



“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

VOL X – ISSUE 29

NOV - DEC 2016

The Theme for 2016: “Seek and Serve the Merciful LORD” Josh:24:15

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Merry Christmas & Happy New Year 2017

ADVENT : A TIME OF PREPARATION

Many Catholics think Advent is a preparation only for Christmas. So it may come as a surprise to some that for three of its four weeks the church prepares us for the second coming of Jesus.

The reading of the first week of advent in the gospel of Mathew 24:37-44 tells us, *“to stay awake because you do not know the day when your master is coming”*. The coming of Jesus is compared to Noah, who reminds us that we need to live moderate lives, else we will be swept away in the flood of despair. The leisurely lifestyle will wean us away from God and spiritual bliss. The season of Advent is a time for us to put our lives in

order, repent for our sins and get rid ourselves of the things that keep us away from God.

The reading of the second week of Advent in the gospel of Mathew 3:1-12 says, "*Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*". Isaiah prophesized 800 years before the coming of Jesus, about a voice crying out in the wilderness preparing a way for the Lord. We find John the Baptist preparing the people of Israel to receive Jesus, the promised Messiah. The key word in his preaching is "repentance", which appears three times in the gospel. True repentance involves a radical turning away from sin and turning towards God. It means not only repenting for the sins, but making a concrete effort to rectify the wrong. It demands a new perspective about life and consequently, a new way of life. He insists that this sort of repentance is necessary for anyone who wishes to share in the blessings and salvation that the Messiah would bring.

We read in the book of Jonah, how Jonah was appointed by God to proclaim salvation and mercy even to Israel's enemies. The message "Forty days and Nineveh would be destroyed". The message was accepted by everyone even the king, who believed God. He proclaimed a fast, to put on sackcloth and ashes. When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity he would bring upon them; and Nineveh was saved.

This calls us to a time of renewed repentance; a time of preparation to receive the incarnation of Jesus into our hearts. As we celebrate the historic event we are reminded of God's humble gift to mankind in the form of a little babe in the manger. With true repentance and prayer, let us prepare to experience this love of God into our lives and to share this love with others; in our family, with our neighbours, and in our communities.

There's an old Jewish parable about a soap-maker and a Rabbi. They're out on a walk. The soap-maker says to the Rabbi, 'Rabbi, what good is religion? What good is God? Look at all the misery in the world, what good does God do?' The Rabbi said, 'That is a great question.' But then he didn't answer it. They just kept walking along. They came across some kids who were playing in the dirt. The Rabbi said, 'Look at those kids. You're a

soap-maker and you say that soap makes people clean, but look how dirty those kids are. What good does soap do?’ The soap-maker said, ‘Well Rabbi, soap doesn't do any good unless you apply it.’ The Rabbi answered, ‘the same is true of religion when applied in one’s life.’

The above story is thought provoking and makes us ponder, are we applying the Word of God into our life; Are we spending time in prayer; are we experiencing the presence of God in our daily life. If the answer is NO, then we need to do an introspection into our life. God can use each one of us as instruments in His great plan of life, just as he invited Mary and Joseph to be a part of his eternal plan. Mary finding favour with God and her accepting the ‘Word of God’. Let us turn to our loving Father and pray that during this time of preparation, we may experience God’s favour in our lives through Jesus His son.

We read in John 1:1-18, “in the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God.” He was with God in the beginning....John tells us what impact Christmas has on us believers. He states that the Word Incarnate encountered both rejection and acceptance. Though he was in the world, the world did not know him; though he came to his own people, they did not receive him. Those who received him and believed in him were extraordinarily blessed; they were given the power to become children of God. Today too, all those who accept and believe in Jesus become sons and daughters of God. They receive a new identity, a new status. It is a cause of great joy to know the son of God came to earth not only to enrich us with divine wisdom, but also transform us through his grace and truth. What a privilege to be assured that ‘the Word’... flesh and blood, not only to free us from sin and death, but also makes us Children of God and members of God’s family! It is all the result of divine action. All that is asked of us is to keep our hearts open to him, accept him as our Lord and Saviour and entrust our lives to him totally.

Christmas can again be a Unifier..... Christmas doesn’t have to be an extended time of consumerism and feasting. Regardless of what you believe about the historic person of Jesus, the words..... “love one another; do unto others as you would have done unto you; it is more blessed to give than to receive; perhaps if we implement these words in our Christmas

thought and expression over the next few weeks, our Christmas would truly be a time of joy and fulfilment as Christ intended it to be.....Wishing you all a Joyous Christmas!

- *Core Team*

Faith Formation Days 2016 – An MIPC Youth Cell Outreach Project

“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice” Hosea 6:6

The FFD (Faith Formation Days) was a blessing in disguise for the M.I.P.C Youth Cell. This parish program was conducted for parents and children of Grade 1 to 12 on nine consecutive Fridays and Saturdays. The writing off of all weekends for a couple of months made the task seem daunting at first, but the opportunity to meet young children and help make their foundations stronger in the Lord was too valuable to be allowed to pass by. So we geared up with all hands in.

Before going into battle it is important to put on one’s armour and so we began our preparation by praying daily and doing a chain fast for the children as well as the parents that they may be touched and have a truly fruitful experience. The cell also met for weekly intercessory meetings at sister Ann’s house. This time of intercession formed the foundation for our outreach. It bonded us together in the spirit as well as gave us the grace and confidence that comes only from the Lord to face each FFD.

Each day began with mass for the parents and the catechism children followed by a small performance by the children. The children then went for their respective sessions in the porta-cabins and upper parish hall while the parents remained in the main hall for their own session conducted by the Catechism Ministry of the Parish and the youth cell elders. The Youth Cell led the sessions for the children which included a time of praise and worship with action songs, interactive video workshops on the Year of Mercy, a session of games, and then ended with a short quiet time of prayer and worship. The children enjoyed the songs, singing and dancing with enthusiasm and engaged in the workshop sessions offering insightful answers. We also had time to share our testimonies with them which encouraged a few of them to come out and share their own, resulting in a

truly uplifting experience for everyone.

The sessions for the parents included praise action songs, then the group discussions in which parents discussed challenges in bringing up children vis-à-vis how the parish catechism can address these challenges with the respective catechism faculty and also giving practical feedback and suggestions. This was followed by a short skit effectively enacted by our skit guys – Vernon, Dallyn, Jasson and Ryan. The time of teaching for the parents with the theme - *Mercy makes a Difference*, was done either by brother Harry and brother Felix, sister Carmen or sister Ann. This was followed by a time of worship. One such time of worship in which brother Felix led where he invited the parents of the children of Grades 9,10,11,12 to pray holding hands with their children, was particularly touching as tears of reconciliation and healing flowed from their eyes!!!

Even though our Youth Cell no more than an 11 or 12 member group, had our share of general ups and downs, technical challenges, malfunctioning pen drives and awry schedules, the Lord who was present in a mighty way brought us solutions just as quickly as the difficulties cropped up as an answer to our prayers. Outreach after outreach we were all blessed with a sense of calmness even in the most trying situations. The oneness that is a fruit of prayer is one of the main elements that enable God's grace to power our team and have a reach toward the parents and kids alike.

The FDD gave us opportunities to not only grow stronger in the Lord as individuals but also to form stronger bonds with each other and work in unity supporting, encouraging and stepping in for each other. We thank God for this time of grace and pray that the Youth Cell continues to experience His mercies in new and increasingly beautiful ways every morning by being instruments for the Lord.

Esther Das

A perfect gift received from the Holy Spirit - A testimony

I experienced baptism in the Holy Spirit two years ago when I attended a prayer meeting and since then, I have been hungry for God, and the more I heard about the Holy Spirit and read the scriptures, the more I believed and yearned for His gifts.

I sincerely thank God for MIPC, I must say that MIPC has really helped and is helping me grow through life's spiritual journey. I was thrilled and happy to hear when announced that MIPC was organizing the LSS. It has been really helpful to me and my family. I take this opportunity to thank every member who shared the Word of God during the eight days. When one of our Core Team member was sharing the Word of God, he said that to receive the Holy Spirit, we should reconcile with God and with others and make a good confession. I made a note of this and made a good confession. I decided wholeheartedly that I wanted the Holy Spirit to take over my life.

Luke 11:13, which reads: **“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”** All we have to do is ask, believe, and receive, and God will freely give the Holy Spirit to us.

On the day of the infilling of the Holy Spirit, before leaving my house, I read the scriptures from **1 Cor 12:4-10** (gifts of charism). I asked our Lord to fill me with His Spirit and pour His grace into my heart, and strengthen and multiply in me the gifts of his Holy Spirit that I may daily grow in grace and in knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. I also asked for his charisms i.e. the gift of tongue, prayer and healing. When the core team members and the elders were going around laying their hands on us, I just pleaded with God to fill me with his Spirit and when Bro. Godfrey laid his hands on me, I kept repeating this “Lord fill me with your Holy Spirit, live inside of me. I prayed and believed that I received it and in few seconds I was filled with the Spirit. I started praying in tongues, I was trembling, tears just kept rolling down my cheeks and I felt a current passing through both my hands and all I remember saying “Jesus I love You”.

On the day I testified this, I was not prepared as to what I was going to say, besides that I have this fear in me to face a crowd, but it was the Holy Spirit who guided my steps and took me to the mic to testify. The Word of God says in 2 Tim 1:7 “For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead his Spirit fills us with power, love, and self-control.”

Now I pray in tongues. I know that I do not always know what to pray or how to pray. But the Holy spirit who is in me knows. After I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, my hunger and excitement for Jesus grew more and more. I read the Word and study it and now it gives me a deeper insight into scriptures. Obviously I do not know all there is to know, but the baptism of the Holy Spirit has brought me a long way from where I began. I know there is no way I would be able to do what I am doing, without having the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

In John 15:8, Jesus says, “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit.” It is not about glorifying or getting power for ourselves, it is about glorifying Jesus. His name is to be praised and glorified in everything we do. I believe the baptism of the Holy Spirit enables me to bear more fruit, in turn glorifying God the best way possible. **Praise the name of Jesus!**

Doris Fernandes

CHRISTMAS—A WONDERFUL TIME TO BE **CHANNELS OF MERCY**

There is a Christmas Carol that goes like...Have a holly jolly Christmas, it's the best time of the year...Yes, all of us eagerly await Christmas and we do feel it is the best time of the year, a time we look forward to, a time of festivities, joy, fun, laughter, Christmas presents, preparing our favourite sweets, a time of caring, sharing, wishing and communicating with people whom we rarely meet. A time when we experience beautiful, cool weather. If we think of the origin of Christmas day, it reminds us of that cold, winter day when our Saviour was born, not in a rich palace but in a poor manger, whereby God showed us His depth of love and mercy for mankind through an act of sending His only son on earth. He taught us that it is not riches and worldly things that will save us, but the sacrifice of His son that would lead us to eternal glory.

The extraordinary jubilee year of mercy has just come to an end. Throughout the year, we have heard a lot of preaching on mercy, we have read articles, attended seminars, and other pastoral activities related to

mercy. Time and again we have been called to be merciful as our heavenly father is merciful. But does it all end with the year coming to an end? Or rather is it just the beginning of putting into practice all that we have learnt?

Teachings of the Catholic Church on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy are known by us. And what would be a better time to put them into practice than Christmas time? The whole act of sending Jesus to save mankind, itself is a great testimony of God's mercy; it was a great sacrifice for the salvation of mankind. And when we celebrate this occasion, needn't we try to be as close to imitating this act of God and be channels of love and mercy? It may not be great things that we need to do, but as St Teresa of Calcutta said, we can do small things with love. Small acts of kindness can go a long way in bringing about happiness in the lives of others. It may be just a smile, a loving word, sharing of a meal or a sip of water or something as casual as giving way to a fellow commuter on the road. If we see the traffic situation on the road nowadays, it is so sad to see that hardly anyone thinks of the other person driving or walking on the road. When we are caught at such crossroads, can we as Catholics behave differently and give way to others and offer that act as a humble sacrifice for suffering souls? And set an example to others? To make a change we need to start somewhere and the start could be through each one of us.

As members of the Church, the body of Christ, our lives should reflect His witness of mercy to all those whom we meet on a daily basis. Perfect mercy and grace are found in Jesus Christ and during the celebration of his birth, we need to try to be as perfect as we can, as channels of mercy with the help of His grace.

At the recently concluded novenas of St Francis Xavier at the Bom Jesus Basilica, there were beautiful themes taken for the Eucharistic celebration, on various aspects of Mercy and beautiful homilies preached by our priests each day. It is a good practice to make a note of important points in a homily or spiritual teachings that touch our lives and keep a spiritual diary. We worry about storing material treasures for our children. One of the most precious treasures we could pass on to them is the teaching of our faith. This would give them the security to live and survive in any situation of life. A collection of good spiritual books, or our own spiritual diary

could be passed on to our children. It would be of great help especially in situations where one cannot teach about faith due to time constraints, communication gaps, generational differences or lack of compatibility and understanding. A spiritual diary may be cherished and be of use sometime, somewhere when we are no more and it may be the turning point that we desired all our life.

Giving, sharing or caring at Christmas is most of the times thought only to be giving donations, food or Christmas sweets to orphanages, old age homes or to those who are mourning. Besides all these things, we need to look a step beyond and realize that there are people who are thirsty and hungry for spiritual food. Sharing the word of God, listening patiently to someone's problems, being a comfort and solace to those with broken relationships, visiting prisons and hospitals, all these are acts of mercy and will go a long way in celebrating a meaningful Christmas.

To some, Christmas may mean festivities, enjoyment, parties, dances and a lot of shopping. But these things will never bring lasting joy or happiness. And if we have really experienced the love and mercy of God, these things really should not matter. What we should worry about is our sinfulness or whether we have made a good spiritual preparation for the coming of Jesus throughout the season of Advent. Whether we have forgiven those who hurt us and made a good confession, and whether we are worthy to receive Jesus in our hearts on Christmas day.

If we try to cultivate the right kind of attitude of mind and heart, mercy is not at all so difficult. Saint Faustina, the great Apostle of Divine Mercy, speaks of the mystery of God becoming man in Jesus as the Mercy Incarnate and says that even heaven is amazed by it. St. Faustina was granted a powerful vision as she encountered the Christ child at the Christmas midnight mass in the year 1937. She urges us to be little and humble before the Lord, so that we can seek to delight His heart by performing works of mercy for others in need. At this point I fondly remember Fr Francisco Caldeira, who left us for His heavenly abode. He was a gentle, kind-hearted, merciful and humble priest who was a great source of inspiration and motivation to me. My sincere appreciation and gratitude to him and to all the priests who have been great instruments in my spiritual life.

So this year, can we celebrate a Christmas with a difference? can we make Mercy a way of life? can we instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, help sinners find the right path, bear wrongdoings patiently, forgive offences willingly, comfort the afflicted and pray for the living and the dead? can we be beautiful channels of mercy and continue living every word that we learnt during the year of mercy? can we have a celebration of a “Mercy Christmas “and not a “Holly Jolly Christmas”, this year? If only each one of us did a small bit of contribution to bring about this change, we would truly experience the real joy and meaning of Christmas.

PRAYER: Thank you Father for sending your son Jesus, Mercy Incarnate, to save us from our sins. Help us to always remember the real meaning of Christmas and give us the grace to be your channels of mercy this Christmas and always. Amen!

- *Dr Nelly De Sa*

God’s Faithfulness Reaches to the Clouds - A Testimony

We often sing the hymns...“God is so good and God’s faithfulness“ happily, but the actual meaning and appreciation of it truly becomes evident when one is hit with something traumatic or shocking.....then comes the test! A few months back, I was slapped with such a predicament. While I was away in Australia helping my daughter with her delivery, I got news that my mother-in-law had a fall and broke her wrist. Godfrey had to rush to Mumbai to take her to the hospital for a surgery to get it fixed. On the very day after it was operated and she had her hand in a sling, she fell again and broke her other wrist. We prayed for a healing of her wrist and wondered why God allowed her to break the other one too!! Both of us were in shock and distraught....What can an old lady do with both hands in slings? The hymn kept ringing in my ears.... God is so good and I said Lord, I do not see goodness in this but I know you see it, so help me see like you and accept it. It was hard with me being far away, not being able to render any help to Godfrey and wondering now what?! Anyway, God took care of the situation as we got day and night nurses to look after her and things seemed to be settling.

Soon after my return to Muscat, I got news that my mum who was also in Mumbai while we were away was not too well, she was diagnosed with bowel syndrome and the doctor suspected colon cancer. However, further tests would be done to confirm it. You know what the word ‘cancer’ can do to anyone.....it just paralyses you with fear and shock and that is exactly what happened to me, until I got my bearings and rang our Intercessory Ministry and close friends to pray that the tests prove negative. Much as I tried to keep calm and not worry, as I surrendered her and the situation to the Lord, doubts kept creeping in now and again to shake my faith but I clung to our faithful God and remembered the verse “ Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds” and claimed it. Praise God! when the test results came, they were negative for which I thank and praise God immensely for His goodness and faithfulness and now I can truly sing with a light heart.....God is so good, He is so good to me!

- *Charmaine D’Souza*

QUIZ CORNER - Christmas Quiz

Match the following versus with scripture shown in the box (refer the NRSV – Catholic Edition)

1. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea... ..
2. When Joseph awoke from sleep he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him...
3. But the angel said to them “Do not be afraid” for see I am bringing you
4. He will be great and will be called the son of the most High.....
5. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.
6. And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.
7. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth,
8. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High
9. Then Joseph got up took the child out he and his mother.....
10. A light for the revelation to the Gentiles.....

Lk:1:76, Mt 2:21, Lk 2:4, Lk:1:56 Lk 2:32, Mt:2:23, Mt 2:10,
Lk. 1:32 Lk 2:10, Mt 1:24

ANSWERS FOR THE MARIAN QUIZ

1. The Magnificat 2. Pope Pius XII 3. St. Dominic 4. Lucy 5. St. Bernard 6. The Fatima Prayer 7. Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen 8. Nagasaki in Japan 9. Maria Assumpta 10. Pope Paul VI 11. Pope Paul XII. 12. Pope Clement XI 13. The coronation.

Hearty congratulations to Ethel Fernandes, Jason D'Souza, Lauren and Caleb Fernandes, for the correct answers. We also appreciate Glen Brooks and Ivy Pacheco for participating.

Wishing every member of The Mary Immaculate Praise Community (MIPC) & Your Families



The Core Team and the Oasis Ministry



*MIPC Prayer Meeting: Every Thursday at 8:00 pm in the Parish Hall.
General Intercessory Meeting: Last Monday of every month at 8:00 pm.*

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