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Memorial of St. Alberto Hurtado Cruchaga, Priest

Date: Monday, August 18, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Judges 2:11–19
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 106:34–37, 39–40, 43ab, 44 | **Response:** Psalm 106:4a
Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 5:3
Gospel Reading: Matthew 19:16–22
Preached at: the Chapel of Richartz House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe**.**

Dear brothers in Christ,

It is one of the deep mysteries of the human heart: how easily we forget. Not when we are desperate, but when we feel secure. Not when we are hungry, but when we are full. It is in those moments — when the land is calm, when our routines return — that we quietly begin to forget the God who carried us through.

Our first reading from Judges speaks into this truth. The people of Israel are now in the land, but Joshua has died, and there is no strong leader. The people live among other nations. And slowly, almost without noticing, they begin to forget. The gods of their neighbours seem close and promising. The memory of the Lord becomes a little fainter.

But we must read the text carefully. This is not a simple story of conquest or purity. The nations remain in the land — and God allows it. Not to punish, but to teach. To remind Israel that living faithfully doesn't happen in a vacuum. It happens in the middle of difference, in the mess of daily life. The other peoples are not the real threat. The real danger is forgetfulness. Forgetting who they are. Forgetting who God is.

That forgetting is all the more painful in the land itself — in the Holy Land — where the Word became flesh. As Patriarch Michel Sabbah, a former Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, wrote in one of his excellent pastoral letters, "**Reading the Bible Today In the Land of the Bible**" is to rediscover the roots of our

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faith. And yet, it is in that very land that forgetfulness now reigns. The stones of Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Jerusalem speak of salvation — but the skies over Gaza are filled with smoke and fire.

Today, as we watch the destruction of Gaza, we are not just witnessing war. We are witnessing the systematic devastation of a people. Whole neighbourhoods erased. Families buried under rubble. Hospitals flattened. Children living through fear upon fear. This is not a dispute. This is a human disaster. And the Church in the Holy Land has not been silent. Long ago, Patriarch Sabbah reminded us that the Bible "must never be used to justify violence," but instead must always be read as "a message of peace and reconciliation."

As Christians, we are called to name things truthfully. God is not on the side of annihilation. God is not glorified in domination. Even in the Book of Judges, God does not seek ethnic cleansing — He seeks covenant faithfulness. The true enemy is not the presence of others, but the absence of mercy. Not difference, but indifference. Not the foreigner, but forgetfulness.

Psalm 106 echoes this again. It is a confession, a cry from a people who realise they have strayed. And yet, it ends in hope: "He had regard for their distress when He heard their cry." Even when we forget, God remembers.

And then we come to the Gospel — that quiet but sharp encounter between Jesus and the rich young man. The man has kept the commandments. He's done all the right things. But Jesus sees his heart, and invites him further: "Go, sell what you have, give to the poor, and come, follow me." But the man walks away sad — not because he hated the poor, but because he loved his comfort.

We know that sadness. That hesitation. That sorrow of being invited into deeper love, and fearing the cost. But as Patriarch Sabbah also taught, reading the Word of God is not just about understanding — it is about "living according to the Word," and making justice and charity concrete. In Gaza. In Zimbabwe. In our Jesuit communities. Everywhere.

St Alberto Hurtado, whom we remember today, understood this. He used to ask: "What would Christ do in my place?" For him, Scripture could never stay on the page. It had to become action — homes for abandoned children, food for the poor, justice for workers. He lived what he read.

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And today, we also remember one of our own — Brother Jonathan, who died last week. He was well known and well loved in our community. He brought humour, compassion, and a generous heart. Many of us turned to him for his smiling encouragement, for his help, for his quiet words. In his final months, he suffered greatly. It was hard to witness. His death, though painful for us, was a release. A quiet mercy. His funeral will be held later this morning in Chishawasha, and we give thanks for the Gospel joy he lived so faithfully among us. Even when he was feeling sick, he always seemed to wamt to encourage us, and so was a minister of consolation to the end.

So today we are left with questions — the kind the Spiritual Exercises teach us to sit with, not solve:

- Where have I begun to forget God — in comfort, in routine, in the slow drift of daily life?
- What is Jesus asking me to let go, so that I might follow Him more freely and more truly?
- Where is the cry of the poor — in Gaza, in Zimbabwe, in my own heart — calling me to remember, and respond?

Amen.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.