was thrice put on the rack, and afterwards buried alive. Marcus and

Marcellianus were nailed by the feet to a post, and having remained in that torment twenty-four hours, were shot to death by arrows.

St. Sebastian, like so many other martyrs, was finally impeached before the Emperor Diocletian, who delivered him over to some archers of Mauritania, to be shot to death. His body was covered with arrows, and he was left for dead. Irene, the widow of St. Castulus, found him still alive and cared for him till he recovered from his wounds. He refused to flee to save his life.

One day he stood by the path where the emperor was to pass and reproached him for his unjust cruelties against the Christians. This greatly angered the emperor; and he again gave orders for St. Sebastian to be seized, beaten to death with cudgels and his body thrown into the common sewer.

A pious lady, Lucina, was informed by the martyr in a vision and so retrieved St. Sebastian's remains privately and buried them in the catacombs at the entrance of the cemetery of Calixtus. A church was afterwards built over his relics by Pope Damasus.

St. Sebastian has been always honoured by the church as one of her most illustrious martyrs. In the year 680, Rome was freed from a raging pestilence by the patronage of this Saint. Milan in 1575, Lisbon in 1599, and many other places, have experienced similar calamities and were saved through the intercession of St. Sebastian.

Chinmay Bastin Jacob

Fear of God or Dread of God?

“If you forward this mail, in the next 27 hours you will you get a very special blessing from Jesus. If you do not forward this mail and ignore it, you are rejecting God and you will go through a lot of trials and sufferings for the next two years.”

This was found at the bottom of a religious forwarded message I received in my email inbox recently.

“Letters to throw contempt on the LORD” (II Ch 32:17)

There was nothing new about this message because for the past eight years or so that I have been using my email ID, I have received thousands of these kinds of forwards. The only new thing in this mail was the number of hours that were mentioned. It said 27. And I would have been fine if it had stated 24 hours or 36 hours or 48 hours. But I was curious to know why the extra grace period of three hours was given? Maybe they did it, keeping in mind the speed of my internet connection, which was so fast that it would take three hours to forward a message.

Only later did I realise that the three hours of grace period was the great ‘Forward gimmick’, a little catch to keep me guessing.

Initially, when I opened my new email account, and I used to receive these kinds of ‘forwarded’ messages my first reaction would be to immediately forward it to as many people as possible. After all which Christian wants to go through trials and suffering for the next two years? And so all my ‘beloved’ ones, for whom I care for so much, would be forwarded this burden. As long as it was off my head, I was fine with it. I was sure that I was not going to ‘reject’ the Lord, nor am I going to take up any trial and suffering courtesy an internet forwarded message, supposedly from a ‘well-wisher’.

I am sure this is something that most of us, using the internet, have come across. A lot of these so called ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ forwarded messages are doing the rounds.

“The LORD is my shepherd” (Ps 23:1)

What do these kind of messages pass on? Isn’t it a dread of the Lord? A dread that the Lord will punish. A dread that we are going against God if we do not pass on a forwarded message. A dread that He will destroy our family. What kind of an understanding of God are we passing on? What kind of a Lord are we portraying? Is this the kind of Jesus that we have found. If so then we have found the wrong Lord. The Lord portrays Himself not as a God of destruction. He portrays Himself as a friend. He portrays Himself as a Shepherd. He says, *“I do not call you servants any longer ... but I have called you friends.”* (John 15:15). He looks at His disciples as friends. And a friendship is not built up on dread. It is built up on love. He sees Himself as a shepherd. *“I am the good shepherd.”* (John 10:11). Not only does He term Himself as a Shepherd but calls Himself the ‘Good Shepherd’. He says, *“The good shepherd lays his life down for the sheep.”* (John 10:11). If He was a God who destroys, then why would He say that He will lay His life for His sheep. In **Luke 15:1 ff** He speaks about going in search for the lost sheep. Never does Jesus portray Himself as a God of destruction. The Lord Himself does not give a negative portrayal of His qualities. He redeemed the world with an act of love. An act of love in which He did not give suffering but rather He took it upon Himself.

True the Lord does speak of suffering. He does speak of taking up our crosses. He calls us to Christian suffering -a suffering that every disciple is called to. But never does He show Himself as this God who would punish and destroy. I would go to the extent of saying that people who forward such messages with that last little line of ‘trials and sufferings’ have not understood the real Lord. I find it hard to recognise the Jesus of those forwarded messages. I know of a Jesus, who forgives and loves. I know of a Jesus, who accepted us with our faults and mistakes. I know of a Jesus

who was ready to die knowing very well that we His people have sinned. In **Romans 5:8** we read, “**But God proves His love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.**” The kind of experience that we have had of the Lord, is the kind of experience that we will propagate. Only one who has understood the Lord as a forgiving and compassionate God can propagate a forgiving and compassionate God.

“What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? (Ps 8:4)

It is sad if we have to make use of such a negative idea to propagate Christ. Our God is a God of love and compassion. He was someone the people were never scared to go to. When the lepers and the outcasts and the sinners were scared of going to others, because they would be condemned, they came to Him to find love and acceptance. When the prostitute was thrown in front of Him, He did not pile on the burden of condemnation and suffering. He brought her back with love. He tended her back to health. No wonder He asked Peter in **John 21:16** “**Tend my sheep**”. Let us understand Him as a God who loves. Let us experience His compassion. After all doesn't He say, “*Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*” (**Mt 11:28-30**)

And if by not forwarding such negative ideas of Christ, we are to face trials and sufferings for the next two years, then as true Christians let us take up our crosses and follow Him. Let us make that conscious decision never to propagate a ‘dread’ of God but rather a positive ‘fear’ of God based on love. I would never be able to relate to a God who scared the living day lights out of me. I have known a God of forgiveness and love and I will propagate a God of forgiveness and love.

And by the way, we don't need those three hours of grace period too!

Rev. Fr. Michael Payyapilly V.C



***MIPC Prayer Meeting: Every Wednesday at 8:00 pm in the Parish Hall.
General Intercessory Meeting: Last Monday of every month at 8:00 pm.
Community Mass: Every Friday at 9.00 a.m. except the last Friday of the month.***