

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

12 – 19 May 2024



“Good Samaritan in Tibet” Artist: Frank Wesley (1923-2002) ©

“You shall love the Lord your God ...and your neighbour as yourself...”

(Luke 10:27)

**BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS
FOR THE EIGHT DAYS**

DAY 1

A lawyer stood up to test Jesus.

“Teacher”, he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

(Lk 10:25)

Help us, Lord, to have a life turned towards you

Additional scripture passages

Romans 14:8-9

Psalm 103:13-18

Reflection

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” This crucial question asked of Jesus by a lawyer challenges every believer in God. It affects the meaning of our life on earth and for eternity. Elsewhere in the Bible, Jesus gives us the ultimate definition of eternal life: “... that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent” (Jn 17:3). Knowing God means discovering and doing his will in our lives.

Every person wants a life of fullness and truth, and God desires this for us too

(cf. Jn 10:10).

Saint Irenaeus said,

“The glory of God is a human being fully alive”.

The existential realities of life, with divisions, selfishness and suffering, often distance us from the quest for God. Jesus lived the mystery of intimate communion with the Father, who desires to fill all his children with the fullness of his eternal life. Jesus is

“the Way” that leads to the Father, our ultimate destiny.

Thus, our quest for eternal life brings us closer to Jesus, and in so doing brings us nearer to each other, strengthening our closeness on the path toward Christian unity. Let us be open to friendship and collaboration with Christians of all churches, praying for the day when we can all stand together at the Table of the Lord.

Prayer

God of life,

You have created us to have life, and life in all its fullness.

May we recognise in our brothers and sisters
their desire for eternal life.

As we follow Jesus’ way with determination,
may we lead others to you.

We pray in his name.

Amen.

DAY 2

The lawyer answered “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself”

(Lk 10:27)

**Help me Lord to love you, my neighbour and myself
with all that I am**

Additional scripture passages

Deuteronomy 10:12-13

Psalms 133

Reflection

The lawyer’s answer may seem simple, drawn from the well-known commandments of God. However, to love God in this way and our neighbour as ourselves can often be difficult.

God’s commandment to love him requires deep commitment and means abandoning ourselves entirely, offering our hearts and minds to serve God’s will. We can ask for the grace to follow Christ’s example, he who offered himself up completely and said, “Not my will but yours be done” (Lk 22:42). He also manifested his great love to all, including his enemies. We do not get to choose our neighbours. Loving them means being attentive to their needs, accepting their imperfections and encouraging their hopes and aspirations. The same attitude is needed on the path of Christian unity, with regard to one another’s different traditions.

The call to love your neighbour “as yourself” reminds us of the need to accept ourselves as we are, conscious of God’s compassionate gaze upon us, always ready to forgive. Consider that we are God’s beloved creation. Respect yourself. Seek peace with yourself. Similarly, we can ask for the grace to love and accept our own church or community, with its failings, entrusting all things to the Father, who restores us through the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

Lord, give us the grace to know you more deeply,
in order to love you with all of our being.

Grant us a pure heart, to love our neighbour as ourselves.

May the gift of your Holy Spirit

enable us to see your presence in our sisters and brothers,
that we may love each other with the same unconditional love with which you
love us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

DAY 3

“Who is my neighbour?”

(Lk 10: 29)

Lord, open our hearts to those we do not see

Additional scripture passages

Romans 13:8-10

Psalm 119:57-63

Reflection

The teacher of the law wanted to justify himself, hoping that the neighbour he is called to love is one of his own faith and people. This is a natural human instinct. When we invite people to our homes, they are quite often people who share our social status, our outlook on life and our values. There is a human instinct to prefer places of familiarity. This is also true of our ecclesial communities. But Jesus takes the lawyer, and his wider audience, deeper into their own tradition by reminding them of the obligation to welcome and to love all, regardless of religion, culture or social status.

The Gospel teaches that loving those who are like ourselves is not extraordinary. Jesus steers us towards a radical vision of what it means to be human. The parable illustrates in a very visible way what Christ expects from us – to open wide our hearts and walk in his way, loving others as he loves us. In fact, Jesus answers the lawyer with another question: it is not “who is my neighbour?”, but, “who proved to be a neighbour to the man in need?”

Our times of insecurity and fear confront us with a reality where distrust and uncertainty come to the forefront of relationships. This is the challenge of the parable today: to whom am I a neighbour?

Prayer

God of love,

Who write love in our hearts,

instil in us the courage to look beyond ourselves
and see the neighbour in those different from ourselves,
that we may truly follow Jesus Christ,
our brother and our friend,
who is Lord, for ever and ever.

Amen.

DAY 4

*When he saw him, he passed by on the other side
(Lk 10:31)*

May we never turn away from those in need

Additional scripture passages

Isaiah 58:6-9a

Psalm 34:15-22

Reflection

The priest and Levite who walk by on the other side may have had good religious reasons for not helping: they may have been ready to perform certain religious rituals and might have risked ritual defilement if the man had been dead. Yet on many occasions, Jesus is critical of religious leadership for placing the rules of religion ahead of the obligation to always do good.

The beginning of the text for the Week of Prayer tells us how the teacher of the law wanted to justify himself. The priest and the Levite in the parable would have felt justified in what they had done. As Christians, how far are we prepared to go beyond convention? Sometimes our ecclesial and culturally conditioned short-sightedness can prevent us from seeing what is being revealed by the life and witness of sisters and brothers of other Christian traditions. When we open our eyes to see how God's love is revealed by our fellow Christians, we are drawn into deeper union with them. This parable of Jesus not only challenges us to do good, but also to widen our vision. We do not only learn what is good and holy from those who share our confessional or religious worldview, but often from those different from ourselves.

The Good Samaritan is often the one we do not expect..

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
As we journey with you towards unity,
may our eyes not look away,
but be wide open to the world.
As we travel through life,
may we stop and reach out, bind up the wounded
and in so doing experience your presence in them:
you who live and reign for ever and ever.
Amen.

DAY 5

*He went to him and bandaged his wounds,
having poured oil and wine on them
(Lk 10:34)*

Lord, help us see the wounds and find hope

Additional scripture passages

Joel 2:23-27

Psalm 104:14-15, 27-30

Reflection

The Good Samaritan did what he could out of his own resources: he poured wine and oil and bandaged the man's wounds and put him on his own animal. He went further still by promising to pay for his care. When we see the world through the Samaritan's eyes, every situation can be an opportunity to help those in need. This is where love manifests itself. The example of the Good Samaritan motivates us to ask ourselves how to respond to our neighbour. He gave wine and oil, restoring the man and giving him hope. What can we give, so that we can be a part of God's healing of a broken world?

This brokenness shows itself in our world in insecurity, fear, distrust and division.

Shamefully, these divisions also exist between Christians. Though we celebrate sacraments or other rituals of healing, reconciliation and consolation, often using oil and wine, we persist in divisions that wound the Body of Christ. The healing of our Christian divisions promotes the healing of the nations.

Prayer

Gracious God,

You who are the source of all love and goodness:

enable us to see the needs of our neighbour.

Show us what we can do to bring about healing.

Change us, so that we can love all our brothers and sisters.

Help us to overcome the obstacles of division,
that we might build a world of peace for the common good.

Thank you for renewing your Creation
and leading us to a future which is full of hope:
you who are Lord of all, yesterday, today and forever. Amen.

DAY 6

*Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn,
and took care of him (Lk 10:34)*

Lord, turn our churches in ‘inns’, to welcome those in need

Additional scripture passages

Genesis 18:4-5

Psalm 5:11-12

Reflection

The man who fell into the hands of robbers was cared for by a Samaritan. The Samaritan saw beyond prejudice or bias. He saw someone in need and brought him to an inn. “The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend” (Lk 10:35)

In any human society, hospitality and solidarity are essential. They require the welcoming of strangers, foreigners, migrants and homeless people. However, when faced with insecurity, suspicion and violence, we tend to mistrust our neighbours. Hospitality is an important witness to the Gospel, particularly in contexts of religious and cultural pluralism. Welcoming ‘the other’, and being welcomed in turn, is at the heart of ecumenical dialogue. Christians are challenged to turn our churches into inns where our neighbours can find Christ. Such hospitality is a sign of the love that our churches have for one another and for all.

When we as followers of Christ move beyond our confessional traditions and choose to practice ecumenical hospitality, we move from being strangers to being neighbours.

Prayer

Father of love,

in Jesus, you showed us the meaning of hospitality,
by caring for our fragile humanity.

Help us to become a community
that welcomes those who feel abandoned and lost,
building a house where all are welcome.

May we come closer to one another as we offer the world
your unconditional love.

This we pray in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

DAY 7

*Jesus said: "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour?"
(Lk 10:36)*

Lord, show us how to respond to our neighbour

Additional scripture passages

Philippians 2:1-5

Psalms 10:17-18

Reflection

At the end of the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer: who was the neighbour to the man victimized? The lawyer replied "the one who showed him mercy". He does not say "the Samaritan" and we might imagine that the hostility between Samaritans and Jews made that answer hard to admit. We often discover neighbours in the most unexpected people, even those whose very name or origins we find difficult to utter. In today's world, where polarised politics often set those of different religious identities against one another, Jesus challenges us through this parable to see the importance of our vocation to cross borders and walls of separation.

As with the lawyer, we are challenged to reflect upon how we live our lives, not merely in terms of whether we do good or not, but whether, like the priest and the Levite, we are neglecting to act mercifully.

Prayer

Holy God,

your Son Jesus Christ came among us to show us
the way of compassion.

Help us by your Spirit to follow his example,
to serve the needs of all your children,

and so give united Christian witness to your ways of love and mercy.

We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

DAY 8

*Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise"
(Lk 10:37)*

Lord, may our fellowship be a sign of your Kingdom

Additional scripture passages

Romans 12:9-13

Psalm 41:1-2

Reflection

Through these words – “Go and do likewise” – Jesus sends each of us, and each of our churches, to live out his commandment to love. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, we are sent to be “other Christs”, reaching out to suffering humanity in compassion and mercy. Like the Good Samaritan towards the injured man, we can choose not to reject those who are different, but instead cultivate a culture of proximity and goodwill.

How does Jesus’ invitation to “Go and do likewise” speak to my life? What does this call of Christ imply for my relationships with members of other churches? How can we charitably bear witness together to God’s love?

As ambassadors for Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:20), we are called to be reconciled to God and to one another, for fellowship to take root and grow in our churches and in areas affected by inter-communal conflict, such as the Sahel region.

As mutual trust and confidence increase, we will become more willing to reveal our wounds, including ecclesial wounds, that Christ’s love may heal us through each other’s love and care. Striving together for Christian unity helps rebuild relationships, so that violence can give way to solidarity and peace.

Prayer

Heavenly Father,
we thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, the giver of life,
who makes us more open to each other, resolves conflict,
and strengthens our bonds of communion.
May we grow in mutual affection
and in the desire to announce the Gospel message more faithfully,
that the world may come together in unity
and welcome the Prince of Peace.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

*You shall love the Lord your God ... and your neighbour as yourself
(Luke 10:27)*

Reflection

“Depending on how narrowly or widely you draw the circle, the parable is about how you interpret the Torah; how you interpret religious and ethical law generally; how you should overcome religious division; how you should overcome ethnic division; how you should not take your ethical status for granted; how you should be morally interventionist; how you should go the extra mile; how you should avoid seeing others as the recipients of your ethical care but instead look first at yourself; how love does not allow limits on the definition of neighbour; how one cannot define one’s neighbour but only be a neighbour; how we should stop asking and start doing”.

(Nick Spencer, research director of Theos, a public theology thinktank in the UK)

World-renowned theologian and Dominican Professor Gustavo Gutierrez responds to the central question in the Good Samaritan parable, “Who is my neighbour?”, stating that strictly speaking, we don’t have neighbours, we are ‘doing’ neighbours. The neighbour is the one “in whose way I place myself just like the Samaritan did” (and thus, ideology moves to praxis). When I go out of my way and approach the other, it is in that moment that we both become neighbours. It is a movement from the ‘I’ to the ‘YOU’.

The call at the end of the parable is to “go and do the same yourself” (37). This is a call to follow Jesus in the service of the other person without obligation. Professor Gutierrez sees this action as a movement from ‘anonymity’ to ‘neighbourhood’ and rooted in the attitude we have and the love that we carry that we may be life-giving for others. And paradoxically, an approach to the other – my neighbour – is an approach to loving myself.

The parable invites reflection on who am I ‘doing’ neighbour for? Who am I going out of my way for: ‘culturally’, beyond my cultural norms; ‘nationally’, beyond my first world environment; and ‘mentally’, beyond my constructs of superiority, of Western society over other societies?

In his recent ‘short talk on love’, Dave Andrews
(Waiters Union, West End, Brisbane) writes:

I believe God is love and that we are made by love, with love, for love. I believe that Jesus embodies God and incarnates God’s love in his life. Jesus calls us to love God and to love like God in whose likeness we are created. Jesus shows us how we can really, truly and sincerely love others as we love ourselves, including not only neighbours, but also strangers, not only our friends, but also our enemies. And in Jesus, we see, that in the end, love is not in vain, love triumphs over hate, love wins..

Reflection (cont)

Dave recounts a time he spent with a bunch of weary, wrinkled, disillusioned activists who had struggled in vain for societal change. Most of them were hard-core atheists, very cynical about the role that religion had played in supporting the status quo.

Nevertheless, Dave and his wife Ange were invited as “Godists” to share with the group about how “God” sustained them in their own struggle for justice, in spite of their own disillusionment. were many people with tears in their eyes. And it seemed to me, they felt that this word, from a “God” whom they didn’t believe in, had profoundly affirmed them in being the very best they could be as human beings. The gospel is simply that ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8) ‘Love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. (v7) ‘If we love one another, God lives in us, and God’s love is made complete in us.’”(v12).

We are made by love, with love, for love.



This year the ecumenical celebration was prepared by a team representing different Christian traditions in Burkina Faso facilitated by the local *Chemin Neuf* Community (CCN).

The choice of biblical and liturgical texts is inspired by the image of the good Samaritan from the parable (Lk 10:25-27) in which Jesus demonstrates what it means to love one’s neighbour, in answer to a question about the Old Testament commandment:

“You shall love the Lord your God ... and your neighbour as yourself”
(Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18b).

In Burkina Faso, a calabash is used to share water with guests who arrive tired from their journey. It expresses welcome, hospitality and fellowship. After the visitor has been refreshed, conversation can begin and the purpose of the visit can be expressed.

As we gather and enter into prayer, we welcome you in the same way as Abraham welcomed the three visitors and provided water for their refreshment.





WEEK OF
PRAYER
FOR
CHRISTIAN
UNITY
2024

“YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD...
AND YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF.”

Luke
10:27

St Mark's Parish.

*United in Baptism,
Nourished by the Eucharist,
Guided by the Holy Spirit,
We Form a Vibrant and Caring Community,
Living and Proclaiming the Gospel,
Reaching Out to Those in Need,
Journeying Together,
Growing in Faith.*

