

SESSION 4 / FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES

I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me (John 5:30)

Theme God's mercy endures; with him all things are possible. In this prayer, we hear that the outpouring of God's mercy cannot penetrate our hearts as long as we have not forgiven others (cf. CCC 2840).

Welcome: We Pray and Share Together (15 mins)

O God,
send forth your Holy Spirit
into our hearts that we might perceive,
into our minds that we might remember,
into our souls that we might meditate.
Inspire us to speak with love, holiness,
tenderness and mercy.
Teach, guide and direct our thoughts and senses
from beginning to end.
May your grace help us to see with your eyes
and to act with your love and light in our hearts.
May we be strengthened with wisdom from on high
for the sake and glory of your kingdom.
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

In a period of calm and a space of trust, each one of us is invited to share briefly one thing that has happened in the past week. It could be one thing that has given you cause for concern, something shared during the last time you met as a group or something that has given you cause to celebrate.

In this moment of peace and fellowship, we pray for the good of the group. Each member is invited to offer up any personal intentions. We also pray for the good of the Church, for wisdom in our country and for the common good. Let us also bring to mind the poor, the sick and those who have died.

We join together in praying: Our Father...

Read and Reflect on the Scriptures Luke 15:11-24 (5 mins)

Note: The story of the Prodigal Son is occasionally referred to as the story of the Forgiving Father. Here we have a vivid image, frequently chosen by artists, which paints a picture of God the Father as patient, generous and ever-ready to embrace his wayward children.

[Jesus] said, 'There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them.

Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

'But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" And he arose and came to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And they began to celebrate.'

Meditate on the Word Luke 15:11-24 (20 mins)

Once the Scripture passage has been read you are asked to choose a word or phrase that has struck you. Underline it with a pen or you might wish to simply hold it in mind. You will be invited to share the word or phrase with the group.

Another person will then read the passage. While you listen attentively, repeat the process of holding onto a word or phrase, making a note and sharing it. In doing this, you are invited to consider the following questions:

How have these words or phrases resonated in my heart and in my mind?

What is the Lord saying to me at this very moment in my life?

In what way has my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture changed me?

How has it helped me to resolve to be more Christ-like in the coming days?

You are encouraged to re-read the Holy Scripture during the coming week, revisiting these questions.

Explore and Reflect on the Theme (25 mins)

All across the London Underground are small, ceramic finger labyrinths for commuters to trace (though few do). Created by the artist Mark Wallinger, each station features a panel, each in a public space – when new stations were added to the system, so new labyrinths are installed.

These ceramics are a nod to a venerable spiritual practice. You may be familiar with one of the most famous labyrinths on the floor of Chartres Cathedral, which invites pilgrims to reflect on their life as a series of steps both away from and towards the LORD.

Hundreds of thousands of people walk past the Wallinger ceramics without so much of a glance, all the while their own lives tracing familiar patterns, sometimes progressing, sometimes regressing in love, in faith, in life. Each one of these labyrinths is unique, in design and in the path one traces; just as each life that passes them by is unique.

Similarly, when growing up, you may have had the joy of playing Snakes and Ladders. Again, here, you trace your way **up** the board, towards your goal. Sometimes you gain a remarkable advance (perhaps akin to a spiritual insight or a singularly graced moment), sometimes you get thrown back (as one is when succumbing to temptation and sin). The Scriptural images here - Jacob's Ladder (cf. Genesis 28:12) and the Snake in Eden (cf. Genesis 3:15) - are perhaps unintentional but worthy of note and reflection.

Conversion, both initial conversion to Jesus Christ and ongoing conversion of heart, intellect and will, are recurring invitations in the Bible and the Liturgy.

The beginning of Mark's Gospel offers us a perspective on preparing the way of the Lord. Mark tells us that John the Baptist proclaimed a 'baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin.' Believe it or not, John and his message of conversion were immensely popular! Great joy doesn't sound exactly like the emotion brought forth by a call to 'repentance' and acknowledgement of sin. So, what is happening here?

John's call to 'repentance' wasn't an invitation to penance. He was inviting people to see everything in life from a new perspective. The change in perspective is required for our participation in the great mission of Christ's Church – the building of the kingdom and the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Our Baptism opens the door to this new perspective, it opens the door to sacramental graces in the other sacraments and permits us to see God as a loving Father and Jesus as brother and Lord.

Where we go awry, sliding down one of life's 'snakes' or tracing a path away from the centre of the labyrinth – the Sacrament of Reconciliation awaits. The Father's arms are open; let us climb the ladders of grace.

Responding to what has been heard

By committing ourselves to action we are saying that we want to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. We are committing to make the words of the Lord's Prayer resonate in our lives. What have you heard today that you find challenging? What do you find affirming? What is your response to God's offer of eternal life? Please share if you feel comfortable. What are you going to do about what you have heard today?

Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord (10 mins)

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Proverbs 3:5-12. Read it slowly, pause between verses, reflect on its meaning for your life and your journey in faith, hope and love. You may also wish to conclude with the Lord's Prayer, another prayer of your own choosing or a moment of silence.

A: Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.

B: Be not wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.
It will be healing to your flesh
and refreshment to your bones.

A: Honour the LORD with your wealth
and with the first fruits of all your produce;
then your barns will be filled with plenty,
and your vats will be bursting with wine.

B: My child, do not despise the LORD's discipline
or be weary of his reproof,
for the LORD reproves him whom he loves,
as a father the child in whom he delights.

All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A blessing taken from the Liturgy of the Hours is included here.

May the Lord bless us and keep us from all evil
and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Pardon and Peace

God does not want to impose the good, but wants free beings... There is a certain usefulness to temptation. No one but God knows what our soul has received from him, not even we ourselves. But temptation reveals it in order to teach us to know ourselves, and in this way we discover our evil inclinations and are obliged to give thanks for the goods that temptation has revealed to us.

Origen

The Lord who has taken away your sin and pardoned your faults also protects you and keeps you from the wiles of your adversary the devil, so that the enemy, who is accustomed to leading into sin, may not surprise you. One who entrusts himself to God does not dread the devil. 'If God is for us, who is against us?'

St Ambrose

I cannot believe that a soul which has approached so nearly to Mercy Itself, and has learned to know itself and the greatness of God's pardon, will not immediately and readily forgive, and be mollified and remain on good terms with a person who has done it wrong. For such a soul remembers the consolation and grace which he has shown it, in which it has recognised the signs of great love, and it is glad that the occasion presents itself for showing him some love in return.

St Teresa of Ávila

[See Catechism 2838-2854]



Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina (4)

Describe what you can see, what is happening?

What does this picture say about forgiveness?

In Reconciliation, you are reconciled with God and with others. How have you experience the mercy of the Lord in the past or even today?

The Return of the Prodigal Son (c.1667-1670) by Murillo /
National Gallery of Art, Washington DC