

Penitential Prayer Service in Thanksgiving for the Gift of the Earth

We present here a liturgy or prayer service for the parish that can be adapted for use in the class room or for any group or family who wish to pray together in thanksgiving for the gift the Lord has given us of the Earth, and who are committed to caring for it in prayer and action.

Entrance procession:

All stand

Opening Hymn: One that refers to Creation blessing the Lord would be appropriate.

Carry in

- A bowl of soil,
- A bowl of water,
- An incense bowl containing burning charcoal to represent fire
- And an 'empty' bowl which is of course filled with air.
- A globe would also be a suitable symbol.

Place these perhaps raised off the ground in front of the altar or the ambo,

Or somewhere visible and central to the space you are praying in.

Greeting

(Priest/Deacon/Leader (from now on referred to as the Presider): In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All: Amen

Presider: Peace be with you

All: And with your spirit

Presider: Please be seated

Introduction:

Presider or other reader: Jesus once said to his disciples, his followers, that the poor were blessed, but not because they were poor, but because they, His followers, had resources with which to enrich the poor, and in this way be a blessing to the poor. In the same way they had the joy of the resurrection with which to comfort those who mourned, and the justice envisioned in the good news of the Gospel to satisfy those who hungered and thirsted for righteousness, for things to be put right. Down through the centuries the Church, the community of Jesus' followers, have been called and sent to be a blessing to those in need, at times even becoming a voice for the needy. Among other voices that we are called to hear and respond to with compassion and care today is one whose voice is perhaps drowned out by the noise of the busy world we live in today – the voice of nature, who calls on us, pleads with us to pause for a moment, to step back from our consumerist habits and think again.

The Season of Lent is always a good time of year to rethink our habits and our relationships – with God, with our family, our community, and with the Earth itself. During Lent it is our custom to give ear to the cry of the poor, and so in this moment we give our attention to one without voice, the one from whom we take all we want, the one who selflessly surrenders all – our home, the Earth. We will make the cry of the Earth our prayer, and pray that the Earth be blessed, because we, as the Body of Christ – the hands, the feet, the love of Christ – will tend to the needs of the Earth with hearts filled with gratitude to God who created it, made it perfect for sustaining human life, and the lives of every creature visible and invisible with whom we share it.

Examination of conscience

Invite all to stand, or kneel

Presider: Often at the beginning of prayer we call to mind our sins, with a view to (a.) admitting our fault, (b.) accepting God's generous forgiveness, (c.) embracing the grace not to repeat the same offence and (d.) committing ourselves to actively making amends to injured parties. The rest of the prayer time is in effect to strengthen us, inspire us and re-launch us renewed into a world that longs for healing and restoration. This longing is not just among the humans who populate this beautiful blue planet, but the planet itself yearns for healing, for peace, for a balanced and fair approach to the resource it is to all.

For the times when we have taken more than our fair share and left others without, we ask for forgiveness. Lord in your mercy,

All: hear our prayer.

For the times when we were unwilling to share, especially in times when we had more than enough we ask for forgiveness. Lord in your mercy,

All: hear our prayer.

For the times when despite our knowledge of the need to reuse and recycle we simply didn't bother, we ask for forgiveness. Lord in your mercy,

All: hear our prayer.

For this new time, may we be filled the courage and the drive to respond to the cry of the Earth in our attitudes, our actions and our words, we pray to you Holy Spirit. Lord in your mercy,

All: hear our prayer.

Lord our God, Creator of all that is, and in whose image we are created, give us your vision of the world.

Help us see our role and embrace it in accordance with your vision, your will.

We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

In the unity of the Holy Spirit, One God, Forever.

All: Amen.

Invite all to be seated

Liturgy of the Word

Introduction to the first reading:

Presider: The first reading is three short verses from the story of Job, a good man who in one day loses everything - his family, his home, his health, his possessions - everything! His friends come to visit him trying to convince him that all this has happened as a punishment to Job from God for something

he has done. But Job is adamant that this is not a punishment, and that in fact bad things happen to good people too. While he says God is not to blame for his misfortune he is sure that God is in the midst of it all, something Job asks us to learn by observing nature.

A reading from the Book of Job (12:7-10)

Job said: Ask the beasts to teach you, and the birds of the air to tell you; or the reptiles on earth to instruct you, and the fish of the sea to inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of God is in this? In his hand is the soul of every living thing and the life breath of all mankind.

The Word of the Lord

In Response to the Reading let us pray the canticle of the three youths from the Book of Daniel:

Leader:

O all you works of the Lord, O bless the Lord.

All: To him be highest glory and praise for ever.

And you, angels of the Lord, O bless the Lord.

To him be highest glory and praise for ever.

Heavens of the Lord, O bless the Lord.

Clouds of the sky, O bless the Lord.

And you, all armies of the Lord, O bless the Lord.

To him be highest glory and praise for ever.

Sun and moon, O bless the Lord.

Stars of the heavens, O bless the Lord.

And you, showers and rain, O bless the Lord.

To him be highest glory and praise for ever.

Breezes and winds, O bless the Lord.

Fire and heat, O bless the Lord.

And you, cold and heat, O bless the Lord.

To him be highest glory and praise for ever.

Showers and dew, O bless the Lord.

Frosts and cold, O bless the Lord.

And you, frost and snow, O bless the Lord.

To him be highest glory and praise for ever.

Night-time and day, O bless the Lord.

Darkness and light, O bless the Lord.

And you, lightning and clouds, O bless the Lord.

To him be highest glory and praise for ever.

O let the earth bless the Lord.

To him be highest glory and praise for ever.

Mountains and hills, O bless the Lord.

All plants of the earth, O bless the Lord.

And you, fountains and springs, O bless the Lord.

To him be highest glory and praise for ever.

Rivers and seas, O bless the Lord.
Creatures of the sea, O bless the Lord.
Every bird in the sky, O bless the Lord.
And you, wild beasts and tame, O bless the Lord.
To him be highest glory and praise for ever.

All humankind, O bless the Lord.
To him be highest glory and praise for ever.

Israel, bless the Lord.
Priests of the Lord, O bless the Lord.
And you, servants of Lord, bless the Lord.
To him be highest glory and praise for ever.

Spirits and souls of the just, O Bless the Lord.
Holy and humble of heart, O bless the Lord.
Ananias, Azarias, Mizaël, O bless the Lord.
To him be highest glory and praise for ever.

Stand to greet the Gospel:

Praise and honour to you Lord Jesus Christ

The Lord hears the cry of the poor, blessed be the Lord.

Praise and honour to you Lord Jesus Christ

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (6:25-30)

Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span? Why are you anxious about clothes?"

Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was clothed like one of them.

If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith?

The gospel of the Lord

All: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

Take a moment or two in silence to look back over the readings and listen to what God might be saying to you personally.

Reflection:

When did you last listen to a bird sing? Not just hear bird song, but stopped, looked at the bird, noted its plumage and type, and waited for its song? You are more likely to have lingered in the case of a wren or a robin, and far less so in the case of a magpie or a seagull! Yet, their songs, their voices are as full of meaning and wonder as are our own. And when did you last look at a blade of grass? Yes one solitary blade? The stuff of green pastures ... Yet, it's just grass. Roses and other flowers seem to better merit our attention, not grass. Indeed, why do some types of birdsong, or other sounds from nature get tagged as ugly or harsh, when they are the sounds of the living, those who are alive and full of life – yet because they lack certain desirable qualities such as melody or perhaps beauty, we feel we can marginalise them. What's more, if these undesirables are many in number we can expel or exterminate them and dispose of them without batting an eyelid. At least this was the attitude to the beasts, birds and general flora of generations in the past – some hunted to the point of extinction for their fur, their flavour, or indeed just for fun. Collectable accessories to adorn homes – alive or dead. Stuffed, mounted, discarded when no longer in vogue. Beware! They say that the way we treat anything, is the way we treat everything!

Clearly, there are arguments around these issues, but the heart of the matter in hand here is the self-centred attitude 'I' can have towards the earth. "I want more, I can see that there is more, so I will take more, and now it is mine to use or discard according to what I want." This ego centric attitude helps itself to the resources of the planet even locally, be it water, food, energy, property or other resources without a thought for the other people that this may effect – such as those who will be left with nothing due to my greed and wastage, or those who will be displaced when I take possession of what I feel I am entitled to.

Yet, if we look at nature itself we see that the vast majority of animals that kill do so only to eat, and those that store food have learnt to do so in order to survive long periods without the possibility of gathering food. Even a troop of monkeys seems to know that you don't eat all the fruit off a tree, you leave some for the tree just in case there is a drought. Otherwise this wonderful source of fruit will die.

Looking at and listening to nature can teach us so much about a balanced approach to life, which in turn can teach us a lot about how God relates with us. God created and sees every living thing, but without categorising them. As children we probably filed things in our minds under a. the things we like and b. the things we dislike. Later in life that might become a. the things I want, and b. thing of lesser importance, and later again, a. the things of use to me, and b. everything else. God invites us to see things, to hear things as he does – it is all his creation, he willed every

little thing into life, and as we were reminded in the canticle, we humans are the crowning glory of all he created. But he didn't hand it over to us to exploit, but entrusted it to us to tend and to care for and in doing so learn about Him - our creator, who sustains us, whose plan it is that we should have life, and have it to the full. He entrusted it to us, and not for ourselves only. We are the current stewards and must entrust it to the generations coming after us, in the hope that they too see this world as something fragile and vital to our existence, a blessing to humanity, to which humanity must become a blessing in how we care for it.

The Lord hears the cry of the earth. We are God's response to that cry and blessed will be the earth if we, the children of God the Creator, respond in action, in word and in faith.

Renewal of Baptismal awareness

(Pointing towards the symbols that were presented at the beginning of the service)

Presider: You see here symbols of the elements of the Earth.

We are deeply connected to each one:

We were made from soil and to soil we shall return.

We were baptised in water, washed of our selfishness and born to a life centred in Christ.

The flame of faith burns within us, we are to fan the flame into a raging fire.

As we breathe in air, we recall the breath of God, the Spirit of life breathed into Adam for us all

Extra bowls of water are brought forward

You are invited to approach one of the bowls of water.

Dip your hand into it, make the sign of the cross and in your heart renew your Baptismal commitment – reject selfishness and embrace God's vision of creation and your role in it.

We are God's response to the cry of the earth. Be that response!

Invite everyone forward.

Use an instrumental or an appropriate hymn to compliment the moment

The Lord's Prayer

Presider: Confident that God is hearing the cry of the Earth, and the cries of all who live on it,

We unite our voices with theirs, and pray as Jesus taught his disciples for all time:

All: Our Father ...

Concluding prayer

Presider: God our creator, our life, our saviour,

We give you thanks for the gift of all that you have created,

And we pray

Give us a share in your passion for life,

Your vision of a world loved by all and sustaining all.

May our Lenten observances help us restore balances in our own living that become a quest for a balance in all aspects of life.

May our eyes and ears be open to learning of your, hearing of you even glimpsing your glory in the world you have created, so that in all things we may rest safe in the knowledge that in your hand are all things and the life-breath of all humanity. You who live and reign forever and ever.

All: Amen.

Presider: Let us go forth and live our commitment to being God's response to the cry of the Earth and let us bless the Lord,

All: Thanks be to God!

A suitable concluding hymn.

