



John 15:1-17

"Abide in
my love and
you shall
bear much
fruit"

WEEK OF PRAYER
FOR CHRISTIAN
UNITY 2021



**Biblical Reflections and Prayers
for the Eight Days**

DAY 1

Called by God “You did not choose me but I chose you” (Jn 15:16a)

Genesis 12:1-4 The call of Abraham

John 1:35-51 The call of the first disciples

Meditation

The start of the journey is an encounter between a human being and God, between the created and the Creator, between time and eternity.

Abraham heard the call: “Go to the land I will show you”. Like Abraham we are called to leave that which is familiar and go to the place that God has prepared in the depths of our hearts. Along the way, we become more and more ourselves, the people God has wanted us to be from the beginning. And by following the call that is addressed to us, we become a blessing for our loved ones, our neighbours, and the world.

The love of God seeks us. God became human in Jesus, in whom we encounter the gaze of God. In our lives, as in the Gospel of John, God’s call is heard in different ways. Touched by his love, we set out. In this encounter, we walk a path of transformation – the bright beginning of a relationship of love that is always started anew.

One day you understood that, without your being aware of it, a ‘yes’ had already been inscribed in your innermost depths. And so you chose to go forward in the footsteps of Christ....

In silence in the presence of Christ, you heard him say, “Come, follow me; I will give you a place to rest your heart.”

The Sources of Taizé (2000) p. 52

Questions for study and discussion

1. Re-read today’s ‘meditation’ and mark any words or phrases that stand out to you. The writer speaks of a personal call into a spiritual encounter and heart-journey with God. How do you attend to your spiritual journey with God? In what ways have you found this to be a transforming experience?
2. What reaction does the expression “the gaze of God” evoke in you? Be aware that both positive and negative images may arise. What does your tradition say about these? Are they helpful for you? How is Jesus the one “in whom we encounter the gaze of

God”? How does that change things?

3. Setting out with God, or going to the place God has prepared for us, may not involve a physical re-location. It may involve seeing the same ‘place’ differently or changing our views or attitudes. To what places or new perspectives has your journey with God taken you so far? Where might God be calling you now?

Prayer

Jesus Christ, you seek us, you wish to offer us your friendship and lead us to a life that is ever more complete. Grant us the confidence to answer your call so that we may be transformed and become witnesses of your tenderness for the world.

DAY 2

Maturing internally “Abide in me as I abide in you” (Jn 15:4a)

Ephesians 3:14-21 May Christ dwell in our hearts

Luke 2:41-52 Mary treasured all these things

Meditation

The encounter with Jesus gives rise to the desire to stay with him and to abide in him: a time in which fruit matures.

Being fully human, like us Jesus grew and matured. He lived a simple life, rooted in the practices of his Jewish faith. In this hidden life in Nazareth, where apparently nothing extraordinary happened, the presence of the Father nourished him.

Mary contemplated the actions of God in her life and in the life of her son. She treasured all these things in her heart. Thus, little by little, she embraced the mystery of Jesus.

We too need a long period of maturation, an entire lifetime, in order to plumb the depths of Christ's love, to let him abide in us and for us to abide in him. Without our knowing how, the Spirit makes Christ dwell in our hearts. And it is through prayer, by listening to the word, in sharing with others, by putting into practice what we have understood, that the inner being is strengthened.

“Letting Christ descend into the depths of our being ... He will penetrate the regions of the mind and the heart, he will reach our flesh unto our innermost being, so that we too will one day experience the depths of mercy.”

The Sources of Taizé (2000) p. 134

Questions for study and discussion

1. Look up a definition of ‘Abide’. What key ideas or images does the word ‘abide’ bring up for you?
2. Our commentator suggests that “nothing extraordinary happened” during the early years of Jesus’ life, i.e. before his public ministry as described in the canonical Gospels. Do you know any extra-biblical stories of Jesus’ childhood? If not, search some. Why might these stories have been told and recorded? What insights do they give us into the people who first told them and shared them?

3. In the Greek text of Luke 2:19 & 51 the words for 'kept/treasured' and 'pondering' imply continuous action. What would it mean for us to actively and continuously contemplate the presence of the Spirit in our lives? How would that change our 'place' in the way that we discussed on Day 1?

Prayer

Holy Spirit, may we receive in our hearts the presence of Christ, and cherish it as a secret of love. Nourish our prayer, enlighten our reading of Scripture, act through us, so that the fruits of your gifts can patiently grow in us.

DAY 3

Forming one body “Love one another as I have loved you”

Colossians 3:12-17 Clothe yourself with compassion

John 13:1-15; 34-35 Love one another

Meditation

On the eve of his death, Jesus knelt to wash the feet of his disciples. He knew the difficulty of living together and the importance of forgiveness and mutual service. “*Unless I wash you,*” he said to Peter, “*you have no share with me.*”

Peter received Jesus at his feet; he was washed and was touched by the humility and gentleness of Christ. Later he would follow Jesus’ example and serve the fellowship of the faithful in the early church.

Jesus wishes that life and love circulate through us as the sap through the vine, so that Christian communities be one body. But today as in the past, it is not easy to live together. We are often faced with our own limitations. At times we fail to love those who are close to us in a community, parish or family. There are times when our relationships break down completely.

In Christ we are invited to be clothed in compassion, through countless new beginnings. The recognition that we are loved by God moves us to welcome each other with our strengths and weaknesses. It is then that Christ is in our midst.

With almost nothing, are you a creator of reconciliation in that communion of love, which is the Body of Christ, his Church? Sustained by a shared momentum, rejoice! You are no longer alone, in all things you are advancing together with your brothers and sisters. With them, you are called to live the parable of community.

The Sources of Taizé (2000) pp. 48-49

Questions

1. Can you be a Christian on your own? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. There is a parable of community that goes like this: *The human race is like a bunch of echidnas huddling together on a cold winter’s night. The colder it gets outside, the more we huddle together for warmth. But the closer we get to one another the more we start to prickle and hurt one another with our sharp quills. And in the long night of earth’s winter eventually we begin to drift apart, and wander out on our own, and freeze to death in our loneliness.*

How do you react to this story? Does it ring true to you as a parable of human community? How so? In what other ways might the 'echidnas' respond to their predicament?

3. When and how do you find Christ in the midst of your faith community?

Prayer

God our Father, you reveal to us your love through Christ and through our brothers and sisters. Open our hearts so that we can welcome each other with our differences and live in forgiveness. Grant us to live united in one body, so that the gift that is each person comes to light. May all of us together be a reflection of the living Christ.

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DAY 4

Praying together “I do not call you servants any longer... but I have called you friends”

Romans 8:26-27 The Spirit helps us in our weakness

Luke 11:1-4 Lord, teach us to pray

Meditation

God thirsts for relationship with us. God searches for us as the Creator Spirit searched for Adam, calling to him in the garden: “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9)

In Christ, God came to meet us. Jesus lived in prayer, intimately united to the Father, while creating friendships with his disciples and all those he met. He introduced them to that which was most precious to him: the relationship of love with the Father, who is our Father. Jesus and the disciples sang psalms together, rooted in the richness of their Jewish tradition. At other times, Jesus retired to pray alone.

Prayer can be solitary or shared with others. It can express wonder, complaint, intercession, thanksgiving or simple silence. Sometimes the desire to pray is there, but one has the feeling of not being able to do so. Turning to Jesus and saying to him, “teach me”, can pave the way. Our desire itself is already prayer.

Getting together in a group offers us support. Through hymns, words and silence, communion is created. If we pray with Christians of other traditions, we may be surprised to feel united by a bond of friendship that comes from the One who is beyond all division. The forms may vary, but it is the same Spirit who brings us together.

In the regularity of our common prayer, the love of Jesus springs up within us, we know not how. Common prayer does not exempt us from personal prayer. One sustains the other. Let us take a time each day to renew our personal intimacy with Jesus Christ.

The Rule of Taizé in French and English

Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, Great Britain pp. 19 & 21

Questions and discussion starters

1. What is your theology of prayer? Or, put another way, how does prayer connect us to God?
2. What is your practise of prayer (Think about aspects such as time, place, posture, form,

content, structure, frequency)? Does prayer 'work'? How or how not?

3. Think of 2 or 3 other ways of saying: "Make your life your prayer". Then read Romans 12: 9-18

Prayer

Lord Jesus, your entire life was prayer, perfect harmony with the Father. Through your Spirit, teach us to pray according to your will of love. May the faithful of the whole world unite in intercession and praise, and may your kingdom of love come.

DAY 5

Letting oneself be transformed by the Word “You have already been pruned by the word...” (*Jn 15:3*)

Deuteronomy 30:11-20 The word of God is very close to you

Matthew 5:1-12 Blessed are you

Meditation

The Word of God is very close to us. It is a blessing and a promise of happiness. If we open our hearts, God speaks to us and patiently transforms that which is dying in us. He removes that which prevents the growth of real life, just as the vine grower prunes the vine.

Regularly meditating on a biblical text, alone or in a group, changes our outlook. Many Christians pray the Beatitudes every day. The Beatitudes reveal to us a happiness that is hidden in that which is unfulfilled, a happiness that lies beyond suffering: blessed are those who, touched by the Spirit, no longer hold back their tears but let them flow and thus receive consolation. As they discover the wellspring hidden within their inner landscape, the hunger for justice, and the thirst to engage with others for a world of peace, grows in them.

We are constantly called to renew our commitment to life, through our thoughts and actions. There are times when we already taste, here and now, the blessing that will be fulfilled at the end of time.

Pray and work that God may reign. Throughout your day let the Word of God breathe life into work and rest. Maintain inner silence in all things so as to dwell in Christ. Be filled with the spirit of the Beatitudes: joy, simplicity, mercy.

These words are recited daily by the Sisters of the Grandchamp Community

Questions

1. What does it mean to “pray the Beatitudes”? (It might help to refer to our discussion on Day 2)
2. What do you think Jesus was getting at with this teaching? Is it for the present or the future? For all Christians or only for some? How so?
3. Pray the Beatitudes now – alone or with your group.

Prayer

Blessed are you, God our Father, for the gift of your word in Holy Scripture. Blessed are you for its transforming power. Help us choose life and guide us by your Spirit, so that we can experience the happiness which you want so much to share with us.

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DAY 6

Welcoming others “Go and bear fruit, fruit that will last”

(Jn 15:16b)

Genesis 18: 1-15 Abraham hosts the angels at the Oak of Mamre

Mark 6: 30-34 Jesus’ compassion for the crowds

Meditation

When we let ourselves be transformed by Christ, his love in us grows and bears fruit. Welcoming the other is a concrete way of sharing the love that is within us.

Throughout his life, Jesus welcomed those he met. He listened to them and let himself be touched by them without being afraid of their suffering.

In the gospel account of the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus is moved with compassion after seeing the hungry crowd. He knows that the entire human person must be nourished, and that he alone can truly satisfy the hunger for bread and the thirst for life. But he does not wish to do this without his disciples, without that little something they can give him: five loaves and two fish.

Even today he draws us to be co-workers in his unconditional care. Sometimes something as small as a kind look, an open ear, or our presence is enough to make a person feel welcome. When we offer our poor abilities to Jesus, he uses them in a surprising way.

We then experience what Abraham did, for it is by giving that we receive, and when we welcome others, we are blessed in abundance.

It is Christ himself whom we receive in a guest. The rule of Taizé in French and English (2012) p. 103

Will the people we welcome day after day find in us men and women radiant with Christ, our peace?

The Sources of Taizé (2000) p. 60

Questions

1. What has hospitality got to do with ‘bearing fruit’? In what ways might we bear fruit by offering hospitality and showing compassion?

2. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected our ability (inclination?) to show both hospitality and compassion? At what cost? Think personally, socially, nationally and globally.

3. How has your own faith community or congregation been impeded by pandemic conditions and restrictions? Have you been called to a new 'place' (Day 1) or to change your approach during this time? What safe ways have you developed to continue the ministry of hospitality? With what fruit?

Prayer

Jesus Christ, we desire to welcome fully the brothers and sisters who are with us. You know how often we feel helpless in the face of their suffering, yet you are always there ahead of us and you have already received them in your compassion. Speak to them through our words, support them through our actions, and let your blessing rest on us all.

DAY 7

Growing in unity “I am the vine, you are the branches” (Jn 15:5a)

1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:21-23 Is Christ divided?

John 17:20-23 As you and I are one

Meditation

On the eve of his death, Jesus prayed for the unity of those the Father gave him: “that they may all be one ... so that the world may believe”. Joined to him, as a branch is to the vine, we share the same sap that circulates among us and vitalizes us.

Each tradition seeks to lead us to the heart of our faith: communion with God, through Christ, in the Spirit. The more we live this communion, the more we are connected to other Christians and to all of humanity. Paul warns us against an attitude that had already threatened the unity of the first Christians: absolutizing one’s own tradition to the detriment of the unity of the body of Christ. Differences then become divisive instead of mutually enriching. Paul had a very broad vision: “All are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God” (1 Cor 3:22-23).

Christ’s will commits us to a path of unity and reconciliation. It also commits us to unite our prayer to his: “that they may all be one. . .so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21).

Never resign yourself to the scandal of the separation of Christians who so readily profess love for their neighbour, and yet remain divided. Make the unity of the body of Christ your passionate concern.

The Rule of Taizé in French and English (2012) p. 13

Questions

1. The “High Priestly Prayer” of Jesus is found only in the Gospel of John (chapter 17). What do you think Jesus meant by his followers being “one”? Why might this have been so important in the context of John’s Gospel, John’s community, John’s time? Why is it still important for us?
2. We talk a lot about ‘unity in diversity’. What does ‘Christian Unity’ mean to you, in theory and in practise? You might also like to look at Philippians 2: 1-4.
3. What happens when we find ourselves in seemingly unresolvable disagreement with

other Christians over major issues of doctrine, church order, human ethics and social justice? Does our discussion of the parable of the echidnas help at all here?

Prayer

Holy Spirit, vivifying fire and gentle breath, come and abide in us. Renew in us the passion for unity so that we may live in awareness of the bond that unites us in you. May all who have put on Christ at their Baptism **unite and bear witness together to the hope** that sustains them.

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DAY 8

Reconciling with all of creation “So that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (Jn 15:11)

Colossians 1:15-20 In him all things hold together

Mark 4:30-32 As small as a mustard seed

Meditation

The hymn to Christ in the epistle to the Colossians invites us to sing the praise of God’s salvation, which encompasses the entire universe. Through the crucified and risen Christ, a path of reconciliation has been opened up; creation, too, is destined for a future of life and peace.

With the eyes of faith, we see that the Kingdom of God is a reality that is very close but still very small, hardly visible – like a mustard seed. However, it is growing. Even in the distress of our world the Spirit of the Risen One is at work. He encourages us to become involved – with all people of good will – in tirelessly seeking justice and peace, and ensuring the earth is once again a home for all creatures.

We participate in the work of the Spirit so that creation in all its fullness may continue to praise God. When nature suffers, when human beings are crushed, the Spirit of the risen Christ – far from allowing us to lose heart – invites us to become part of his work of healing.

The newness of life that Christ brings, however hidden, is a light of hope for many. It is a wellspring of reconciliation for the whole of creation and contains a joy that comes from beyond ourselves: “so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (Jn 15:11).

Do you wish to celebrate the newness of life that Christ gives through the Holy Spirit, and let it live in you, among us, in the church, in the world and in all of creation?

Second promise made during profession at the Community of Grandchamp

Questions

1. “Creation, too, is destined for a future of life and peace”. What do you think is the destiny of creation? What role do human beings play in achieving this? (You might like to look at Bible passages like Psalm 96: 11-13; Isaiah 11: 6-9; Romans 8: 19-23) Does the present reality of climate change threaten that destiny? Where do our responsibilities as Christians lie in this regard?

2. How can we become a part of Christ's "work of healing" in creation? Have you heard of the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC)? Find out about what happened on 11th March this year (Global multi-faith action day: *Sacred People, Sacred Earth*). Why are multi-lateral movements like these important? How might you and your faith community get involved in such actions in the future?

3. How has the newness that Christ brings transformed your life (your 'place', your purpose, your outlook, your relationships)? In what ways can you celebrate and share this?

Prayer

Thrice-holy God, we thank you for having created us and loved us. We thank you for your presence in us and in creation. May we learn to look upon the world as you look upon it, with love. In the hope of this vision, may we be able to work for a world where justice and peace flourish, for the glory of your name.