

The Lord be with you: **and also with you.**

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

as we gather we must recall the promises and warnings given to us in the Scriptures. Let us therefore examine ourselves and repent of our sins.

Father God, we confess that we often take the gifts of your creation for granted, and use them chiefly to further our own interests:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Saviour Christ, we confess that we often give in to the selfish desires of our hearts, and the uncaring ways of the world.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Holy Spirit, we confess that we often close our minds to your influence, and fail to bear good fruits in our lives.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Absolution May God our Father forgive us our sins,
and bring us to the fellowship of his table with his saints for ever. **Amen.**

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is gracious, for his steadfast love endures for ever.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say this, those he redeemed from the hand of the enemy. And gathered out of the lands from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. Some were foolish and took a rebellious way, and were plagued because of their wrongdoing. Their soul abhorred all manner of food and drew near to the gates of death. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress....

Ephesians 2:1-10 [From Death to Life]

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

This is the word of the Lord;

Thanks be to God.

John 3:14-21

Jesus said to Nicodemus, 'Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.'

This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Sermon

Today's gospel reading is not just one more passage about Jesus - words that could be removed without any significant change. It is a statement that reflects the core of our Christian faith: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ..."

This love of God is the source and the foundation of our hope. God loves the world. Full stop. He loves it just as it is: incomplete and uncertain, full of conflicts and contradictions, capable of the best and the worst. This world does not go on its way alone, lost and forsaken - God envelops it with his love all around. This has hugely important implications, so let's reflect on that it entails for Christian believers.

First, Jesus is the gift that God has made to the world - not only to Christians. Researchers can argue endlessly about many aspects of the historical figure of Jesus; theologians may go on developing ingenious theories, but only those who see Jesus Christ as the great gift of God will go on discovering in all his deeds, with love, and joy, the closeness of God to every human being.

Secondly, the purpose that justifies the existence of the church and its presence in the world is to always keep in our minds and hearts the love of God. There is nothing more important: the task we have as Christians is to communicate the love of God to every human being. Too often in the past we thought of God as somehow dangerous, angry and vengeful; someone we really would prefer to hide from, like that mythological Adam in the Garden of Eden. God as an infinitely loving, forgiving being was too often obscured by a sense of guilt: that we weren't good enough, and never would be.

Thirdly, the evangelist - John - says that God gave the world this great gift, which is Jesus: "not to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." To me it's pointless to attempt to denounce and condemn the modern world: we can only try to change the world with hearts full of love for all people. If people feel condemned by God, we will not be communicating the message of Jesus, but something else. It can't be a message of resentment and anger.

Fourthly, in these COVID times in which everything seems confused, uncertain and discouraging, nothing should stop each of us from bringing a little love into the world. Don't wait for someone else. Why aren't there more good men and women among us who will bring love, friendship, compassion, justice, empathy and help to those who are suffering? People like these will build the Church of Jesus. It's that simple - it's a church of love.

And now to God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit be ascribed, as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion, power and glory. Amen.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,

God from God, Light from Light,

true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.

Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,

was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;

he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;

he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,

and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,

who proceeds from the Father and the Son,

who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. **Amen.**

Intercessions, beginning with the Collect of the fourth Sunday in Lent

Lord God,
whose blessed Son our Saviour gave his back to the smiters
and did not hide his face from shame:
Give us grace to endure the sufferings of this present time
with sure confidence in the glory that shall be revealed:
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord, we seek to make our home in you, for in you is our hope. May we abide in you as you are in us. Grant, O Lord, in turning to you we may find new vision, new strength and new love.

... hear our prayer

Lord, may your church be a home for the weary, a shelter for the fearful, a strength to the weak, a place of healing and forgiveness to the troubled and the guilty. We pray for all who are spiritually hungry, for all who have lost faith or who have lost hope. *... hear our prayer*

We come to you, Lord of love. We give you thanks for our homes and loved ones; may we not take their love for granted, and may we not be a burden to those with whom we live. In loving each other may we learn of your love for us. We pray for families where there is misunderstanding, neglect, violence or apathy. *... hear our prayer*

Have mercy on all who suffer in body, mind or spirit. Our prayer is especially for all who have been struck by COVID-19, whether personally or through their families and friends; those for whom the virus has left them distressed; those for whom the brightness of life has been dimmed by fear. May the light of hope shine through their darkness and give them comfort. *... hear our prayer*

Lord, in love you welcome us home, you come to meet us and lead us to your kingdom. We pray for all who have the joy of your nearer presence, for our loved ones departed. *... hear our prayer*

Amen.

Christ our passover has been sacrificed for us
therefore let us celebrate the feast.

The Lord is here.

His Spirit is with us.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

All glory and honour, thanks and praise be given to you at all times and in all places, Lord, holy Father, true and living God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

For he is your eternal Word through whom you have created all things from the beginning and formed us in your own image.

In your great love you gave him to be made man for us and to share our common life. In obedience to your will your Son our Saviour offered himself as a perfect sacrifice, and died on the cross for our redemption.

Through him you have freed us from the slavery of sin and reconciled us to yourself, our God and Father. He is our great high priest whom you raised from death and exalted to your right hand on high where he ever lives to intercede for us.

Through him you have sent upon us your holy and life-giving Spirit and made us a royal priesthood called to serve you for ever.

Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying:

Holy, holy, holy Lord,

**God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

Hosanna in the highest.

Merciful Father, we thank you

for these gifts of your creation, this bread and this wine, and we pray that we who eat and drink them in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit in obedience to our Saviour Christ in remembrance of his death and passion may be partakers of his body and his blood, who on the night he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given you thanks he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat. This is my body which is given for you; Do this in remembrance of me.

After supper, he took the cup, and again giving you thanks he gave it to his disciples, saying, Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. Father, with this bread and this cup, we do as our Saviour has commanded:

we celebrate the redemption he has won for us;

we proclaim his perfect sacrifice, made once for all upon the cross, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension; and we look for his coming to fulfil all things according to your will.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Renew us by your Holy Spirit, unite us in the body of your Son, and bring us with all your people into the joy of your eternal kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, with whom and in whom, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we worship you, Father almighty, in songs of never-ending praise:

Blessing and honour and glory and power are yours for ever and ever. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,

for ever and ever, Amen.

The Breaking of the Bread

The bread which we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

We being many are one body, for we all share in the one bread.

Almighty God,

we thank you for feeding us with the spiritual food

of the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.

Through him we offer you our souls and bodies

to be a living sacrifice.

Send us out in the power of your Spirit

to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.

Dismissal:

Strengthen for service, Lord,

the hands that holy things have taken;

may the ears that have heard your word be deaf to clamour and dispute;

may the tongues which have sung your praise be free from deceit;

may the eyes which have seen the tokens of your love shine with the light of hope;

and may the bodies which have been fed with your body

be refreshed with the fulness of your life;

and the blessing of God Almighty,

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

be with you and remain with you always. **Amen.**