

## **Ecumenical prayer liturgy**

### **Music, hymn, or song**

*Follow me, Follow me* (suggestion only)

### **Greeting**

### **Call to worship**

I would like to welcome you to our service today as we remember all those who suffer for their love of Christ.

### **Opening prayer**

(Taken from [3 prayers for persecuted Christians \(christiantoday.com\)](https://www.christiantoday.com))

Almighty God,

You have warned us through your Son Jesus Christ that those who follow Him may be oppressed and abused because of their faith.

We ask that you comfort and give courage to all your children who fall victims to unjust imprisonment, physical harm, and intimidation at the hands of their oppressors.

For those who have given their lives in the fight for freedom to openly share and live out their faith, may they be welcomed into your warm embrace.

For those who persecute our brothers and sisters, may their spirits be touched by the incredible faith of those who they attack. And may they turn away from sin and open their hearts to your love.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

### **Scripture reading 1**

Matthew 10:16-18

Jesus said to his Apostles: “Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves. But beware of men, for they will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues, and you will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans.” Matthew 10:16-18

### **Scripture reading 2**

The Sermon on the Mount

5 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

The Beatitudes

2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

### **Hymn**

*The Servant King* (suggestion only)

### Prayers of intercession

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).**

XV Letter to Her Sister Celine

**Leader** 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 people of God may faithfully proclaim the message of freedom to a troubled world, and that the Church will continue to transform, heal, and make new the hearts of all who hear her message. **Lord, in your mercy...**

**Reader** says:

Let us pray for 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 lead 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. 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 faith in God. We pray especially for our brothers and sisters who have been threatened, intimidated, or attacked, or whose places of worship 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 Pakistan, Madagascar, Ethiopia, Somalia, and South Sudan, as well as Yemen, Afghanistan, 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 a cease-fire in Ukraine, and in Yemen. We pray for lasting peace and security in the Middle East, in Myanmar, in Venezuela, and in Ethiopia; Mozambique; in the Central African Republic, Chad; Libya; Niger; South Sudan; and for an end to civil unrest in Cameroon; Mexico; Ecuador, Nigeria, and the Philippines. We pray also for all religious leaders in 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. God our Father, we place them, their parents, and their teachers into your hands; let them remain healthy in both body and in mind. We ask you 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 work of people of faith who, in the face of threats, violent attack, continue to 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:

We pray that there will always be men and women of faith, and charity to care for the needs of the sick, the vulnerable, and lonely. We ask our God 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...**

(If praying the Our Father prayer **at the end** of the liturgy, you may omit the Lord's Prayer)  
Now we lift our prayers to God, Our Father, as we say, **Our Father, who art in heaven hallowed...**In silence, we pray for our own needs as well as for those for whom we promised to pray.

**Leader** says:

God our 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. Amen.

## Reflection

From the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew Chapter 5,6, and 7)

Salt and Light (Matthew chapter 5)

<sup>14</sup> “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup> Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

### **Freedom: A Lesson in Obedience from Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

*Perhaps the most valuable lesson that the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer can offer to the Christian men of our time is a lesson in obedience—a virtue highly unpopular and largely absent from our culture. The seriousness with which Bonhoeffer viewed obedience to God was evident not only in his life, but also in his theology, which is worthy of note. Bonhoeffer is well known for his concepts of cheap grace and costly grace. Cheap grace is “marked by formalism;” it means “going to church and hearing that God just loves and forgives everyone, so it doesn’t really matter much how you live” (Keller, Foreword to Bonhoeffer, xv). Costly grace, on the other hand, involves “costly sacrifice” and maintains that “if God was willing to go to the cross and endure such pain and absorb such a cost in order to save us, then we must live sacrificially as we serve others” (Keller, Foreword to Bonhoeffer, xvi). Thus, in Bonhoeffer’s eyes, anything less than this firm obedience to God “smacked of ‘cheap grace’” (Metaxas, Bonhoeffer, 240).*

**Adapted from “Freedom: A Lesson in Obedience from Dietrich Bonhoeffer”** by Mr Sean Mitchell [A Lesson in Obedience from Dietrich Bonhoeffer \(thosecatholicmen.com\)](http://thosecatholicmen.com)

### **Music from Taizé**

Veni Sancte Spiritus

### **Let us pray:**

A prayer Dietrich Bonhoeffer from ‘*Letters and papers from prison*’  
(Taken from [A prayer by Dietrich Bonhoeffer - Tearfund Learn](#))

‘In me there is darkness,  
But with You there is light;  
I am lonely, but You do not leave me;  
I am feeble in heart, but with You there is help;  
I am restless, but with You there is peace.  
In me there is bitterness, but with You there is patience;



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I do not understand Your ways,  
But You know the way for me.  
Lord Jesus Christ,  
You were poor  
And in distress, a captive and forsaken as I am.  
You know all man's troubles;  
You abide with me  
When all men fail me;  
It is Your will that I should know You  
And turn to You.  
Lord, I hear Your call and follow;

Help me.

Or pray the Our Father

### **Closing Hymn**

*For all the saints (suggestion only)*