

02 Praying at Home, this Holy Week

Apr

Praying at Home during this Coronavirus Holy Week

This suggestion was sent to us by Thomas O'Loughlin, Professor of Historical Theology at the University of Nottingham. As an example of what might be done, he has proposed a text, (below) for a [Home Liturgy for Palm Sunday](#).

You can divide religions into those that are most at home in the large public space and those which are most at home in the domestic space. For most Christians the choice has never been visible: they own many big buildings – and that is where religion takes place. If it takes place elsewhere, that is really just 'a follow up.' Christians seem to like big public statements.

But it is startling to recall that the original eucharistic meals – where the followers of Jesus wanted to be distinctive from their fellow Jews – took place in their homes.

'Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke the loaf at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts' (Acts 2:46).

In this domestic scale, they were in tune with their Jewish roots. Every meal was to be an occasion at which those gathered blessed God (Dt 8:10); the weekly meal with which the Sabbath began was a special act of praise, and the most special night of the year is Passover meal when God's liberating deeds are recalled around the table. This year – in most places – Christians are going to have to rediscover this domestic liturgical space.

Let us remind ourselves of some basics.

1. Jesus is present with us

The risen Jesus is present in every community however small. This was captured in this saying preserved in Matthew's gospel: 'For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them' (18:20). Even the smallest gathering – just two people staying two metres apart so as not to spread the virus – has the Risen Lord is among them. This might be two people in a house, or it might be people linked on the phone or on skype.

This was expressed in another ancient Christian saying – preserved in the *Didache* (a first-century new disciples' guide): 'wherever the things of the Lord are spoken about, there the Lord is present' (4:1).

2. Our sitting room is a place of prayer

We might be feeling the lack of a church building, but recall this instruction by Jesus:

And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the gatherings and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you (Mt 6:5-6).

3. Centre and summit

Our prayer together at home should be seen as being among the foothill: soon we shall gather as a whole community again for the Great Thanksgiving that we call 'the Eucharist.'

4. Every table is a sacred place

Jesus encountered people and taught at their tables: every table is a place where we can encounter the Lord in those with us. We will not be eating together as sisters and

brothers in a church for the next few weeks, so let's starting recalling that whenever we eat, we should be thankful. We can gather at the table now to celebrate Holy Week, and there in our domestic space, enter Jerusalem with Jesus, recall his last Supper with his disciples on Thursday, rejoice in his victory over sin and death when he was exalted upon the Cross on Good Friday, wait for him during the still hours of Saturday, and sing our Easter 'alleluia' at that same table next Sunday.

Getting going

If you want to devise, along with those locked down in the same house with you, a special liturgy to celebrate Palm Sunday then that in itself will be an act of praise. But if you want a little 'ready made' liturgy that can just be downloaded, then here is one.

Remember – a home liturgy has to be:

- simple and short (the kettle may be boiling or a phone start ringing) – this one takes about 6 minutes;
- straight-forward (people, not just children, must not get a fit of the giggles: what works in a big group will often not work in a very small group); and
- you do not need lots of words to pray, to remember, and to celebrate.

Lots of people have helped create this little liturgy – thanks to them all!

A Home Liturgy for Palm Sunday 2020

If you have a garden and can get some greenery, then get enough to give a piece to each person in isolation with you.

If you cannot cut some greenery but have a potted plant, place that on the table – it will remind you and anyone with you of the strange year we are in.

Sit down around the table you are normally at for meals. If you do not have such a common table, then sit around where you normally eat.

Sisters and brothers, this Sunday we gather as individual households or alone in our homes. In all instances God is with us, the Christ is among us, and the Church is at prayer. This prayer resource is for you this Sunday.

Opening

Have a piece of greenery in your hand

Leader or together:

Sisters and Brothers, we have observed the 40 days of Lent. We unite ourselves to the Church Universal and pray that we may enter this Holiest of Weeks with reverence and hope.

We pray: God of all creation, these branches recall for us the joy of that day when Jesus, fulfilling the scriptures, made his entry into Jerusalem. Bless this greenery we hold in our hands that it may go with us throughout the coming year.

All:

Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Gospel: Matthew 21:1-11.

Reader: **A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.**

Jesus and the disciples drew near Jerusalem

When they came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives,

Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them,

“Go into the village opposite you,

and immediately you will find an ass tethered,
and a colt with her.
Untie them and bring them here to me.
And if anyone should say anything to you, reply,
'The master has need of them.'
Then he will send them at once."
This happened so that what had been spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled:
Say to daughter Zion,
"Behold, your king comes to you,
meek and riding on an ass,
and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden."
The disciples went and did as Jesus had ordered them.
They brought the ass and the colt and laid their cloaks over them,
and he sat upon them.
The very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road,
while others cut branches from the trees
and scattered them on the road.
The crowds going ahead of him and those following
kept crying out and saying:
"Hosanna to the Son of David;
blessed is the he who comes in the name of the Lord;
hosanna in the highest."
And when he entered Jerusalem
the whole city was shaken and asked, "Who is this?"
And the crowds replied,
"This is Jesus the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee."

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Then together say:

O Gates lift high your heads;
Grow higher ancient doors.
Let him enter the King of Glory!
Who is the King of Glory?
He, the Lord of Host, he is the King of Glory.

Spend a minutes in silence thinking about the Gospel. Then talk together about what Jesus will do in Jerusalem in the coming days. What will happen on Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday? Remind one another that Jesus is present in this domestic liturgy: 'for where two or three have gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Mt 18:20).

Prayer of the Faithful

Leader: Let us pray.

Let each in turn lead an intercession:

We pray for all those infected by the Coronavirus around the world, for those who care for them, for health specialists and authorities who are combatting the spread of infection, and for all who at this time are feeling anxious.

— Lord hear us. **(Lord graciously hear us.)**

For all believers: that we take up the cross each day and remain faithful to the Lord.

— Lord hear us.

For world leaders: that they may govern with mercy, justice and respect for the rights of all people for just treatment, food, water, shelter and safety. Lord hear us.

For wealthy nations and people; that they act with compassion and concern for the poor and marginalized.

— Lord hear us.

Make your own prayers for those who are sick or in need. Ask God to protect them.

Finish each prayer with:

— Lord hear us.

Then the leader says:

We pray for those who have died that they may rest in the loving presence of the Lord.

Lord hear us.

And now let us pray together as Jesus taught us:

Everyone prays this together

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 the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

Leader: May God bless us and keep us safe.

All: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.