

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2011

5 June – 12 June 2011

"One in the Apostles' Teaching, Fellowship, Breaking of Bread and Prayer"

Introduction to the Ecumenical Worship Service

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42)

This year's theme offered for our meditation by the Churches in Jerusalem invites Christians everywhere to pause and reflect on their relation to the mother Church of Jerusalem, so as to look afresh at our own situations. It is from this Jerusalem community that all other communities are born. The earthly community of Jerusalem is a pre-figuration of the heavenly Jerusalem where all peoples will be gathered around the throne of the Lamb in eternal praise and adoration of God.

The Christians of Jerusalem invite our ecumenical gatherings in 2011 to meditate on the importance of our devotion to the teachings of the apostles and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers; elements that unite us, though we are many, in the one Body of Christ. The churches in Jerusalem ask us to remember them in their precarious situation and to pray for justice that will bring peace in the Holy Land. The ecumenical liturgy presented here is intended to lift up the fundamental dimension of all Christian witness, namely love in the service to the Gospel of reconciliation with God and with all of humanity and creation.

Order of Service

The order of service is divided into: (I) gathering, (II) celebration of the Word of God, (III) prayers of repentance and peace, (IV) litany of Christian unity, (V) sending.

I) Gathering

Following local customs, appropriate symbols may be brought forward and placed before the assembly while the *opening hymn* is sung. We suggest that baskets of bread be brought in procession, along with the book of the scriptures.

After the initial greeting by the person presiding some *words of welcome* may be offered to the communities and leaders who have gathered to celebrate.

The assembly is then invited to prepare to celebrate and praise God through the opening sentences and an opening prayer in the form of a litany in the traditional Eastern form.

II) Celebrating the Word of God

The reading from the Acts of the Apostles is central and organizes the next parts of the service. In selecting the text from Acts, the planning committee from Jerusalem wanted to accentuate the ideas of fidelity to the teaching of the apostles and the sharing of all things in common as the key to Christian unity.

Immediately following the gospel reading, designated people come forward and collect the baskets. They distribute the bread to the assembly. As the bread is moved along the pews, one breaks off some bread and gives it to one's neighbour. Each person is then invited to eat the bread.

This will either happen in silence, or be accompanied by instrumental music.

The homily may develop the themes of the Acts community and Matthew's call to forgiveness. It will recognise that the bread we have shared is the bread of hope, of a united Christian community in the manner of Acts that gathers together for the Word, to share all things in common, to reach out to the poor, and to share the bread of unity together. The homily can also emphasize the need for Christians around the world to support in prayer their sisters and brothers witnessing to the Gospel of love in the Holy City.

Following the homily there may be a period of meditation, silent or accompanied by music. An offering or collection to aid the Christians and their institutions (schools, hospitals, etc) may be taken and sent to an appropriate Church organisation.

III) Prayer of repentance and peace

A symbolic action may take place during this prayer. If bread has been shared this might be a moment simply to pray without the use of ritual action.

Option one: Several candles that were carried in procession in the opening of the liturgy and placed in view of the assembly may be extinguished one by one after each petition of sinfulness leaving one Christ candle or Paschal candle lighted as the lights of the church are turned off. At the conclusion of the peace small candles are distributed to those present. The confession of faith which may be done according to the Nicene creed or the Apostles creed or some other traditional expression of faith follows the exchange of peace in semi darkness. The extinguished candles are then lit (from the Christ candle or the paschal candle) one by one after each intention in the litany of Christian unity. The participants are encouraged to take home the candles they received and to light them each night during the week of prayer and, if appropriate, place them in their windows as a continuation of this prayer vigil and a remembrance of Christians in the Holy Land and elsewhere who suffer because of their faith.

Option two: A group (for example of children/youth) prepares beforehand the „mosaic“ (an image of Christ, a cross, a picture of a church, any other symbol for unity may be used as appropriate) and cuts it into large pieces. During the litany of Christian unity, various representatives of the communities present place the mosaic piece by piece in a frame before the assembly. At the conclusion of the litany the mosaic will represent the unity of all in the one body of Christ with the diversity as the rich gift that God gives to the churches.

Option three: Some incense may be offered by members of each community after each petition of sinfulness representing God's mercy which covers our sins and God's grace that heals us. A container holding some lit charcoal may be placed in the centre of the assembly or next to the place where the scriptural readings are read. After each confession of sinfulness the reader or another member of the assembly will place some incense on the charcoal. This gesture represents the willingness of the assembly to acknowledge sin and welcome the response of God's mercy.

IV) Litany of Christian Unity

These petitions are inspired from the situation of the churches in Jerusalem. However, each local situation may substitute their own petitions which demonstrate how each place is seeking to overcome division and find full visible communion. The Litany is lead by the leader and reader with the assembly responding each time. The litany is concluded by the recitation of the Lord's prayer. Each one may pray it in his or her own language or in Aramaic, the language used by some Christians in the Holy City today (see appendix).

V) Sending

The assembly invokes the blessing of God upon its members, who are sent forth as ambassadors of the Good News of reconciliation. A hymn may conclude the service.

ORDER OF THE ECUMENICAL WORSHIP SERVICE

L: Leader
A: Assembly
R: Reader

GATHERING

The Book of the Gospels is processed, and also baskets of bread (rolls or small loaves) are brought and placed near the table or place of the Word.

Opening Hymn

Greeting

L.: In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

A.: Amen.

L.: From all Christians in Jerusalem to the faithful of NN,

in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace!

(cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:1).

A.: Thanks be to God.

Opening Invocations

L.: Compassionate and loving God, you created us in your likeness.

A.: Kyrie, kyrie, eleison. *(The first kyrie could be intoned and then all sing using the Taize chant).*

L.: Reconciling and healing God,

restore the unity of all those who confess your Son Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of all.

A.: Kyrie, kyrie, eleison.

L.: Courageous and sustaining God

help us in our weakness and strengthen us with your Holy Spirit.

A.: Kyrie, kyrie, eleison.

CELEBRATING THE WORD OF GOD

L.: Open now our ears and hearts to hear your Word proclaimed.

Inspire us to live it more faithfully in all that we do and say, to the glory of your name and the spreading of your kingdom, most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

A.: Amen.

L.: Wisdom. Let us be attentive!

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 33:1-4

Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother. But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

Or: Isaiah 58:6-10

Is not this the fast I choose:

to loose the bonds of injustice,

to undo the thongs of the yoke,

to let the oppressed go free,

and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,

and bring the homeless poor into your house;

when you see the naked, to cover them,

and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.

Psalm 96:1-13 (It would be very appropriate that this, or a similar hymn based on Psalm 96 be sung)

A.: O sing the Lord a new song and bless God's holy name

O sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Sing to the Lord, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples.

A.: O sing the Lord a new song and bless God's holy name

For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be revered above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
but the Lord made the heavens.
Honour and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

A.: O sing the Lord a new song and bless God's holy name

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts.
Worship the Lord in holy splendour;
tremble before him, all the earth.

A.: O sing the Lord a new song and bless God's holy name

Say among the nations, 'The Lord is king!
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
He will judge the people with equity.'

A.: O sing the Lord a new song and bless God's holy name

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it.

New Testament Reading: Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Alleluia (sung)

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:21-26

You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgement.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool.’ you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Alleluia (sung)

Bread (rolls or small loaves) that have been carried in baskets and placed near the Word at the entrance procession are now distributed to the assembly. The bread is passed along the row from one participant to the next. Each takes a small piece, eats it, and passes the rest of the loaf to the next person.

Homily / Sermon

Silence and possibly a collection.

L.: Let us pray
Gracious God,
you have promised through your prophets that Jerusalem will be home to many peoples, mother to many nations. Hear our prayers that Jerusalem, the city of your visitation, may be for all a place to dwell with you and to encounter one another in peace.
We pray to the Lord.

R.: Gracious God hear our prayer.

L.: Merciful God,
may your life-giving Spirit move in every human heart, that the barriers that divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease, and that, with divisions healed, your people might live in justice and peace.
We pray to the Lord.

R.: Merciful God hear our prayer.

L.: Loving God,
hear our prayers for your holy city, Jerusalem.
End her suffering and make her whole.
Make her your home once again, a city of peace, and a light to all peoples.
Foster harmony in the holy city among all her inhabitants.
We pray to the Lord.

R.: Loving God hear our prayer

Hymn

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND PEACE

L.: With the Churches in Jerusalem we pray to the Lord: we confess our failure to uphold faithfulness and fellowship. (*pause for reflection*)

We pray to the Lord:

A.: Kyrie, kyrie, eleison.

L.: With the Churches in Jerusalem we pray to the Lord:
we confess a lack of vision that prevents us from seeing the glory of your work in our midst. (*pause for reflection*)

We pray to the Lord:

A.: Kyrie, kyrie, eleison.

L.: With the Churches in Jerusalem we pray to the Lord:
we confess that we hold on to possessions at the expense of the poor. (*pause for reflection*)

We pray to the Lord:

A.: Kyrie, kyrie, eleison.

L.: With the Churches in Jerusalem we pray to the Lord:
we confess our failure of love and generosity. (*pause for reflection*)
We pray to the Lord:
A.: Kyrie, kyrie, eleison.

Assurance of God's Forgiveness

L.: This is what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah, 'Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly.' As we wait for the coming of the Lord we are also assured that in Christ we are forgiven, renewed and made whole again.

The Peace

L.: Christ is our peace. He has reconciled us to God in one body on the cross; we meet in His name and share His peace.
The peace of the Lord be always with you.
A.: And also with you.

Some sign of peace is shared in the assembly according to custom.

Hymn (calling on the Holy Spirit to strengthen us)

LITANY OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

L.: In Christ, the world is reconciled to God who entrusts to us the message of reconciliation.
As the ambassadors of Christ's reconciling work, we make our petitions to God:

L.: With Christians of the Holy Land, we too are witnesses to the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, his ministry in Galilee, his death and resurrection, and the descent of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem:

L.: When we pray together from our diverse traditions,
A.: **Holy One who makes us one, thank you for the gift of unity in Christ:
make our unity visible and bring healing to the world.**

L.: When we read the Bible together in our diversity of language and context,
A.: **Revealing One who makes us one, thank you for the many and varied ways in which you speak to us:
make our unity visible and bring healing to the world.**

L.: When we establish relations of friendship among Jews, Christians and Muslims,
A.: **Wounded One who makes us one, thank you for your grace shown to all:
make our unity visible and bring healing to the world.**

L.: When we tear down the wall of indifference and hatred,
A.: **Merciful One who makes us one, thank you that we are all on in Christ Jesus:
make our unity visible and bring healing to the world.**

L.: When we work for justice and solidarity and move from fear to confidence,
A.: **Strengthening One who makes us one, thank you for the power of the Spirit:
make our unity visible and bring healing to the world.**

L.: When we yearn for peace and justice for all in the sure and certain hope of your coming Kingdom,
A.: **Triune One who makes us one, thank you for your boundless love:
make our unity visible and bring healing to the world.**

*The Creed (Apostles, Nicene-Constantinople or other suitable form. See Appendix)
We pray this together as a sign of our common baptism and the beliefs we hold in common.*

Lord's Prayer (each in one's own language, or as suggested in Aramaic)

SENDING

The assembly invokes the blessing of God upon its members, who are sent forth as ambassadors of the Good News of reconciliation.

L.: May the Father, who is faithful to his promises and unfailing in his help, sustain you as you go forth to strive for justice and seek an end to division.

A.: Amen.

L.: May the Son, who sanctified the Holy Land by his birth, ministry, death and resurrection, bring you redemption, reconciliation and peace.

A.: Amen.

L.: May the Spirit, who gathered the first believers in Jerusalem as one, unite you in faithfulness to the teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers, and inspire you to preach and live the Gospel.

A.: Amen.

L.: May the One God, Father, Son and Spirit, bless you and keep you, as you go forth to proclaim his Good News to the world.

A.: Thanks be to God.

Blessing

A.: May the blessing of the God of peace and justice be with us;
May the blessing of the Son Who weeps the tears of the world's suffering be with us;
And may the blessing of the Spirit who inspires us to reconciliation and hope be with us from now into eternity.

A.: Amen.

Hymn

APPENDIX

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,

the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,

the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation

he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;

he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,

who proceeds from the Father [and the Son],
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.