

Holy Week

Community Staff Prayer



Artwork by Dorothy Woodward rsj

Jesus, God's Mercy For The World

Preparation:

A large Globe of the world is set in the centre of the room as the focus of our prayer. A large candle burns near the Globe and the group is seated in a circle (if possible) around it. The Bible is placed on the Prayer focus and lies open at the Scripture reading for today. A prayer leaflet is provided and the CD and player arranged.

WE GATHER

Gathering Song: By His Wounds (Monica Brown – A Heart's Journey)

Opening Prayer:

Leader: Let us pray ... (pause) ...

All: O God of merciful love,
Your only Son, Jesus, surrendered himself out of love.
May the mystery of this gift touch and transform our hearts.
May we be just as generous in the way we love others.
We ask this prayer in the name of Jesus your Son,
And in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

WE LISTEN

Scripture Focus: Heb 5: 7-9
(Short pause for silent reflection)

Breaking Open The Word /Reflection:

The Leader reads the following extract from "Rooted In Love" by Margaret Blackie © 2013, New Voices Publishing (page 162).

Spiritual Director, Margaret Blackie writes this about suffering:

I do not believe – as some do – that God visits suffering upon us to make us stronger, in the same way that I do not believe that the pain and suffering of the cross was somehow *necessary* for our redemption. I believe that we live in a broken world; a world where suffering and pain is handed on from one generation to the next, unconsciously and unceasingly.

Some of life's tragedies can be explained through human sin – for example, greed and a lust for power give rise to all sorts of personal injury. Many of the chronic diseases we suffer can be attributed, at least in part, to the toxicity of our environment or our emotional being.

But some tragedies cannot be attributed to any human activity – the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan is just one such example. Sometimes over-zealous pastors try to explain natural disasters in terms of God's righteous anger and a purging of society – such as the voices which claimed that Hurricane Katrina was God's judgement upon the wanton lifestyle of some of the people of New Orleans. Such messages are not helpful. They give an image of a vengeful God willing to wreak havoc to prove a point. I simply cannot believe in such a God, and I cannot believe that the Creator of the Universe could not think of more wholesome ways to teach us lessons. However, - and this is a big however – I do believe that God can use any situation as a vehicle for grace.

The Leader allows time for people to reflect on these words and then invites a response.
How does all of this relate to a God of abundant mercy?

After the group has had enough time to discuss and share, the Leader continues:

WE RESPOND

Ritual:

Leader: In Holy Week, we enter more deeply into the mystery of Love.
We allow ourselves to be transformed by its life-giving power.
I invite you to call to mind a country where people are suffering today ...
(Wait for people to think of a country)

When you feel ready, turn the Globe until you find that country and touch it with your hand as you say its name:

The Leader gives time for every person to bring a country forward for prayer. After each person places their hand on their chosen country and announces its name, all respond as follows:

Participant: ... *(Name of the chosen country)* ... **May you know the mercy of Christ.**

All: **By his wounds we have been healed
In his wounding, we are healed.**

When all have finished, the Leader turns the globe slowly while saying:

Leader: For all the other places in the world where there is suffering and pain –
May you, too, know the mercy of Christ.

All: **By his wounds we have been healed
In his wounding, we are healed.**

Conclusion:

Leader: O God, your mercy can fill us even in the midst of our pain.
We pray in the words of your Beloved Son:

All: Our Father ...
... for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever.

WE GO

Leader: As Christians, we believe that our suffering can transform us.
This is the victory of Love!
Let us finish our prayer by marking ourselves
with the powerful sign of Christ's victorious love:

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