



**servants**

into the presence

# GRACE

*All that we do and are is rooted and sustained  
by God's lavish, unearned love, favour and forgiveness towards us.  
This profound grace delivers us from unhealthy striving,  
competition and condemnation of ourselves  
or judgment of others.*

## INTO THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Trust in God at all times, people.  
Pour out your hearts to the Holy One.  
**For God alone my soul waits in silence.**

*Silence*

Lord, we cannot find you in time past or time future;  
Only in this present moment.  
The now is all that we have.  
It is a sacrament, a sign of inward grace.  
It is only in this moment that we can come close to you.<sup>1</sup>

**I wait for the Lord,  
My soul waits and in his word I hope,  
My soul waits for the Lord,  
More than those who watch for the morning,  
More than those who watch for the morning.**

O people wait and watch for God.  
With God's arrival comes love.  
With God's arrival comes generous redemption.

*Sing:* Amazing grace

## LAMENT and THANKSGIVING

How long O Lord? Long enough,  
God – you've ignored me long enough.  
I've looked at the back of your head long enough.  
Long enough I've carried a ton of trouble,  
lived with a stomach full of pain.  
**Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy**

How long O Lord? Long enough my arrogant enemies  
have looked down their noses at me.  
Take a good look at me God, my God;  
I want to look life in the eye.

**Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy**

I've thrown myself headlong into your arms –  
I'm celebrating your rescue.  
I'm singing at the top of my lungs,  
I'm so full of answered prayers.

**Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy**

You serve a six course dinner right in front of my enemies.  
You revive my drooping head; my cup brims with blessing.  
Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life.  
I'm back home in the house of God for the rest of my life.

**Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy**

In looking upon you, O Christ,  
may I see myself more truly in my need  
and you more fully in your grace.<sup>2</sup>

**Amen**

## THE LIVING WORD

Ps. 103            or            Hos.11:1-11        or            John 8:2-11  
Matt. 18:21-35        Mark 2:13-17        James 4:1-12

*Silence for reflecting on the readings*

## RESPONSE

: meditation ~ either *lectio divina* or *gospel contemplation*  
: contemplation of painting e.g. *Rembrandt's Return of the Prodigal*  
: watch the film "*Babette's Feast*"

## FOR EACH OTHER

Let's hold in the light and freedom of God  
our Servants family worldwide, and especially today ....

*Silence or open prayer*

## THIS WAY THIS DAY

Jesus our healer and brother,  
Your clear eyes pierced all deceit and hypocrisy  
But never hardened in condemnation.  
You shocked the proud and self-righteous  
With your reckless forgiveness of sins.  
Your grace is a quiet revolution within and among us,  
Curse-lifting, history changing.

**Live in our hearts and our eyes, Jesus.  
Show us this cracked and fragile world  
In the generous light of your gaze.  
Give us patience with all that resists or frustrates us,  
And words of kindness and encouragement  
For all whose lives touch ours today.**

Among the judging and the judged,  
To the unforgiven and the unforgiving,  
**On earth as in heaven  
Your Kingdom come!  
Amen**

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<sup>1</sup>*Sacred Space* - a prayer site run by the Irish Jesuits

<sup>2</sup>Charles Ringma, *Wash the feet of the world with Mother Teresa*

## NOTES

- 1 **Bold text** indicates participants read these lines together.
- 2 Songs and responses to readings are suggestions only.
- 3 Three pairs of readings are presented – choose the pair you wish.
- 4 Two ways of praying with Bible passages are suggested: lectio divina, and gospel contemplation - see outlines below.
- 5 Participants are welcome to incorporate these liturgies into their usual patterns of worship and prayer.

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### LECTIO DIVINA (holy reading)

#### **Preparation**

quieten yourself for a few moments and then choose a short passage of Scripture or other spiritual reading

#### **Lectio (attending)**

trusting that the Holy Spirit is there to help you, read through the passage several times really *SLOWLY*. Some people find that reading aloud helps to slow them down. Let the words move deeply into your being, like nourishing rain into the soil. Allow a word or a phrase to touch you.

#### **Meditatio (pondering)**

reflect on the word or phrase that has touched you, exploring what it means to you here and now. Let the word or phrase speak to your personal situation; believe that through this process God is communicating with you, perhaps giving a word of encouragement or of challenge, or calling you to a deeper awareness of God's love for you.

#### **Oratio (responding)**

in this part of Lectio divina, you respond to God. You talk to God about what you have been thinking and what you have heard through the words of Scripture. You might pray your response or write in your journal, even sing or dance or paint your response ...pray as the Spirit moves you whether in gratitude, longing, repentance or intercession.

#### **Contemplatio (being)**

in this final and most important stage, sit quietly with God, at rest in the presence of the One who loves you. Do not worry that you may appear

to be doing ‘nothing’. Trust that the Holy Spirit is at work in the depths of your spirit, deepening your faith. Let the Word move from your head to your heart to dwell there in peace-full silence.

**Lectio divina or holy reading** is a simple and ancient way of praying with Scripture. It leads us naturally from a rational consideration of how a few verses of Scripture might connect with our current life, to a personal response in prayer and a gentle resting in the love of God, the beginnings of contemplation. This practice emerged in the early history of the Church, finding its way into European monasticism through Cassian and St Benedict. Now it is being reclaimed by Christians as another gift of grace and growth in Christ.

## GOSPEL CONTEMPLATION (praying with your imagination)

Usually we approach Scripture with the expectation of reading its words and thinking about their meaning. Yet when we read anything that tells a story, or relates to life issues, we always use *more* than our intellects. In his *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius of Loyola (16th C) encouraged people to bring their whole selves to God in meditation and prayer. He taught them especially to do this in meditating on the life of Christ, on gospel stories. Using our imaginations opens us to encounter Jesus more directly than our intellects allow. Here is a simplified version of what he taught.

Taking any incident from the life of Jesus in the Gospels, gently follow these steps ...

### **1. Pray beforehand**

Settle and relax yourself. Deal with any distractions that become evident. Open your mind and heart to God, praying that you might be open and attentive to anything God might want to say to you. Ask that your heart will be receptive and your will ready to obey.

### **2. Set the scene**

Read the passage through to remind yourself of the story.

Now use your imagination to set the scene as vividly as you can. Use as many of your senses as you can: what would you hear? what would you

see? what would you smell? who is in the scene? what are they doing? what is in the background? what is the emotional atmosphere like? Take time to let the scene unfold.

### **3. Enter into the story**

Now let yourself become part of this scene. Without forcing anything, what are you drawn to in the story? Perhaps you particularly identify with one of the characters, and take that role.

Perhaps you are a bystander, watching what is taking place. When you have found your place it is time to ...

### **4. Allow the story to unfold**

Using the biblical story, allow the action to be played in your imagination. Now that you are part of the scene, notice how you find yourself responding – your thoughts, actions and feelings. It may be that the story unfolds a little differently to the biblical account. Notice what happens, as it may be significant. Do you find yourself interacting with Jesus? Is there anything you want to say to him, or ask him? Is there anything he seems to want to say to

you, or ask you? Maybe a dialogue with Jesus, or another character, will unfold.

### **5. Reflection and prayer**

Ignatius encourages us to “savour the response.” When your imaginary journey through the story has come to an end, take time to think back over what happened and how you found yourself responding. It might be helpful to journal your reflections. Allow this to lead into prayer, as seems appropriate.