

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER THE FESTIVAL OF THE ASCENSION OF ST. MARY
(SEPTEMBER 10TH 2006)

Dearly beloved:

Next Sunday, September 10th is the Fourth Sunday after the Festival of the Ascension of St. Mary (Shoonoyo). The Holy Gospel reading for this Sunday is about Jesus telling His disciples about God's Law and "What makes Christians different from others and what makes Christianity distinct from any other religion.

When Jesus spoke about God's Law, He did something no one had done before. He gave a new standard based on the law of grace and love. He quoted from the oldest law in the world: *If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (Exodus 21: 23-25)*. Such a law today seems very cruel, but it was meant to limit vengeance and retaliations. Only Jesus knew the law and its intention better than any jurist or legal expert could imagine. He transforms the law with grace and loving-kindness. Jesus also makes it clear that there is no room for retaliation. We shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against our own people, but we shall love our neighbor as ourselves. When we look closely at Jesus' teachings, including "*If someone strikes you on the right cheek turn to him the other one also; and Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*", at first we may think that this is easier than the older laws, but in practice, these are very hard and He makes them even harder. There is no doubt that only a person with full dedication and beliefs can follow His teachings.

We find Jesus practicing what He preached. When He was dying a cruel and horrible death on the cross at the hands of His enemies, instead of retaliating and striking down His enemies, He prayed for them: *Father forgives them*. The church is not the place to fight or to pretend that we are all healthy; it is a place for spiritual healing. It is the place where we receive the medicine of the word of God; it is where we gain strength from fellowship with other believers. Some might say that the church is where we get our dying batteries charged. For when our batteries are charged, it is only then we will be effective lights in the world.

O merciful God, fill our hearts with the graces of Your Holy Spirit. Teach us to love those who hate us; to pray for those who despitely use us so that we may be the children of love".

Bible readings for Sunday, September 10th, 2006.
(Fourth Sunday After Shoonoyo)

Before Holy Qurbana:

Exodus	-	3: 1-6; 3: 11-14
Job	-	1: 1-5
Isaiah	-	1: 15-20

Holy Qurbana

General Epistles:	I Peter	-	2: 1-5
Epistles of St. Paul:	I Corinthians	-	3: 16-23
Holy Gospel:	St. Matthew	-	5: 38-48

With prayers,
Thomas Alex