

2021 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

“Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit” (John 15:5-9)

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)

Gen 12:1-4		The call of Abraham
Jn 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 Discussion and Reflection

1. Abram begins his journey in Genesis 12 with a call from God: “Go to the land that I will show you.” He is given a description of the future that would seem impossible if it was

not God declaring it. Do you or your community speak of a future that seems almost impossible? What is that future?

2. Abram cannot enact this future alone. He relies on support from God, from friends, from family. What would your community need to enact your brighter future: courage, wisdom, patience? Make a list of what is needed, whether large or small, practical or abstract.
3. The dream that God offers both Abram and the disciples in John 1 is not a short-term goal, but a generations-long creation. When is a time that you worked on a long-term goal, and how did it feel at the beginning, middle, and end?

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)

Eph 3:14-21 | May Christ dwell in our hearts
Lk 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 that 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 Discussion and Reflection

1. Jesus is a youth when he is presented to the Temple, still new to life and not yet beginning his ministry. He had to grow spiritually, amongst other ways, to serve. What are the ways that we grow spiritually here and now? Are there exercises or practices in your tradition that help you grow?
2. Do we ever feel fully mature in our faith? What does that look like (knowing your Scriptures, a “full” prayer practice, being involved in the church, etc.)? This may be a question to ask people of different ages and backgrounds.
3. One of the prayer practices that this year’s Week of Prayer for Christian Unity includes is Taizé contemplation. As a Bible Study, or on your own, this would be an excellent opportunity to try Taizé Prayer for 15 minutes and reflect on your experience.

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” (Jn 15:12b)

Col 3:12-17		Clothe yourself with compassion
Jn 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’s 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 for Discussion and Reflection

1. Service and compassion are two crucial parts of the Christian tradition. Peter received Jesus at his feet and was touched by his humility. How can we recognize the connections of where we serve, and are served, in the community?
2. Jesus washing Peter’s feet is written as a reversal of roles – the teacher becoming the servant. How can we relate this concept to our lives?
3. What does it mean to be “clothed in compassion” and forgiveness? What does that look like in our churches and communities?

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.

Day 4

Praying Together

“I do not call you servants any longer ... but I have called you friends” (Jn 15:15)

Rom 8:26-27 | The Spirit helps us in our weakness
Lk 11:1-4 | Lord, teach us to pray

Meditation

God thirsts for relationship with us. He searches for us as he 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 his 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 his 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 that 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 for Discussion and Reflection

1. How do you pray? What is your experience when you pray alone and when you pray with others? What is the gift of praying with Christians of different traditions?
2. As a group, go over the Lord’s Prayer at least twice. Share with one another any phrases that stand out to you, and whether those phrases change between the first and second time reading it through.

3. Looking back at the reflections for the previous Days of Prayer, how did prayer impact the lives of Abram and Sarai (Abraham and Sarah) or Jesus and the disciples? Are there other people in Scripture whose prayer stories speak to you?

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)

Deut 30:11-20		The Word of God is very close to you
Mt 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 for Discussion and Reflection

1. The Beatitudes are some of the most well-known blessings in the Christian tradition, quoted in movies, political speeches, songs, and on buildings. We are asked to meditate on the Beatitudes. Reading them through at least two or three times, which ones stand out for you today? Why?
2. This year’s focus on Jesus as the true vine invites us to think about food and agriculture, to consider communities that are dealing with food scarcity or food deserts, migrant workers, and farmers in Canada. How might these groups of people be connected to the

Beatitudes? What would “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” mean in this context?

3. In your context, is there a particular Beatitude that your community acts out in the world? Is there one that your community perhaps does not pay as much attention to?

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.

Day 6

Welcoming Others

“Go and bear fruit, fruit that will last” (Jn 15:16b)

Gen 18:1-5 | Abraham hosts the angels at the Oak of Mamre
Mk 6:30-44 | 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 fishes.

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 for Discussion and Reflection

1. Jesus’s response to being told there is too little to feed the crowd is to send his disciples to find the resources that he will use to feed the people through a miracle. What can this account of his ministry tell us about our calling to follow Jesus?
2. What does it mean that Jesus does this ministry – feeding the five thousand – *with* his disciples, not just on his own?

3. Food scarcity and food deserts are a significant problem in many communities across Canada. Whether there are no grocery stores within an accessible distance, or the places that do sell food sell them at exorbitant prices, or there is no access to fresh food through community gardening and other means, there are millions in Canada who do not have ready access to healthy and safe food for them and their families. Some more reading on the topic can be found at [Food Banks Canada's HungerCount report](#).
In your context, how does food scarcity appear in your communities? How do you address it, or how could you address it?

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 Cor 1:10-13; 3:21-23		Is Christ divided?
Jn 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 for Discussion and Reflection

1. Each Christian tradition endeavours to bring us closer to God, through Christ, in the Spirit. Paul warns us not to use divisions as a way to separate Christ; indeed, Christ has not been divided. How can our differences strengthen our faithfulness?
2. The imagery in John 15:5 of a vine and branches is a powerful one. Take some time to reflect on what that vine-and-branches imagery might look like in or for your community. Is it different across communities?
3. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the interconnectedness of our lives – for example, the crucial importance of migrant farm workers, workers in food delivery and grocery stores, and other food industry workers, for our safety and well-being. How do our choices affect the lives of others?

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.

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)

Col 1:15-20 | In him all things hold together
Mk 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 for Discussion and Reflection

1. Jesus relates the parable of the mustard seed to his disciples: the kingdom of God might start small, but it is going to grow and flourish before long. However, it takes all of us to bring this vision to life. How is it connected to our Day 2 readings of Abram and Sarai, and Jesus’s proclamations as a youth in his ministry?
2. How can the works that we do in our communities be like a mustard seed?
3. Jesus often refers to agricultural activity in his preaching (sheep and shepherds, vines and fruit). Farming is a crucial part of our society and, without farmers, our country would grind to a halt. Take a few moments to reflect on the importance that Jesus places on

farming. How have we become more removed from this understanding and how may we become more attuned to it?

Prayer

Thrice-holy God, we thank you for having created 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.