**REFLECTION ON THE 1st SUNDAY OF LENT YEAR B:**

An invitation to spiritual race of 40 days is set before us once again. A great forum for pensive and contemplative reflection of my spiritual journey. ‘It is an ideal time’ say Pope Francis ‘…to allow hearts to beat once more in tune with the vibrant heart of Jesus.’ Traditionally, the Church in her wisdom unfolds for us the path to follow in every first Sunday of this Holy Season by inviting us into the desert to share in the experience of Jesus.

The Synoptic Writers considered the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness a good point to share. One of the very striking point that I wish to point out in their accounts is that ‘the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness.’ Naturally, one should pause for a while on that. Be that as it may, to fulfil his redemptive mission the Spirit led him into the wilderness but it was Devil that tempted him. The Father was aware that Devil knowing that Jesus had fasted and was more or less vulnerable thus considered it opportune time to tempt him.

However, we are invited to share in the desert experience of Jesus. It is quite hard, nay, difficult experience. The unpredictable ecology of the desert posits a great challenge. I can simply understand that human body can possibly endure heat far better than cold. Notwithstanding, the possibility of the burning heat of the desert is beyond comparison. Biologists tells us that two-third of human body is composed of water. Hence, the continual and drastic shortage of water amounts to dizziness, malfunctioning of the systems including the brain and power of thought.

From all possible analysis, the triumph of Jesus over Satan considering all these challenges is an indication that Jesus is God’s sent. However, our 40 days spiritual race is not going to be free from challenges. Wherever you are simply becomes your desert experience. Devil is quite aware that through the mysteries of this holy season our hearts are purified and renewed. Therefore, continual relationship with God through prayer, fasting and works of charity would keep us firm in knowledge of Christ. In line with this, today’s Collect says: ‘…that we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by conduct pursue this effect.’

A caveat from Pope Francis during his Ash Wednesday Mass at Basilica of St. Sabina seems adrem to wrap up this reflection. He enjoins us on 3 actions that should characterise our Lent: Pause, See and Return – ‘Pause from this compulsion to a fast-paced life that scatters, divides and ultimately destroys time with family, with friends…. See and contemplate the real face of Christ crucified out of love for everyone…. Flash and Return without fear, for this is favourable time to come home, to the home of my Father and your Father….’

 **REFLECTION ON THE 2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT YEAR B**

Our day to day life experiences leave us with messages for a worthwhile life. Most often we may or may not take cognisance of them. However, we experience signals and indications ‘to get set’ for what comes up next in many occasions of life. These instances are quite often: As we go towards the Intersections on the road, the ‘Yellow flash’ indicates to us to get prepared. At the Airport Terminals, we hear boarding calls alert. In the Football pitch, the referee issues a ‘Yellow card’ to a defaulter which is basically a warning that ‘red card’ might be the next merit. There could be many and more good examples. All these and more alert our consciousness that something is about to happen. Apparently, the Church is giving us a clarion call now that Christ is coming soon! Hence, we should be in joyful expectation.

Advent is from the Latin word: ‘Adventus’ – Coming. Who is coming? Our Saviour, Jesus Christ. We should dispose ourselves to give him hearty welcome. Ultimately, it is quite a natural phenomenon to get oneself prepared in view of the arrival of a visitor. The first and foremost is interior disposition to welcome the visitor and then do well to tidy up the messed home. In our own case, therefore we are anticipating the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Our heart should be ever ready.

In liturgy of the word today, quoting Isaiah, John the Baptist cries out: ‘Prepare a way for the Lord, let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hills be laid low…’ John knowing fully well of the sensitive nature of his message was more or less stamping his feet on the ground. We are called this time to pensive and fervent spiritual disposition of heart. Hence, ‘Every valley in our hearts should be filled.’ This is quite simple. Our inclinations to modernism could develop aversion in our value for God. This will definitely affect our prayer life and thereby develop a valley in our souls which tantamount to considering God as a ‘spare tire’ – second option. Again, ‘Every mountain in our lives will be laid low.’ The mountains of pride and ‘I can do it independent of others’ in us should be laid low to give a way to the coming king. The virtue of humility comes into play here which will give us firm spirit to recognise ourselves as mere earthenware, expiate for our misconducts and then visit God at the Tribunal of Mercy.

From all indications therefore inner true disposition of the spirit is called for at this time of waiting. A proud and arrogant person will really find it a bit difficult to exercise patience and wait. He might consider it as a sign of humiliation and inferiority. Apparently, John the Baptist has given us a lesson of life. ‘Someone is following me,’ He says ‘Someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals.’ (Mark 1:7). In humility we appreciate the gifts in others and form our consciences in the light of faith.

**REFLECTION ON THE 33rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME OF THE YEAR A:**

One of the beautiful realities of life is that we humans are wonderfully and gloriously made. Our Maker has beautified us with gifts and talents for better living. The encouraging words of Joel Osteen, a televangelist in Houston, Texas, has a point on this fact. He says: ‘I believe that God has put gifts and talents on the inside of every one of us. When you develop that and you believe in yourself and you believe that you’re a person of influence and a person of purpose. I believe you can rise up out of any situation.’

Apparently, we receive gifts / talents from God, the source of all gifts, without any merit on our own part. Some blessings are endowed on us from birth while some are received at participation in the sacraments of the Church. The blessings of God are given to us knowing fully well of our abilities, attitudes and competences. Some are blessed with talents / gifts of intellectual acumen, eloquence, ability to volunteer at any given situation, the list could be endless. These gifts though inherent but without activation becomes dormant.

Today, the mother Church brings to our consciousness the Parable of the Talents. Here, Jesus draws our minds to Christian discipleship using economic metaphor. In this parable, the master was about to leave for a long journey abroad, hence he entrusted his possessions to his most trusted servants taking cognisance of their abilities. He gave five talents of silver to one, then two talents to another, and one talent to the third.

However, this is typical of our life setting. Without doubt, God has given us different talents according to our abilities hence, we are automatically conduits / channels of blessings of God. To bring my point home a bit, If you have the gift for voluntary service, a Volunteer, God’s judgement will be based on the service you render to God and humanity. If properly used you will surely be rewarded and entrusted with even more responsibilities as servants with five and two talents respectively. The third servant who was given one talent was not happy with his master thus made no profit. This is quite a lesson for us, never underestimate your talents. Fan into flame the gifts you have. Leave your comfort zone to embrace opportunities in life. Mother Teresa of Calcutta at the age of 12, had the inner calling to serve the poorest of the poor. She had to activate the charism and today the church has acclaimed her a Saint in heaven.

We are called to life of prayer. Our often encounter with God will absolutely help us to discern his gifts inherent in us. The gifts once activated will be for the service of God and humanity. Let the passion to make a positive mark and better living encourage us.