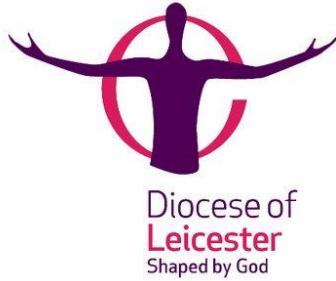




THE COMMUNITY OF THE  
**TREE OF LIFE**



# AGAPE FEAST

## A SUGGESTED 60-MIN PRAYER GUIDE

Below you will find a centring prayer, scripture, and a range of ‘prayer actions’. Please feel free to use what you want. Permission to dip in and out, follow the suggested timings or go at your own pace.

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Depending on what ‘prayer action’ you choose to take, you may need a Bible, paper, salt, flour, a sink and a device with Wi-Fi – scroll down to find out more before entering prayer.

### INTRO

On Thursday 16th July, many Christians give thanks for the institution of Holy Communion, also known as Corpus Christi. The origin of Holy Communion lies in the communal Passover meal Jesus shared with his disciples just before His arrest. In the early church, Communion was often part of an Agape meal (agape being the Greek word for ‘love’ in the most general sense), although at some point around the first or second century, Communion became separate from the Agape meal. The lovefeast seeks to strengthen the bonds and the spirit of harmony, goodwill, and congeniality, as well as to forgive past disputes and instead love one another. Food in Christianity is an important symbol of community, unity, and plenty.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the measures taken to stop the spread of the virus deepened an existing crisis and levels of food poverty started rising. Around the world, we produce more than enough food to feed the global population – but more than 810 million still go to bed hungry every night. With skyrocketing food prices and the climate crisis devastating food production in some areas of the world, let’s come together to pray for those who experience hunger and lack food security in our world today.

## CENTRING & SILENCE [5 mins]

Get into a comfortable posture and pray,

*'As we enter prayer now, we pause to be still, slow our breathing, and centre ourselves in the abiding presence of Christ'*

Bring your attention to your breath. Become present.

## OPENING SCRIPTURES [5 MINS]

Read slowly, aloud or in your head. You may like to read several times.

And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten.

- John 6:12-13

Therefore, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

- 1 Corinthians 10:14-17

## VISIO DIVINA [15 mins]

Visio Divina (divine seeing) is related to the prayer form Lectio Divina (divine reading), but instead of Scripture, this form of prayer uses visual elements to aid prayer. It allows God to speak into your heart through image as you notice what feelings, memories or inspiration stirs in you.

The image below is titled "The Meal" by priest and artist Sieger Köder. Köder (1925–2015) was a German soldier in World War II who was captured while fighting on the front lines in France.



Sieger Köder, "The Meal," from the Lenten veil *Hope for the Excluded*, 1996

**Settling:** Take some moments to settle into your surroundings. Become aware of your breathing. You might want to use this breath prayer to help centre yourself:

**Shimmering:** Begin to gaze over the image in front of you. Notice what you respond to – what shimmers or stand out: colours, shapes, a particular face, hands, eyes. It could create either a resonance or dissonance in you. Linger on whatever is capturing your attention.

**Stirring:** As you continue to focus on whatever has captured your attention, what memories, thoughts, feelings are being stirred in you? Is there an invitation or a response that God is calling you to?

**Savouring:** You might want to capture something by drawing, creating or writing something down. Thank God for this moment.

## **OUR DAILY BREAD [15 mins]**

... give us this day our daily bread...'

Here are three prayer points around food poverty and hunger. Feel free to use them to inspire your prayer. Add your own petitions and requests.

// Salt: pray for you and your local community

*... you are the salt of the earth...'* Matt 5

If you are able to, go outside into your garden or outside your front door. Take some salt with you. Sprinkle some salt on the ground as you pray. Pray that you would be able to witness to the generous Spirit of God, that your eyes would be opened to injustice in the world around you, that your local Community would care for those in need.

// Flour: pray for those who grow, produce and distribute food.

Grab some flour (if you don't have flour, you could use salt or sugar). Tip some flour out on a table or work surface, roughly 20cm x 10cm. Write a single word prayer in the flour with your finger. 'Sustainable', 'justice', 'health', for example. Rub out the word and write another and another. Each time you use flour.

// Water: for the causes and effects of malnutrition and hunger.

*'... the water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.'* - John 4

There are many causes of hunger and malnutrition: gender inequality, war and conflict, climate breakdown. Poor nutrition affects the growth and development of millions of children.

Go to a sink and wash your hands. As the water flows, pray for the living water of Jesus to renew our world, that we might build a better future together, that God would wash away the effects of greed and violence.

*Bread of life, Bread of Heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread.*

*Feed those, who are hungry.*

## **PRAYING THROUGH THE PSALMS [15 mins]**

Based on the life and words of David, the Psalms provide insightful reflections on depression, anger, frustration, fear, and insecurity, as well as joy, exhilaration, triumph, and gladness.

Praying with the Psalms offers readings to guide us in expressing to God the wide range of human emotions. Even when we ourselves are not experiencing distress, the Psalms offer us a way to offer up to God the distress of others, and to remember those who are in distress.

Here are a few options of Psalms of lament and praise that you could use, or pick your own!

### **PSALM 107**

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;

his love endures forever.

Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story—

those he redeemed from the hand of the foe,

those he gathered from the lands,

from east and west, from north and south.

Some wandered in desert wastelands,

finding no way to a city where they could settle.

They were hungry and thirsty,

and their lives ebbed away.

Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,

and he delivered them from their distress.

He led them by a straight way

to a city where they could settle.

Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love

and his wonderful deeds for mankind,

for he satisfies the thirsty

and fills the hungry with good things.

## Psalm 6

Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger

or discipline me in your wrath.

Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint;

heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony.

My soul is in deep anguish.

How long, Lord, how long?

Turn, Lord, and deliver me;

save me because of your unfailing love.

Among the dead no one proclaims your name.

Who praises you from the grave?

I am worn out from my groaning.

All night long I flood my bed with weeping  
and drench my couch with tears.

My eyes grow weak with sorrow;

they fail because of all my foes.

Away from me, all you who do evil,  
for the Lord has heard my weeping.

The Lord has heard my cry for mercy;  
the Lord accepts my prayer.

All my enemies will be overwhelmed with shame and anguish;  
they will turn back and suddenly be put to shame.

## **Psalm 102**

Hear my prayer, Lord;  
let my cry for help come to you.

Do not hide your face from me  
when I am in distress.

Turn your ear to me;  
when I call, answer me quickly.

For my days vanish like smoke;  
my bones burn like glowing embers.

My heart is blighted and withered like grass;  
I forget to eat my food.

In my distress I groan aloud  
and am reduced to skin and bones.

I am like a desert owl,  
like an owl among the ruins.

I lie awake; I have become  
like a bird alone on a roof.

All day long my enemies taunt me;  
those who rail against me use my name as a curse.

For I eat ashes as my food  
and mingle my drink with tears  
because of your great wrath,  
for you have taken me up and thrown me aside.

My days are like the evening shadow;  
I wither away like grass.

But you, Lord, sit enthroned forever;  
your renown endures through all generations.

You will arise and have compassion on Zion,  
for it is time to show favor to her;  
the appointed time has come.

For her stones are dear to your servants;  
her very dust moves them to pity.

The nations will fear the name of the Lord,  
all the kings of the earth will revere your glory.

For the Lord will rebuild Zion  
and appear in his glory.

He will respond to the prayer of the destitute;

he will not despise their plea.

## **OPTIONS FOR PRAYING THE PSALMS**

// Pick one and stay with it for a week.

Praying the Psalms regularly is an ancient prayer practice. Pick one of the Psalms from above and say it as your prayer each day, keeping in mind those in need as you pray. You may even like to memorize it!

// Draw/sing/create/dance a Psalm.

If words aren't your thing, you may like to pick one or two words or ideas from one of the Psalms and turn it into a dance, song or piece of art. Let your creativity be your prayer!

// Use a Psalm to write your own prayer:

### **// Breath Prayers**

We see the Psalmist breathe a prayer, in a way, when they offer words like, "My life is a breath" (Psalm 39:5, 11; 144:4). The book of Psalms closes with the words: "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord" (Psalm 150:6).

You may like to use some words from a Psalm as a breath prayer. For example, you could use the phrase: "**The Lord is my Shepherd... I shall not want.**" Here is one way I do this:

Breathe in slowly and deeply as you whisper or think: "The Lord is my Shepherd..."

Hold your breath and your consciousness of God's presence...

And then exhale as you whisper or think: "...I shall not want."

### **// Responses**

- a) Write down 5 prayers for those in need.
- b) Use 'You have seen, O Lord, do not be silent' from Psalm 83 as a response to each of these. E.g.:

'May everyone in the UK receive a living wage so that they will never go bed hungry.'

You have seen, O Lord, do not be silent.'

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Lord Jesus you fed the hungry,  
you shared your bread with all.  
Your people hunger now,  
and we are called to share your bread.

May rains fall upon the dry and broken earth  
and quench your people's thirst,  
so seeds grow tall and flourish,  
producing a bountiful harvest.

May we share the blessings you give us  
and bring comfort to those in need.  
May we show love through our actions  
so all have enough to eat.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.

(By Helen Moriarty/CAFOD)