

SATURDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2013

A DAY OF FASTING AND PRAYER FOR PEACE IN SYRIA

VIGIL FROM 1900-2400 CET – 1800-2300 BST

Pope Francis has called for a day of prayer and penance on Saturday. He says, “On 7 September, in Saint Peter’s Square, from 19:00 until 24:00, we will gather in prayer and in a spirit of penance, invoking God’s great gift of peace upon the beloved nation of Syria and upon each situation of conflict and violence around the world.”

SUGGESTIONS

- **To gather – or to pray alone in solidarity...**

Time is not on side to publicise as much as might be desirable but it should still be possible to get word out suggesting that people gather for prayer – or try to set aside some time during Saturday evening at home to pray in solidarity with the world-wide prayer for peace.

- **Holy Hour** (page 2)

Below is an idea for a Holy Hour that parishes and groups might find useful as a starting point. Schools might like to adapt parts of it to use in assemblies or classroom prayers.

The Readings for Sunday’s Mass are not really focused on prayer for peace so this Hour uses the Beatitudes which, Matthew tells us, were addressed to crowds of people from all around the Middle East – including Syria.

Add in music or symbol or ritual as appropriate to your group.

An outline for a people’s version is available for parishes/groups to add their own details.

- A **Night Prayer** based on the Divine Office for use by small groups or individuals can be found on page 8

- **Prayer on the hour every hour**

Another possibility is to invite people to set alarms for each hour between 6pm and midnight (a bit longer than the “official” vigil) and to stop and pray an Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be for this intention of Pope Francis.

- Using a **prayer of the Desert Fathers**, promoted by St John Cassian as a mantra.

This can either be done as a group as part of a shared prayer or by individuals. It takes the opening responses of the Office:

O God, come to our aid,

O Lord make haste to help us.

Simply repeat the phrases under your breath– perhaps timed with your breathing – holding in your mind and heart those who are suffering.

- **A lit candle**

If your church is on a thoroughfare, perhaps have an electronic candle lit in the window or porch – You might also have something that speaks of the prayer for peace happening on Saturday and during Masses and, if appropriate at picture from Syria.

A HOLY HOUR

(possibly for use after Vigil Mass)

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the lands of the Middle East have been torn apart by war and conflict. Nations have taken up arms against nations. Within countries, violence has been used to oppress and to rebel– with many innocent non-combatants paying the price with their lives or life-long, grievous injuries.

Tonight, we hold this part of the world – and others places around the world where people suffer because of conflict and violence – in our prayer.

St Matthew tells us that Jesus' fame and healing work extended to Syria – and that it was in response to the crowds who came from there and other regions of the Middle East that he gave us the Beatitudes.

GOSPEL READING

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 4: 23-5: 12

SHORT REFLECTIONS ON THE BEATITUDES

Use different voices if possible – and allow people time to pray quietly after the brief lead into reflection.

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’

Lord Jesus, you promised the kingdom of heaven to the poor in spirit – those who seek just to live their lives in security and peace.

We pray for those who simply want to get on with their lives – to do the things we take for granted – going to work and school in safety... spending time with family and friends... enjoying time in the open-air...

As we look at the things we do in an ordinary day, we reflect on how it must feel to have those things taken away by people of violence and cruelty.

(Pause for people to work through a day and to pray for those denied such simple things ...)

Either sing or say: Lord have mercy or Kyrie eleison or similar short refrain.

‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.’

Lord Jesus, you saw people mourning and knew the power of human comforting.

We pray for those who are mourning tonight – especially those without human arms to enfold them or to wipe their tears away.

Perhaps you have seen an image on the television or internet of someone mourning following death in war – or heard a news report and heard the pain and fear in people’s voices. Bring that person – or people – to mind. You may not know their name but they are a son or daughter of God – a brother or sister in the human family.

(Pause for people to think about the image...)

Either sing or say: Lord have mercy or Kyrie eleison or similar short refrain.

‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.’

Lord Jesus, you promised that the meek would inherit the earth – and yet, millions of people have fled and become refugees – they have lost the little bit of our beautiful earth they called home.

We pray for those made homeless by war and conflict – far from the places their families have lived for generations – away from crops they have planted – away from the support of family, friends and neighbours – strangers in lands that are not always welcoming...

Imagine yourself – and your family – and people in your neighbourhood suddenly faced with the reality of having to up sticks and move – with little or no notice. What would you take – remember that you can only take what you can carry? What would you have to leave behind? Who might you have to leave behind? (Loved ones buried in local cemeteries, for example)

(Pause for people to think about what it might be like to become a refugee...)

Either sing or say: Lord have mercy or Kyrie eleison or similar short refrain.

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.’

Lord Jesus, you promise that those who yearn for justice – truth – righteousness – will be satisfied – and yet, it seems that the yearning is hopeless...

We pray for those who work for justice – peace – reconciliation – healing in areas of conflict – particularly in areas where the situation is truly desperate and seems hopeless.

Think of some of the agencies who try to bring peace to war and conflict-torn areas... the doctors and nurses who risk their own lives to bring medical help to those suffering grave injuries ... those who tell the truth even when it leads to imprisonment, torture or death.

(Pause for people to think about these agencies, etc...)

Either sing or say: Lord have mercy or Kyrie eleison or similar short refrain.

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.’

Lord Jesus, you pour mercy into the world – and inspire others to be merciful ... to act against the instinct for revenge – or to use power wisely and with compassion.

We pray for those who are in positions to show mercy – whether at national level – or simply individual acts of kindness and mercy.

Reflect on how merciful you are in your dealings with people – of the small acts that make a big difference in our relationships with one another. In your imagination, try to see such acts in places of conflict – and pray that God will inspire such mercy there.

(Pause for people to pray...)

Either sing or say: Lord have mercy or Kyrie eleison or similar short refrain.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.’

Lord Jesus, you promise the pure in heart a vision of God – yet, those who seek purity of mind and body are so often at the receiving end of violence and cruelty that destroys what they and others have protected.

We pray for those whose purity of mind and body has been gravely assaulted – who have encountered people acting under evil impulses – who have not seen God but something demonic.

Think of children – and women and men – who have been the subjects of assaults and humiliations that have seared their bodies, minds and spirits. Hold them in your own love and compassion – placing them in the hands of a loving and healing God.

(Pause for people to pray...)

Either sing or say: Lord have mercy or Kyrie eleison or similar short refrain.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.’

Lord Jesus, in every generation, God raises up people who work tirelessly for peace – they are indeed children of God – but their work is long, hard and sometimes feels thankless and futile.

We pray for those who are working for peace in the conflicts in our world – those we hear about – and those who work behind the scenes – those who work at international levels – and those who make peace between neighbours in their own streets.

Think of those who are trying to find peaceful resolutions to the conflicts and wars today. Reflect on your own life – your own heart – and pray that the peace we seek for the world might find its home in you too.

(Pause for people to pray...)

Either sing or say: Lord have mercy or Kyrie eleison or similar short refrain.

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’

Lord Jesus, you knew from personal experience that those who work for peace and justice are often persecuted...at best through insults and ridicule – at worst through torture and death.

We pray for those who work to bring righteousness into the dealings of the world – especially those who have suffered for being true to their consciences.

Think of people you have heard of who have suffered because they have stood for truth, justice and righteousness. Think also of those whose names you do not know – but who are there risking their reputations and even their lives for the sake of righteousness.

(Pause for people to pray...)

Either sing or say: Lord have mercy or Kyrie eleison or similar short refrain.

SHORT RITUAL

At this point, it could be good to offer a short ritual – an action that will help to express people’s prayer...

You might consider

- Have pictures (taken from newspapers or internet news sources) that people can pick up as they come in. Have a cross – and/or basket at the front (or in the centre of a circle for small gatherings). Invite people to spend a few minutes at this point looking at the image – and to pray for the person/people or situation they have before them.

Then play quiet music and invite people to bring forward their picture and place it at the foot of the cross. If just using a basket, think about where you might put it to honour the prayers it contains – for example, in a Lady Chapel or by a statue of a patron saint.

- Have a map of the world and tee-lights. Invite people to come and light a candle and to place it on the map. If numbers are large, encourage people to think of places beyond the Middle East where there is conflict and suffering that is not in the news. Have music playing or sing a gentle chant (for example: Kindle a flame from the Iona Community).
- Have symbols of some of the Beatitudes – or people involved in conflict: a teddy for children – a scarf for women who have been abused – a handkerchief for those who mourn – a rail ticket for those fleeing their homes – a First Aid kit for doctors and nurses and those they care for – a cross/ star of David/ crescent or other symbol to represent those of all faiths who strive for peace – a flower (or dead plant) for creation made barren – photo of a soldier or arms/banner of local regiment involved in peace-keeping... and so on...
Invite people to light a candle in front of each. As above, have music or quiet singing to accompany the ritual.

SIGN OF PEACE

Jesus said, 'Peace I leave you, my peace I give you'. Let us offer each other a sign of that peace – praying for peace in our own hearts – peace among our families and friends – peace in our neighbourhoods – peace in the world.

CONCLUSION

As we prepare to part, we give thanks for this time together – playing a small part in the great work of prayer enfolding our world tonight. Our prayer is concluding – but others are taking it up and we hand the prayer for peace on to them, but holding in our hearts all that we have prayed for.

O God of peace, who are peace itself
and whom a spirit of discord cannot grasp,
nor a violent mind receive,
grant that those who are one in heart
may persevere in what is good
and that those in conflict
may forget evil and so be healed.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Mary, Queen of Peace, pray for us

St John Damascene, pray for us. (or St John of Damascus, pray for us)

We pray God's blessing on ourselves – on those who carry on the prayer – and, above all, on those in places of war and conflict for whom the night will bring fear and death... in hope that they will somehow sense that we have been with them in spirit for a little time.

And may God bless us and keep us from all harm,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

SIMPLIFIED NIGHT PRAYER

As you pray this Prayer, remember when you say “our” and “us” that you are drawing all caught up in war and conflict into your prayer.

Leader O God, come to our aid,
All O Lord make haste to help us.

Psalm 4 – A Psalm for Deliverance

If praying with others, you can either have a leader start the first verse and alternate with the rest of the group – or divide the group in half with one side praying the odd verses, the other half praying even ones.

Answer me when I call, O God of my right!
You gave me room when I was in distress.
Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.

How long, you people, shall my honour suffer shame?
How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies?
But know that the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him.

When you are disturbed, do not sin;
ponder it on your beds, and be silent.
Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the LORD.

There are many who say, ‘O that we might see some good!
Let the light of your face shine on us, O LORD!’
You have put gladness in my heart
more than when their grain and wine abound.

I will both lie down and sleep in peace;
for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety.

(NRSV)

Scripture Reading

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

Nunc Dimittis

*Save us, Lord, while we are awake; protect us while we sleep;
that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with him in peace.*

Now, Master, you let your servant go in peace.
You have fulfilled your promise.
My own eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of all peoples.
A light to bring the Gentiles from darkness;
the glory of your people Israel.
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.

*Save us, Lord, while we are awake; protect us while we sleep;
that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with him in peace.*

Concluding Prayer

Come to visit us, Lord, this night,
so that by your strength we may rise at daybreak
to rejoice in the resurrection of Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

The Lord grant us a quiet night and a perfect end.

Amen

Calling on Mary – the Queen of Peace and Mother of mercy...

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy,
hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope.
To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve:
to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears.
Turn then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us,
and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus,
O merciful, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!
Amen

Below are links to liturgies that could also be adapted for use (prepared by Kathryn for previous prayers of peace)

http://www.wellsprings.org.uk/liturgies/healing_nations.htm

<http://www.wellsprings.org.uk/liturgies/remember.htm>

A Way of the Cross in a time of war and conflict:

http://www.wellsprings.org.uk/liturgies/way_in_war.htm