



Living churches at the heart of their communities...

## **A Book of Prayers and Reflections**



**'Be still and know I am with you'**



*Prayer is an important part of our Christian faith in that it helps us to build a firm relationship with God enabling us both to talk and, just as importantly, to listen to Him. It is hoped that you will find this booklet useful when praying privately in Church or at home. You will find a variety of prayers and reflections to aid you in prayer. It is worth noting that sitting in silence and being in the company of God alone is prayer in itself.*

## **Prayer as we return to Church**

Father,

The doors of our Church are open wide once more beckoning us to enter after this period of lockdown. Each one of us carries in our hearts and minds a vast mixture of emotions and uncertainties for the future. As we enter may we be filled with a desire to re-dedicate ourselves to help each other and those in our community to grow in faith and love of you.

We pray that you will still our restlessness and fill us with your grace in the knowledge that all which may challenge us is surmountable because you are with us.

May this building once more ring out its voice of praise and prayer for you. May we as a parish community flourish and fulfil your calling to love and serve our neighbour.

We ask this in your dear Son's name

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

**Reading:** Micah 6. 6-8

## **What God Requires**



'With what shall I come before the LORD,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?'  
He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?

## **Reflection**

Quietly think upon the words above. God does not ask us to do difficult things that are beyond our capabilities. What He asks from us is to love, show kindness to one another, to act justly and to walk humbly with Him. These traits are difficult for you and I to constantly follow but God knows this and the fact that He encourages us to walk with Him is a wonderful sign of His love. God's constant presence and love accompanying us on life's journey reassures us that whatever we face we are not alone, He is there to love, protect, pick us up when we stumble, forgive our mistakes and set us off once more on the path of life.

## **Prayer**

Father, we thank you for your love for us and ask that we may grow in faith and love of you. In our words and actions help us to emanate to all we come into contact with love justice, faith and love of you.

Amen



**Reading:** Acts 1. 8-10

'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'  
When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.

Matthew 16. 19

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

**Reflection**

God's way since creating the world has been to invite our co-operation, our co-creating as partners in His divine creativity.

Maybe Jesus could have left detailed instructions about how to run a church.

But his way was God's way and so instead he left his Spirit. Trusting us, he let go and left it to us to continue treading his path, to continue the work of the kingdom as faithful disciples.

*The above has come from Donal Harrington's book on 'Prayer Reflections for Group Meetings'. God has entrusted human beings with quite a task in carrying on Christ's work here on earth. As Donal Harrington rightly points out, there is no blue print here for us to work from. God does not tell us what to do; He leaves it to us to work it out trusting that we will look closely to the Holy Spirit to guide us.*

**Prayer**

Father, help us to be open to your Holy Spirit in guiding us as we live out our Christian faith within our communities. We pray that our words and actions will bring comfort and hope to all those with whom we come into contact. Let us always be loving servants to each other and show willingness to help and support all those in need.

Amen



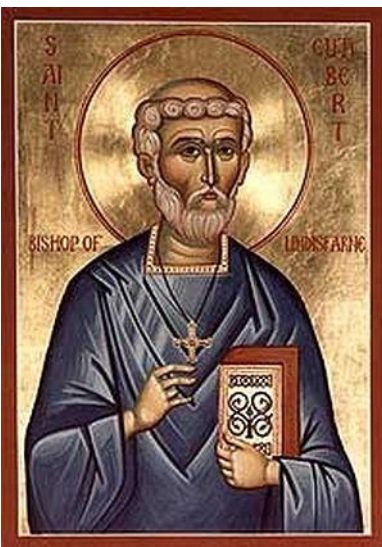
**Reading:** 1 Kings 8. 27-30

‘But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! Have regard to your servant’s prayer and his plea, O LORD my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; that your eyes may be open night and day towards this house, the place of which you said, “My name shall be there”, that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays towards this place. Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray towards this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling-place; heed and forgive.



**Reflection**

We often hear it said that the Church is not the building but the people and yet the church building is where we gather as a worshipping community, and the older the building is the more that sense of prayer and worship from previous generations prevails. One of my joys is sitting in church and feeling that connection between the past, present and future, the knowledge that generations to come will experience that same connection. For me it’s a sign of our Christian faith and depth of rootedness that anchors us as a Christian community.



**Prayer of St Cuthbert**

Ever living God, who didst call thy servants Aidan and Cuthbert to proclaim the Gospel in northern England and endued them with loving hearts and gentle spirits: Grant us grace to live as they did, in simplicity, humility and love for the poor; through Jesus Christ, who came among us as one who serves, and who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

**Reading:** First Song of Isaiah, from Daily Morning Prayer

“Surely, it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid.

For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense, and he will be my Saviour.

Therefore you shall draw water with rejoicing from the springs of salvation.

And on that day you shall say, Give thanks to the Lord and call upon his name;

Make his deeds known among the peoples; see that they remember that his name is exalted.

Sing the praises of the Lord, for he has done great things, and this is known in all the world.

Cry aloud, inhabitants of Zion, ring out your joy, for the great one in the midst of you is the Holy One of Israel.”



## **Response**

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost.

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.

World without end.

Amen.

## **Prayer**

Father we pray that we will be constantly invigorated by the power of the Good News and filled by your Holy Spirit to share the news of your love within the communities in which we live. We pray that our faith will be a living, fruitful witness to others which will encourage them to find out more about you.

Amen



*In the stillness of the Church or at home you may just like to sit quietly and be at one with God and talk to Him or just say nothing and let God speak and be with you. These moments of stillness are important and it is amazing how refreshed we feel when, for a short time, we leave the noise and bustle of our busy lives behind.*

***Below are some prayers which you may like to say***

### **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, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever.

Amen.

### **The Lord is my Shepherd Psalm 23**

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

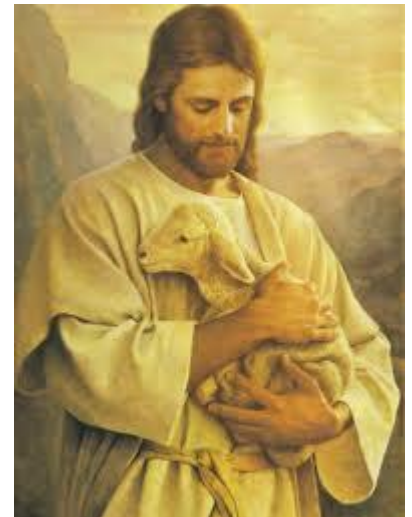
He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,

he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.



## **Make Us Walk in Your Way, St Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)**

Lord, make us to walk in your way:

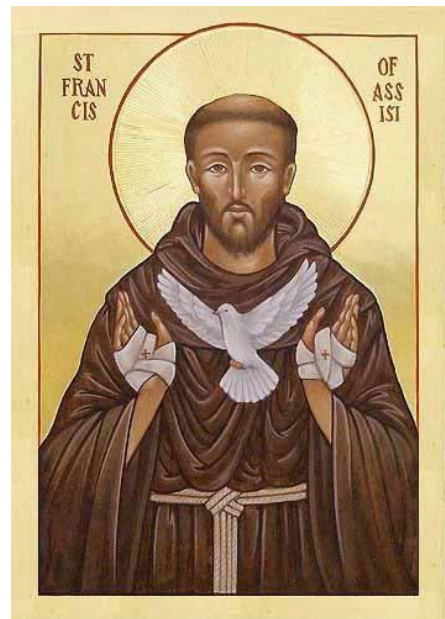
'Where there is love and wisdom,  
there is neither fear nor ignorance;  
where there is patience and humility,  
there is neither anger nor annoyance;  
where there is poverty and joy, there is  
neither greed nor avarice; where there is  
peace and contemplation, there is neither  
care nor restlessness;

where there is the fear of God to guard the dwelling,  
there no enemy can enter;

where there is mercy and prudence,  
there is neither excess nor harshness';

this we know through your Son,  
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.





*To conclude I have chosen to reflect upon the painting below. Our churches are re-opening their doors to welcome us back in. Are we too opening the doors of our hearts to welcome Christ in afresh?*

## **The Light of the World**

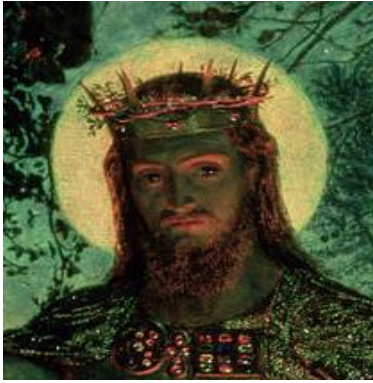
*by William Holman Hunt*



## Reflection

In this reflection on the painting certain aspects have been highlighted. For a fuller description you can go to:

<https://www.stpauls.co.uk/documents/Education/Light%20of%20the%20world%20booklet.pdf>



Hunt painted Jesus' expression as one of great patience. He does not show anger or fatigue, but waits quietly for the door to be opened. The eyes seem to look directly at you wherever you stand, and many people would say they are eyes full of love. Jesus' hands show the marks of the nails which were hammered through them when he was hung on the cross. Modern medical research has found that this method would not have been able to support the weight of the body and that the nails would probably have been hammered through the wrists.



After Jesus' resurrection, Jesus showed his disciple Thomas, the holes in his hands and feet to prove that it really was him back from the dead. (*John 20*)

In the painting, Jesus' right hand knocks at a door, whilst his left holds a lantern.

Holman Hunt painted Jesus' feet turned sideways away from the door. The meaning of this is that he has been knocking at the door for a very long time and now is preparing to go. The implication is that it is almost too late to open the door and admit Jesus into our lives.



## The Door

The door represents the door of our lives. Jesus knocks on the door and waits patiently for us to open it.

Crucial to the painting is that the door has no handle. The only way for it to be opened is from the inside. A person who hears Jesus' message needs to accept it and open their life to admit him. The words from Revelation 3:20, which inspired Hunt's painting, written beneath the picture read,



“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and sup with him and he with me”.

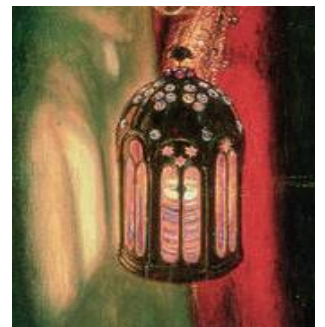


Weeds and the dense growth of plants around the door symbolise sin. They stop the door from being opened, just as sins often distract people from following Christ. Many of the weeds are dead and dying, indicating that life without Jesus is no life at all.

All the light in the painting comes from the lantern held in Jesus' left hand. This serves to explain the meaning of the painting's title. Jesus declared, "I am the Light of the World" (*John 8:14*). "I am" is a phrase that recalls Jesus' divinity (when Moses asked God whom he should say had sent him to free the slaves, He replies, "Tell them 'I am' has sent you"). (*Exodus 3:14*)

As the Light of the World, Jesus gives life, just as the Sun gives life to the world. He also leads his followers through the dark and difficult times of our lives, providing guidance and hope.

A careful study of the lantern will reveal that there are little holes in the top. These are six pointed stars and crescent moons, the symbols for Judaism and Islam. This symbolises that Christians believe that Jesus is the Light for all people, and knocks at everyone's door. Muslims revere Jesus as an important prophet, although they do not consider him to be divine.



### **The Inscription**

Taken from *Revelation 3:20*, the last book of the Bible, the inscription is the key to understanding the whole painting.

The original words were written in Greek and some of their meaning is lost in a direct translation into English. A more literal reading would be, "Here I am! I have been standing (for a long time) at the door and I am constantly knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

'Eat' in this context refers to the main meal of the day, taken in the evening. There is no doubt that sharing a meal with someone is an intimate and trusting activity.

The New Testament frequently tells of Jesus eating with people and many parables and teachings contain references to feasts and celebrations. According to John's Gospel, even after his Resurrection, Jesus ate with his disciples (*John 21*).

Jesus also used meals in his parables. The Kingdom of Heaven is often referred to as a feast to which people are invited. In the Parable of the Great Banquet (*Luke 14*), invitations are sent out, but people make excuses and do not turn up. The servants are then sent out to bring in all those who were classed as outcasts from society.



Today, Christians still celebrate the Eucharist, in remembrance of the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples. Sharing bread and wine, they remember Jesus' body and blood sacrificed on the cross.

### **A prayer before leaving Church**

Father you have invited me into your presence today to both speak and listen to you. You alone know the contents of my thoughts and prayers. Whatever I have needed, you have answered my call through your grace and love for me as your child. May I ask that your Holy Spirit remains and guides me and that I continue to know you are always with me in life, walking beside me ever present in all I think and do.

Amen

