# Opening Prayer Service

## Gather

Blessed are you, Lord God of our Salvation.

We thank you for the life, death, and resurrection

of your son, Jesus.

We thank you for the ways we are taught to pray,

through our Sunday worship,

through the Prayer of the Hour of Jesus,

through Jesus’ agony in the Garden.

Through Mary’s humble trust in you, she shows us

How to say yes to your initiative in our lives.

Like Mary, help each one of us to become aware

Of your work in the world that hinges on our humble consent.

Just as with the disciples on the road to Emmaus,

may our eyes be opened to see you more clearly,

and may our hearts burn within us as we contemplate your love.

Blessed are you, Lord God of our Salvation.

Amen.

## Listen

John 17:1-5

## Respond

Presider:

As we continue our Lenten retreat and prepare our hearts to renew our baptismal promises on Easter, let us pray that we grow in awe and appreciation for Jesus’ gift of his life through his passion, death, and resurrection—all so that we can experience redemption and salvation. Our response is “Not my will, but yours be done, O God.”

Reader 1:

Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, ‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.’

Assembly: Not my will, but yours be done, O God.

Reader 2:

For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

Assembly: Not my will, but yours be done, O God.

Reader 3:

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him;

Assembly: Not my will, but yours be done, O God.

Reader 4:

They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem.

Assembly: Not my will, but yours be done, O God.

## Go Forth

Presider:

God, we are growing in our understanding that because Jesus conquered death and brought new life to all, our ritual prayer of breaking bread and sharing the cup are of great importance. During the seasons of Lent and Easter, may our eyes be opened to your gracious love all around, and may our hearts burn within us with the joy of the risen Lord. Amen.

# Handout #1.

# The Practice of Praying

Prayer is a discipline, reflecting the habits and practices of discipleship. Consider the four P’s of prayer, and the four types of prayer.

**Place.** There are many places favorable for prayer: you can pray at church, in a prayer corner at home, in nature (God’s creation), as pilgrims at shrines. You can create places for prayer in your home by carving out a space just for yourself, or to share with others.

**Posture.** Choose a prayer posture that works best for you: kneeling, sitting, lying down (don’t be so comfortable that you fall asleep!), using a small prayer stool, and so on. Position yourself in such a way that you are comfortable yet remain attentive as you pray.

**Prepare.** Even though prayer is gift from God, you need to make an active decision to engage your whole being in the time of prayer. Some people use a journal to write down what is on their mind as they start their time of prayer. Others use their imagination to place their distractions in their hands, and then raise their hands in offering to God. What will you do to prepare your heart for prayer?

**Process.** What process will you use to pray? Will you choose a Scripture passage? Will you pray contemplatively, quietly repeating the same phrase as you center you mind and heart and sit quietly with the Lord? How will you pray? Everyone has their own path in prayer, and different times in our lives call for different ways to pray.

The four types of prayer are:

1. **Contemplative**: conversing with God as though God is one of your best friends. Contemplation is the ability to be with God and to know that God is being with you at the same time. In meditation, the mind is working and actively seeking to understand something. In contemplation, the mind is at rest, simply drinking in the moment.
2. **Praise**: telling God how you stand in awe of who God is, and all that God does for you. Many of our traditional prayers begin with praise using a simple formula such as “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, your goodness surpasses all other good . . .” and the prayer may go on from there.
3. **Petition**: asking God for the things you need and desire and trusting that God knows what is best for you.
4. **Intercession**: asking on behalf of another, praying for others, or asking others (even saints) to intervene for you. Jesus is the ultimate interceder, pleading with God on your behalf. So too are you called to prayerfully intercede for others. A simple formula for creating an intercessory prayer is: a) name the person or persons or situation for whom you are praying, b) articulate the need of those for whom you are praying, c) articulate the intercession needed for those for whom you are praying, d) end the intercession with, “We pray to the Lord.”

## Group Work

Our group has been assigned the following type of prayer:

**Place.** One or more good places to engage in this type of prayer are:

**Posture.** This type of prayer lends itself to these postures:

**Prepare.** One good way to prepare for this type of prayer is:

**Process.** This type of prayer lends itself to the following process:

**Write.** Write a prayer of this type:

# Handout #2.

# The Last Supper

“On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?’ He said, ‘Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, “The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

“When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said, ‘Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.’ And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, ‘Surely not I, Lord?’ He answered, ‘The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.’ Judas, who betrayed him, said, ‘Surely not I, Rabbi?’ He replied, ‘You have said so.’

“While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom’” (Matthew 26:17-29).

* Step into the story and become a part of it. What is happening? What kind of day is it? Where is Jesus? Who is with him? Imagine yourself as one of the disciples at the Last Supper with Jesus.
* Put yourself in the room with them all. What do you see? What do you hear? What is the mood?
* Imagine their shock when hearing about his betrayal. What do you imagine lies in the mind and heart of Judas?
* Consider the disciples. What do you think they would be saying to Jesus? What would Jesus be saying to them?
* Now imagine the disciples asking Jesus what he means by “this is my body” and “this is my blood.” What questions would you be asking?
* Quietly thank God in your heart for your time of prayer and when you are ready, open your eyes and come back to this room.

Write or draw your observations of your experience here:

What words are staying with you from the passage.

How will this reflection help you worship and pray at Sunday services?

How will this reflection help you pray during Lent?

# Handout #3.

# Reflection on Foot Washing

Consider these thoughts on foot washing. Do they resonate with your own experience and feelings? If so, look for the opportunity to interject some of these thoughts during the session, perhaps as a “mini-homily” after the reading is proclaimed.

Jesus washed his disciples’ feet at the Last Supper. As we hear in the story, Peter felt embarrassed. He didn't want Jesus to wash his feet, at least not until Jesus explained that this was Peter’s only way to remain connected with him.

I don't know about you, but like Peter, I find it embarrassing to allow another person to wash my feet. I know I’m not the only one who isn’t quite sure he or she wants to be that close to another. Even with a church member I might know well, I have never been that close to his or her feet before.

Each year I enter into the ritual reluctantly, allowing someone to wash and dry my feet, and then taking a towel to wash and dry another person's feet. But somewhere along the line, I find myself transformed into prayer for the person so close to me. I look at his or her feet and I wonder what journeys and hardships these feet have endured. What joys have these feet experienced? What troubles have these feet walked into?

I am also reminded that this is just a ritual reenactment of a gesture that challenges me to place myself in service for others. If I feel uncomfortable and a little embarrassed, does that mean I will feel the same when it's the real thing—not just a ritual? Does my embarrassment hold me back from reaching out to those in need because I will have to get close to them?

I see now that my feelings of vulnerability and embarrassment take me to an "edge" that I need to cross over. I must respond to those in need with care, concern, prayer, and love *in spite* of those feelings that want to hold me back. The embarrassment must become an internal signal that tells me to go beyond my comfort zone, abandon my own self-consciousness, and surrender to the needs of the person in front of me.

# Handout #4.

# Washing Feet

## Draw a symbol, or write your responses to the following questions:

* What does the cross mean to you in your life today?
* What does the cross teach you?

## Veneration of the Cross

An ancient Christian tradition is the veneration of the Cross. In this action, persons come forward and present themselves to the cross. They might bow, or touch the cross, or kiss the foot of the cross, or a combination of these actions to show their reverence for what the cross symbolizes—Jesus giving his life in death on the cross so that we may live. You will now have an opportunity to venerate the cross.

## Washing of Feet

The washing of the feet is a symbol of service, humility, and purification. It is a prayer of action that both honors and humbles. It is as if Jesus recognizes that few of us will be called to the same sacrifice of the cross as he, shedding body and blood. But this intimate action of washing one another’s feet is something to which we are all called.

What is one word that summarizes the reading for you and also connects to the meaning of the cross in your life today.

# Handout #5.

# The Agony in the Garden

“They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’ He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, ‘I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.’ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, ‘Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.’ He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, ‘Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. He came a third time and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand’” (Mark 14:32-42).

How do you handle something you dread, particularly as the anxiety builds and the tension rises? When you know you must endure something extremely difficult that you simply cannot avoid, what do you do? Let’s consider these four steps:

## Share your burden.

List the people to whom you can turn when anxiety begins to overwhelm.

Jesus first shared his burden with Peter, James, and John, who were among his closest friends. Is it difficult for you to turn to someone for help, or to simply share your burden? If so, why?

Jesus took his burden directly to his Father in prayer. When your anticipation of something leads to dread, do you take it to God in prayer? If so, how do you pray at those times?

## Surrender to the experience.

In his agony in the garden, Jesus surrendered to the will of his Father, knowing full well that he must endure the hardest of hardships. When the inevitable is upon you, it is perhaps a waste of energy to resist. Reflect on the following questions and jot your responses.

In our culture, “surrender” is typically a sign of weakness. Do you subscribe to that line of thinking, or are there times when “surrender” is the best choice? Explain.

When you anticipate hardship, or find yourself in the midst of it, well-meaning people will often say something to the effect of “Hang in there. You will learn a lot from this experience.” How do you feel when you hear words like this? Do you think these words are generally true?

## Resolve to be strong and stay present.

In the midst of hardship and anxiety, the greatest temptation is to "check out" and leave the situation behind, if not physically, then emotionally and mentally. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the disciples could not stay awake. Sleep overcame them. They "numbed" themselves to the impending pain and doom. Meanwhile, Jesus stayed awake, and, in prayer he confronted the situation head on. Reflect on the following questions and jot your responses.

When confronted with impending "doom" how do you resist the temptation to "check out" and "numb" yourself to the experience?

Do you believe that prayer can give you inner strength to stay present to the situation, even when the situation is particularly dreadful? Have you ever had such an experience?

## Trust in God's love and providence.

It's easy to trust God when all goes well, but can you do so when confronted with a challenge more difficult and more fearful than you have ever before encountered? Reflect on the following questions and jot your responses.

What does the word "providence" mean to you?

How can you grow into the ability to give greater trust to God? Do you think prayer has anything to do with it?

# Prayer Service

## Gather

Blessed are you, Lord God of our Salvation.

We thank you for the life, death, and resurrection

of your son, Jesus.

We thank you for the ways we are taught to pray,

through Jesus’ agony in the garden,

through washing one another’s feet,

through waiting for the bulb to become a flower,

and through the Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, almsgiving.

Just as with the disciples on the road to Emmaus,

may our eyes be opened to see you more clearly,

and may our hearts burn within us as we contemplate your love.

Blessed are you, Lord God of our Salvation. Amen.

## Listen

Luke 24:13-35

## Respond

Presider:

As we conclude our reflections on prayer through the Lent and Easter seasons, let us pray in thanksgiving for how Jesus opened our eyes and our hearts through his resurrection, conquering death and offering everlasting life to all who believe. Our response is “Are not our hearts burning within us?”

Reader 1:

As Christians our prayer is rooted in our belief in Jesus’ resurrection.

Assembly:

“Are not our hearts burning within us?”

Reader 2:

At the Last Supper with his twelve disciples Jesus also broke bread and gave it to them; took the cup and shared it with them. And he commanded, “Do this in remembrance of me.” The ritual prayer of breaking bread and sharing the cup now has meaning, for Jesus has conquered death and brought new life to all.

Assembly:

“Are not our hearts burning within us?”

Reader 3:

When we enter into the prayer of remembrance our eyes may be opened. When we break bread with one another, perhaps we can see the face of the risen Christ in each other, and even reconcile the hurts between us.

Assembly:

“Are not our hearts burning within us?”

Reader 4:

This Easter season, take time to read, meditate, and dwell on the Walk to Emmaus. Open your heart to that which your mind cannot fully comprehend: the *risen* Jesus, and you may find that your eyes are opened and your heart is burning.

Assembly:

“Are not our hearts burning within us?”

## Go Forth

Presider:

God, we are growing in our understanding that because Jesus conquered death and brought new life to all, our ritual prayer of breaking bread and sharing the cup bring deep meaning to our lives. During the seasons of Lent and Easter, may our eyes be opened to your gracious love and may our hearts burn within us with the joy of the risen Lord. Amen.

­