

Prayer Service for Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 18-25 January 2023

Call to Gather

Sisters and brothers, we gather here in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

By the waters of baptism, we have become members of the Body of Christ, yet our sins have caused pain and trauma to each other.

We have failed to do good.

We have not sought justice in the face of grave oppression, nor heeded God's command to care for the widow and orphan (Is 1:17).

As we gather, let us reflect on our actions and inactions and learn to do good and seek justice.

We need God's grace to overcome our divisions and to uproot systems and structures that have contributed to the fracturing of our communities.

We gather to pray to reinforce the unity that we have as Christians to "open our hearts, that we may be bold in finding the riches of inclusion and the treasures of diversity among us. We pray in faith."

Hymn

We Are One Body

Refrain

**We are one body, one body in Christ;
and we do not stand alone.**

**We are one body, one body in Christ;
and he came that we might have life.**

When you eat my body and you drink my blood,

I will live in you and you will live in my love.

When you eat my body and you drink my blood,

I will live in you and you will live in my love.

Can you hear them crying, can you feel their pain?
Will you feed my hungry, will you help my lame?
See the unborn baby, the forgotten one,
they are not forsaken, they are not unloved.

I am the Way, the Truth, the Life, I am the Final Sacrifice,
I am the Way, the Truth, the Life;
he who believes in me will have eternal life.
I am the Way, the Truth, the Life, I am the Final Sacrifice,
I am the Way, the Truth, the Life;
he who believes in me will have eternal life.
(to Verse 4)

I have come, your Saviour, that you might have life,
through the tears and sorrow, through the toils and strife.
Listen when I call you, for I know your need,
come to me, your shepherd, for my flock I feed.

At the name of Jesus ev'ry knee shall bend;
Jesus is the Lord and he will come again.
At the name of Jesus ev'ry knee shall bend;
Jesus is the Lord and he will come again.

On the rock of Peter, see my Church I build.
Come receive my spirit, with my gifts be filled.
For you are my body, you're my hands and feet.
Speak my word of life to ev'ryone you meet.

Invitation to Confession and Forgiveness

Confession and Forgiveness through the Reading of Isaiah 1:12-18

We are invited to confess our sins with the words of the prophet Isaiah.

R 1 When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me (12 – 13a).

R./ Forgive us Lord when we come to worship without walking humbly before you.

New moon and Sabbath and calling of convocation – I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them (13b – 14).

R./ We ask forgiveness for the complicity of churches in the evils of colonialism felt around the world.

When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. (15)

R./ We ask forgiveness for our sins of injustice and oppression that suppress the diverse harmony of your creation.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. (16, 17)

R./ As we have been washed clean in the living waters of baptism, forgive us anew and reconcile us to one another and to creation.

Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. (18)

R./ May God in his mercy, free you from your sins so that you can do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.

Almighty God hears our prayers, has mercy on us and forgives our sins.

R./ Thanks be to God.

Opening Prayer

God of all, our hearts and bodies are thankful for this opportunity to come before you to confess our sins of injustice and divisiveness.

Together we come before you, a holy family, united in the beautiful diversity of your creation, as part of the one Body of Christ.

We praise you that through the living waters of baptism our sins were washed away and we were healed, as we became part of the beloved community, the family of God.

We offer our thanksgiving and praise to you, Creator God. Together on this journey, we celebrate with our hearts and eyes open to understanding and growing in the sacred wisdom that is shared and passed amongst all people. Help us to embrace unity with each other, and remind us that we are of one family gathered by your Holy Spirit, in the midst of your creation.

Amen

First Reading

A reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians (2:13-22)

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Responsorial Psalm

(Ps. 42)

R./ Hope in God; for I shall again praise him.

As the deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
My soul thirsts for God, the living God.
When shall I enter and see the face of God? **R./**

My tears have been my food day and night,
while people say to me all day long,
“Where is your God?” **R./**
These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:
how I would lead the rejoicing crowd into the house of God,
with shouts and songs of thanksgiving,
the throng wild with joy. **R./**

Why are you cast down, my soul,
why groan within me?
Hope in God; I shall praise him still,
My saviour and my God. **R./**

By day the Lord commands his steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
I say to God, my rock,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why do I go mourning, oppressed by the foe?” **R./**

Gospel

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew. (Mt. 25:31-40)

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

HOMILY

Hymn

Spirit of the Living God

Iverson

Spirit of the Living God,
Fall afresh on me [us, them],

Spirit of the Living God,
Fall afresh on me.

Melt me, mould me, fill me, use me.

Spirit of the Living God,
Fall afresh on me.

Prayers of Intercession

With faith and confidence, we come in prayer, before God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

Creator God, today we live with the consequences of actions that have made life unsustainable for some and overabundant for others. Teach us to know how to use responsibly the resources you have given to us for the benefit of all and the respect of your creation. The groaning creation cries out to you.

R./ Teach us and show us the way.

Compassionate God, help us repair the harm that we have inflicted upon each other and the divisions we have created among your people. Just as Christ Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit onto the disciples to birth the community of the new creation, send your grace to heal our divisions and gift us with the unity for which Jesus prayed.

R./ Teach us and show us the way.

Christ, the way, the truth and the life, you embodied justice in your ministry on earth by the good that you did, breaking down the walls that divide and the prejudices that imprison. Open our hearts and minds to recognize that though we are many, we are one in you.

R./ Teach us and show us the way.

Holy Spirit, you create anew the face of the earth. The summit of the mountains, the thunder of the sky, the rhythm of the lakes speak to us –

R./ Because we are connected.

The faintness of the stars, the freshness of the morning, the dewdrops on the flower speak to us –

R./ Because we are connected.

The voices of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized speak to us –
R./ Because we are connected.

But above all, our hearts soar to you for we cry out ‘Abba, Father’ as we say:

Our Father....

Closing Prayer

Everlasting God,

look upon these faces gathered together in holy community
and send them where you would have them go.

Encourage them by your Holy Spirit to continue to tell their stories,
to do good, and to seek justice for the sake of your Creation through their
actions.

Sustain them that they may be one,
so the world may believe that you sent your only Son
Jesus for the life of the world. **Amen.**

Final Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Final Hymn

Bind us Together

Gillman

Bind Us Together, Lord

Bind Us Together

With Cords That Cannot Be Broken

Bind Us Together, Lord

Bind Us Together

Bind Us Together In Love

There Is Only One God,
There Is Only One King
There Is Only One Body,
That Is Why We Sing.

Bind Us Together, Lord
Bind Us Together
With Cords That Cannot Be Broken
Bind Us Together, Lord
Bind Us Together
Bind Us Together In Love

Made For The Glory Of God,
Purchased By His Precious Son;
Born With The Right To Be Clean,
For Jesus The Victory Has Won.

Bind Us Together, Lord
Bind Us Together
With Cords That Cannot Be Broken
Bind Us Together, Lord
Bind Us Together
Bind Us Together In Love

You Are The Family Of God,
You Are The Promise Divine;
You Are God's Chosen Desire,
You Are The Glorious New Wine.

Bind Us Together, Lord
Bind Us Together
With Cords That Cannot Be Broken
Bind Us Together, Lord
Bind Us Together
Bind Us Together In Love.

(Adapted from: Resources for The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and throughout the year 2023: 'Do good; seek justice' (Is. 1:17).

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