

DAY 7

Jesus said: "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor?" (*Lk 10:36*)

Scripture

Philippians 2:1-5
Psalm 10:17-18

Meditation

At the end of the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer: who was the neighbor to the man victimized? The lawyer replied, "The one who showed him mercy." He does not say "the Samaritan" and we might imagine that the hostility between Samaritans and Jews made that answer hard to admit. We often discover neighbors in the most unexpected people, even those whose very name or origins we find difficult to utter. In today's world, where polarized politics often set those of different religious identities against one another, Jesus challenges us through this parable to see the importance of our vocation to cross borders and walls of separation.

As with the lawyer, we are challenged to reflect upon how we live our lives, not merely in terms of whether we do good or not, but whether, like the priest and the Levite, we are neglecting to act mercifully.

Prayer

Holy God, your Son Jesus Christ came among us to show us the way of compassion. Help us by your Spirit to follow his example, to serve the needs of all your children, and so give united Christian witness to your ways of love and mercy. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 8

Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (*Lk 10:37*)

Scripture

Romans 12:9-13
Psalm 41:1-2

Meditation

Through these words – "Go and do likewise." – Jesus sends each of us, and each of our churches, to live out his commandment to love. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, we are sent out to be "other Christs", reaching out to suffering humanity in compassion and mercy. Like the Good Samaritan towards the injured man, we can choose not to reject those who are different, but instead cultivate a culture of proximity and goodwill.

How does Jesus' invitation to "Go and do likewise" speak to my life? What does this call of Christ imply for my relationships with members of other churches? How can we charitably bear witness together to God's love? As ambassadors for Christ (*cf. 2 Cor 5:20*), we are called to be reconciled to God and to one another, for fellowship to take root and grow in our churches and in areas affected by inter-communal conflict, such as in Burkina Faso.

As mutual trust and confidence increase, we will become more willing to reveal our wounds, including ecclesial wounds, that Christ's love may visit and heal us through each other's love and care.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, who makes us more open to each other, resolves conflict, and strengthens our bonds of communion. May we grow in mutual affection and in the desire to announce the Gospel message more faithfully, that the world may come together in unity and welcome the Prince of Peace. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2024

Daily Scripture and Prayer Guide

"You shall love the Lord your God... and your neighbor as yourself."

(*Luke 10:27*)

DAY 1

A lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (*Lk 10:25*)

Scripture

Romans 14:8-9
Psalm 103:13-18

Meditation

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" This crucial question asked of Jesus by a lawyer challenges every believer in God. It affects the meaning of our life on earth and for eternity. Elsewhere in the Bible, Jesus gives us the ultimate definition of eternal life: "... that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (*Jn 17:3*). Knowing God means discovering and doing his will in our lives. Every person wants a life of fullness and truth, and God desires this for us too (*cf. Jn 10:10*). Saint Irenaeus said, "The glory of God is a human being fully alive."

The existential realities of life, with divisions, selfishness and suffering, often distance us from the quest for God.

Thus, our quest for eternal life brings us closer to Jesus, and in so doing brings us nearer to each other, strengthening our closeness on the path toward Christian unity. Let us be open to friendship and collaboration with Christians of all churches, praying for the day when we can all stand together at the Table of the Lord.

Prayer

God of life,
You have created us to have life, and life in all its fullness. May we recognize in our brothers and sisters their desire for eternal life. As we follow Jesus' way with determination, may we lead others to you. We pray in his name. Amen.

DAY 2

He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." (*Lk 10:27*)

Scripture

Deuteronomy 10:12-13
Psalm 133

Meditation

The answer the lawyer gives to Jesus may seem simple, drawn from the well-known commandments of God. However, to love God in this way and our neighbors as ourselves can often be difficult.

God's commandment to love him requires deep commitment and means abandoning ourselves entirely, offering our hearts and minds to serve God's will. We can ask for the grace to follow Christ's example, he who offered himself up completely and said, "Not my will but yours be done." (*Lk 22:42*). He also manifested his great love to all, including his enemies. We do not get to choose our neighbors. Loving them means being attentive to their needs, accepting their imperfections and encouraging their hopes and aspirations. The same attitude is needed on the path of Christian unity, with regard to one another's different traditions.

Prayer

Lord, give us the grace to know you more deeply, in order to love you with all of our being. Grant us a pure heart, to love our neighbors as ourselves. May the gift of your Holy Spirit enable us to see your presence in our sisters and brothers, that we may love each other with the same unconditional love with which you love us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

DAY 3

“Who is my neighbor?”
(Lk 10: 29)

Scripture

Romans 13:8-10
Psalm 119:57-63

Meditation

The teacher of the law wanted to justify himself, hoping that the neighbor he is called to love is one of his own faith and people. This is a natural human instinct. When we invite people to our homes, they are quite often people who share our social status, our outlook on life and our values. There is a human instinct to prefer places of familiarity. This is also true of our ecclesial communities. But Jesus takes the lawyer, and his wider audience, deeper into their own tradition by reminding them of the obligation to welcome and to love all, regardless of religion, culture or social status.

The Gospel teaches that loving those who are like ourselves is not extraordinary. Jesus steers us towards a radical vision of what it means to be human. The parable illustrates in a very visible way what Christ expects from us – to open wide our hearts and walk in his way, loving others as he loves us. In fact, Jesus answers the lawyer with another question: it is not “who is my neighbor,” but, “who proved to be a neighbor to the man in need?”

This is the challenge of the parable today: to whom am I a neighbor?

Prayer

God of love,
Who writes love in our hearts, instill in us the courage to look beyond ourselves and see the neighbor in those different from ourselves, that we may truly follow Jesus Christ, our brother and our friend, who is Lord, for ever and ever. Amen.

DAY 4

When he saw him, he passed by on the other side. (Lk 10:31)

Scripture

Isaiah 58:6-9a
Psalm 34:15-22

Meditation

The priest and Levite who walk by on the other side may have had scrupulous reasons for not helping: they may have been ready to perform certain religious rituals and might have risked ritual defilement if the man had been dead. Yet on many occasions, Jesus is critical of religious leadership for placing the rules of religion ahead of the obligation to always do good. In fact, their attitudes are in violation of the Torah.

The beginning of the text for the Week of Prayer tells us how the teacher of the law wanted to justify himself. The priest and the Levite in the parable would have felt justified in what they had done. As Christians, how far are we prepared to go beyond convention? Sometimes our ecclesial and culturally conditioned short-sightedness can prevent us from seeing what is being revealed by the life and witness of sisters and brothers of other Christian traditions. When we open our eyes to see how God’s love is revealed by our fellow Christians, we are drawn closer to them and so are drawn into deeper union with them.

This parable of Jesus not only challenges us to do good, but also to widen our vision. The Good Samaritan is often the one we do not expect.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
As we journey with you towards unity, may our eyes not look away, but be wide open to the world. As we travel through life, may we stop and reach out, bind up the wounded and in so doing experience your presence in them: you who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

DAY 5

He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them.
(Lk 10:34)

Scripture

Joel 2:23-27
Psalm 104:14-15, 27-30

Meditation

The Good Samaritan did what he could out of his own resources: he poured wine and oil and bandaged the man’s wounds and put him on his own animal. He went further still by promising to pay for his care. When we see the world through the Samaritan’s eyes, every situation can be an opportunity to help those in need. This is where love manifests itself. The example of the Good Samaritan motivates us to ask ourselves how to respond to our neighbor. He gave wine and oil, restoring the man and giving him hope. What can we give, so that we can be a part of God’s work of healing a broken world?

This brokenness shows itself in our world in insecurity, fear, distrust and division. Shamefully, these divisions also exist between Christians. The healing of our Christian divisions promotes the healing of the nations.

Prayer

Gracious God,
You who are the source of all love and goodness: enable us to see the needs of our neighbor. Show us what we can do to bring about healing. Change us, so that we can love all our brothers and sisters. Help us to overcome the obstacles of division, that we might build a world of peace for the common good. Thank you for renewing your Creation and leading us to a future which is full of hope: you who are Lord of all, yesterday, today and forever. Amen.

DAY 6

Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. (Lk 10:34)

Scripture

Genesis 18:4-5
Psalm 5:11-12

Meditation

The man who fell into the hands of robbers was cared for by a Samaritan. The Samaritan saw beyond prejudice or bias. He saw someone in need and brought him to an inn. “The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend’” (Lk 10:35).

In any human society, hospitality and solidarity are essential. They require the welcoming of strangers, foreigners, migrants and homeless people. However, when faced with insecurity, suspicion and violence, we tend to mistrust our neighbors. Hospitality is an important witness to the Gospel, particularly in contexts of religious and cultural pluralism. Welcoming ‘the other’, and being welcomed in turn, is at the heart of ecumenical dialogue. Christians are challenged to turn our churches into inns where our neighbors can find Christ. Such hospitality is a sign of the love that our churches have for one another and for all.

Prayer

Father of love, in Jesus, you showed us the meaning of hospitality, by caring for our fragile humanity. Help us to become a community that welcomes those who feel abandoned and lost, building a house where all are welcome. May we come closer to one another as we offer the world your unconditional love. This we pray in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.