

Red Wednesday Prayer Liturgy

Each of us is called to reflect the light of God (Mt 5:14 – 16)

This year #RedWednesday falls on Wednesday, 25th November. ACN's #RedWednesday campaign draws the attention of governments and media organisations around the world to the shocking plight of Christians, those from other minorities, faith communities and people of no faith who suffer unjustly because of their faith or beliefs. Will you help to reflect the light of God by making a stand for faith and freedom and supporting #RedWednesday?

Introduction

One teenager, who without hesitation, acted in solidarity with the oppressed, the poor and the marginalised and reflected the light of God, was Carlo Acutis.

On Saturday 10th October 2020, Carlo Acutis was beatified in Assisi in Italy. Following his beatification, Carlo Acutis, was given the title 'Blessed' by the Church.

Blessed Carlo Acutis, was born in London in 1991, but moved to Italy with his parents soon afterwards. Carlo died in 2006 from Leukaemia aged 15. He was an only child and, in many regards, just an ordinary teenager. He was a computer-loving, internet-savvy person who loved playing football and video games as well as looking after his many different pets.

He was devoted to the Holy Eucharist. From the age of 11, he used his computer and Internet skills to create a website that compiled Eucharistic miracles from around the world. His devotion to the Eucharist led his mother to return to the Church.

He was very generous, too; he used his first savings to buy a sleeping bag for a homeless man he would often see on his way to Mass. His small acts of generosity and kindness inspired his family's house cleaner, who was then a Hindu, to be baptised into the Catholic Church. Blessed Carlo often said that each person reflects the light of God. His motto: "[be] originals not photo-copies," challenges all of us to live our everyday, ordinary lives extraordinarily well through acts of service.

By putting others before himself, Blessed Carlo Acutis led a life of Christian witness to God's love and mercy. Through his life of compassion and service to the poor, he reflected the light of God and brought hope to many people.

Blessed Carlo shows us that we, too – every one of us – we can all become saints by prayerfully following Jesus' example to use our gifts, time and money to serve others. In his Apostolic Exhortation (*Christ is Alive* [Christus vivit] 2019, 105-106) Pope Francis wrote that, "Carlo was well aware that the whole apparatus of communications, advertising and social networking can be used to lull us, to make us addicted to consumerism and buying the

latest thing on the market... Yet he knew how to use the new communications technology to transmit the Gospel, to communicate values and beauty. Carlo didn't fall into the trap.

He saw that many young people, wanting to be different, really end up being like everyone else, running after whatever the powerful set before them with the mechanisms of consumerism and distraction. **In this way they do not bring forth the gifts the Lord has given them; they do not offer the world those unique personal talents that God has given to each of them.** As a result, Carlo said, 'everyone is born as an original, but many people end up dying as photocopies'. Don't let that happen to you!" Pope Francis continued, "Young friends, don't wait until tomorrow to contribute your energy, your audacity and your creativity to changing our world. Your youth is not an "in-between time". **You are the 'now' of God, and he wants you to bear fruit**". (Pope Francis, *Christ is Alive [Christus vivit]* 2020, 178)

How then, and in what ways, will you follow Blessed Carlo's example by using your gifts to support oppressed Christians and people of other faiths and none on #RedWednesday, 25th November?

Our brothers and sisters need your help. Tragically, in our world today, we need #RedWednesday more than ever before. Around the world, Christians, minority faith groups and people of no faith suffer abuse and discrimination simply because of their faith or beliefs.

The terror that many Christians face is, perhaps, difficult for many of us to understand. Thousands face discrimination and legal abuses that may affect their housing, wages, education, their future prospects or their access to healthcare services. Around the world, countless numbers of Christians are kidnapped, attacked or killed through their faithfulness to Christ. For example, in February 2018, Boko Haram Islamist militants kidnapped 110 female students from a boarding school in the city of Dapchi in north-eastern Nigeria. Leah Sharibu, who was 14 years old at the time, was one of the captives. Sadly, some of the girls died in captivity. A month later, Boko Haram released all the other 101 captives except Leah. The girls who were released testified that Leah was the only Christian of the group and the terrorists had tried to force her to convert to Islam, but she had refused.

Before we open our hearts to God in prayer, let us prepare by listening to the following short passages from the Bible and from Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

Reader 1:

He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; **listen to him.**" (Mt 17: 5)

Reader 2

On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "**Do whatever he tells you.**" (John 2: 1-5)

Reader 1:

My sheep **hear my voice**, and I know them, and they **follow me**. (John 10: 27)

Reader 2:

And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, **as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.**' (Mt 25: 40)

Reader 1:

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labour. **For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.** (1 Cor 3:6-9)

Reader 2

Only if **I serve** my neighbour can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me. (Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, *God is Love* [Deus Caritas Est] 2005, 178)

Let us pray a prayer written by St Thérèse of Lisieux in a letter to her sister Céline.

Jesus wills that we give alms to Him as to one poor and needy. He puts Himself as it were at our mercy; He will take nothing but what we give Him from our heart, and the very least trifle is precious in His sight.

*He stretches forth His Hand, this sweet Saviour, to receive of us a little love, so that in the radiant Day of Judgment He may be able to address to us those ineffable words: "**Come, ye blessed of my Father; for I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; sick and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me.**" (Matthew 25:34-36, and XV Letter of St Thérèse to Her Sister Celine)*

In a few moments of silence, during the short meditation that follows, let us take the opportunity to think about the gifts God has given us. How we can use them to give glory to God and to reflect His light? Let us ask him for the gift of wisdom and 'an attitude of gratitude' so that 'we may see with God's eyes, to feel with God's heart to speak with God's words'.

Reflection: Meditation - My Gifts (Adapted from Quinlan, T., (2002) *Still Point Meditations: For School and Parish*, Dublin, Veritas Publications, pp. 12-13 and pp. 24 – 25.)

Introduction:

Times of silence are precious. Our aim is to enter into silence – the silence of our own hearts. To do so, we must first become relaxed. In order to become still in our innermost heart we must first become still in our body.

Firstly, we relax our bodies. Close your eyes. Bring your attention to your neck and shoulders. If you notice you experience any tension there, just imagine that tension flowing gently down your arms and out of your body through your fingers.

Become aware of your back against the seat and then, further down, feel your weight pressing against the seat. You are becoming more and more relaxed.

You are now breathing nice and easily. Bring your attention to your breath, but do not breathe any more heavily that you normally do.

The breath you are breathing now is the breath of life; the breath that God breathed into your body when you were born. Remember you are the receiver of this breath of life, not its giver.

Meditation

Imagine now that you are walking into a theatre. Describe it in your mind's eye. See yourself walking up to the very first row. There is no-one else in the theatre. You sit down and look at the stage...Gradually the curtains open to reveal a large armchair in the middle of the stage. Imagine now a big leather armchair.

Eventually your favourite hero or heroine comes out onto the stage and sits down. Name this person in your mind. Describe how this person looks, how he or she is dressed. You start to talk to this person telling him or her all the things you admire about them – think of all the gifts that this talented individual has.

This person gets up after a while and bids you goodbye. Then another person comes out onto the stage and sits down. After a while, you realise that this second person is you, yourself. **Now tell yourself all the good things you admire about YOU!** Think of all the gifts and talents that you possess as a unique human being.

See yourself now, getting up from the front row and going up on the stage to meet yourself. Shake hands with this new, personal you.

Scriptural Reflection

We are all made in the image of God; we have all been given gifts to reflect the light of God. Are you willing to commit to using these freely given gifts to assist and support our oppressed brothers and sisters around the world?

As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God; whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4: 10-11)

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in everyone. **To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.** All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (1 Corinthians 12: 4-7; 11)

Prayers of the Faithful

Leader (Chaplain, teacher or priest or senior member of the chaplaincy team) says:
God wants us all to be diligent workers for the coming of his kingdom. We are his hands and his feet. Let us pray for greater generosity and sincerity in God's service.

Reader says:

Let us pray that the Church may faithfully proclaim the message of freedom to a troubled world, and that by your grace and the work of the Holy Spirit, the Church will continue to transform, heal and make new the hearts of all who hear her message. We pray especially for the Church in Sri Lanka, in Syria, in Iraq and in Egypt that uplifted and sustained through the prayers and the advocacy work of our school community, the faithful will be encouraged to continue to witness to Christ in the face of bomb attacks, animosity and oppression.

Lord, in your mercy...

Reader says:

Let us pray for the supporters and benefactors of ACN who, through their prayers, solidarity and generosity, enable the Church, through Aid to the Church in Need and her project partners, to continue to bear witness to our Lord's healing mercy, compassion and saving love. **Lord, in your mercy...**

Reader says:

Let us pray for our bishops, project partners, all religious and lay leaders that they may reflect your light and glorify you by living out your healing compassion and love. We pray, Father, that you will fill them with your mercy, understanding, wisdom and prudence, so

that confident in their trust in you, they will prayerfully shepherd their flock and decide on the right course of action to take. **Lord, in your mercy...**

Reader says:

Let us pray for all those who suffer repression and persecution because of their faith in China, North Korea, Syria, and Eritrea and in Sudan. Consoled by our prayers and reassured by our support we humbly ask you, Father, to bless them with your Holy Spirit so that they 'might not despair nor become despondent' but may find strength in your endless mercy and inexhaustible compassion. **Lord, in your mercy...**

Reader says:

We pray for those communities affected by discrimination and violence because of their Christian faith. We pray especially for our brothers and sisters living in: Burkina Faso; Central African Republic; Cameroon; Democratic Republic of Congo; Mozambique, Niger and Nigeria as well as in Nicaragua, India and Pakistan; who have been attacked or whose churches have been desecrated or destroyed. We pray that the Holy Spirit will comfort and protect the afflicted; guide the weary; and lead the peacemakers. **Lord, in your mercy...**

Reader says:

Let us pray for all those affected by natural disasters. We pray especially for the people of Lebanon and the Philippines. We humbly ask God to comfort, lead and strengthen them as they rebuild their lives, homes and communities. **Lord, in your mercy...**

Reader says:

Let us pray for the grace to forgive, for healing and for reconciliation. God our Father, we pray for lasting peace and security in the Middle East, Venezuela, Belarus and in Ethiopia; for the success of peace negotiations in: Afghanistan; Central African Republic, Chad; Libya; Niger; South Sudan and Ukraine; and for an end to civil unrest in Cameroon; Mexico; Nigeria and the Philippines. We pray also for Cardinal Bo and all religious leaders in Burma (Myanmar) engaged in inter-religious dialogue as well as for national and local politicians, civil, community and business leaders that they will reject self-interest and pursue justice, compassion and equality. **Lord, in your mercy...**

Reader says:

Let us pray for those children and young people who, because of violent attack, oppression or conflict, have had their opportunities for carefree play severely limited, their education disrupted and their dreams curtailed due to the destruction, damage, confiscation or closure of their schools or colleges. Father we place them, their parents and their teachers into your hands; let them remain healthy in both body and in mind. Send your Holy Spirit to strengthen them and to 'kindle in them the fire of your love' so that, by placing their trust in you, your perfect peace will reign in their hearts. **Lord, in your mercy...**

Reader says:

Let us pray for the continued successful formation of our novices and seminarians who, in the face of threats, violent attack and the consequences of the Covid-19 health crisis,

continue to study and serve their communities. 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few'. Merciful Father, we ask you to protect your labourers. **Lord, in your mercy...**

Reader says:

Let us pray for those families suffering from Covid-19 corona virus in: Bangladesh; Burkina Faso; Lebanon; Pakistan; Ukraine and in Venezuela who, though already very poor, have suffered discrimination in accessing healthcare services and receiving government food parcels. We pray that there will always be men and women of faith and charity to care for the needs of the sick, vulnerable and lonely. We ask our Father to envelop in his love all who have been mistreated, exploited, or pushed from the centre to the edges of society. **Lord, in your mercy...**

Now we join our prayers to Mary, our Mother, as we say, **Hail Mary, full of grace...**

In silence, we pray for our own needs as well as for those for whom we promised to pray.

Leader says:

Father, hear the prayers of your people. You know our needs. Send us your Holy Spirit so that we may remain faithful, intentional disciples through our thoughts, words and actions. We present our prayers in the name of Jesus the Lord.

Before we end our prayer liturgy, have you reflected on or even decided how, and in what ways, you are able to commit to using your time, gifts and money to support #RedWednesday?

Let us pray:

Send me, Lord

(Taken from von Lengerke, G. & Schromges, D. (eds.) (2013) *YOUCAT English Youth Prayer Book*. San Francisco, Catholic Truth Society, Ignatius Press, p. 126.)

Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord.

Send me!

(Based on Isaiah 6: 8)

Send me, Lord,
Wherever you please,
for when I am sent by you,
then I am quite sure
that you will help me
- in whatever situation I find myself –
to fulfil what you ask.
Amen.

Saint Francis de Sales

Teachers' Notes

Depending on the context - and on your answers to the following questions:

- What will follow the prayer liturgy?
- How much time do you have available?
- What is the shape and size of the space? Where is it located in the school?
- How many and what type of students will be in the class?

- you may choose to use all or only sections of this #RedWednesday prayer liturgy. You might prefer to omit the meditation for example.

Depending on the length of time you spend on the meditation, the prayer liturgy will take approximately 15 to 35 minutes to go through it completely.

Excerpts of Scriptural passages were taken from the Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition of the Bible.

Ideally, the following sections should be read by the person leading or supervising the prayer liturgy. Ordinarily, this will be a chaplain, a teacher or a priest:

- Introduction;
- Meditation;
- Scriptural reflection;
- St Thérèse of Lisieux prayer;
- Closing prayer by St Francis de Sales

You might like to choose your readers from:

- the chaplaincy team; or
- form group; or
- year group.

as appropriate. Depending on the size of the room, or on the number of volunteers, you may decide to select only two readers rather than have a different reader for each reading.

To do

- Depending on the size of the room/number of people taking part in the liturgy you may need to consider using your IT/AV facilities.
- You may need to copy the prayer onto a PowerPoint slide and use microphones/speakers/cabling and so on...
- Print copies of the prayer liturgy as required
- Music; you might wish to choose:
 - Appropriate hymns/praise and worship songs;
 - Suitable background, calming, meditative music