

ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS PRAYER SERVICES



INTRODUCTION

Pope John Paul II in his encyclical letter “That They May Be One” (Ut Unam Sint) expressed an earnest desire that the call for Christian unity made by the Second Vatican Council be renewed with deep commitment. “... the quest for Christian unity is not a matter of choice or expediency but a duty which springs from the very nature of the Christian community.” (#49) He emphasized the importance of prayer in this renewal. “In this journey which we are undertaking with other Christians ... prayer must occupy the first place.” (#102)

Every parishioner in the Phoenix diocese is encouraged to pray alone and with others for Christian unity and interreligious harmony. This prayer guide can be used with the various groups which already meet in the parish, at a time of prayer specifically for Christian unity, or interreligious relationships, and/or by individuals at home or at church for private prayer. The baptism we share with all our sister and brother Christians calls us to ongoing conversion and lived discipleship. As people of faith, we are called to respect the religious traditions of others.

As stated in the “Decree on Ecumenism” (Unitatis Redintegratio) from the Second Vatican Council, “This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement and merits the name, ‘spiritual ecumenism.’” (8) In its “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” (Nostra Aetate), the Council stated “the Church, therefore, urges her sons (and daughters) to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions.” (2) And, “We cannot truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people in other than brotherly (or sisterly) fashion, for all are created in God’s image.”(5)

Note: (All psalms from *The Psalter*, Translated by International Commission on English in the Liturgy. Readings from the *New American Bible with Revised New Testament* © 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.)

Prepared by the Commission on Ecumenism and Interreligious Affairs, Diocese of Phoenix.
January 1, 2009

OPENING PRAYER (Litany of the Presence of Christ)

NOTE: TO BE USED WITH ALL TWELVE SERVICES

L. Jesus, Risen Lord

All We gather in your name.

L. Jesus, Good Shepherd

All We gather in your name.

L. Jesus, Word of life

All We gather in your name.

L. Jesus, friend of the poor

All We gather in your name.

L. Jesus, source of all forgiveness

All We gather in your name.

L. Jesus, Prince of peace

All We gather in your name.

All Lord Jesus Christ,
You call us together in faith and love.
Breathe again the new life of your Holy Spirit among us
That we may hear your holy word,
Pray in your name, seek unity among Christians
(and harmony with all men and women)
And live more fully the faith we profess.
All glory and honor be yours
With the Father, and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Litany jointly prepared and published by:

The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and
The Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches

CLOSING PRAYER

NOTE: TO BE USED WITH ALL TWELVE SERVICES

Prayer for Unity of the Church

O God the Abba of our Lord Jesus Christ,
our only Savior, the Prince of Peace:
give us grace seriously to lay to heart
the great dangers we are in
by our unhappy division;
take away all hatred and prejudice,
and whatever else may hinder us
from godly union and concord;
that, as there is but one Body
and one Spirit,
one hope of our calling,
one Lord, one Faith,
one Baptism, one God and Creator of us all,
so we may be all of one heart
and of one soul,
united in one holy bond of truth and peace,
of faith and charity,
and may with one mind and mouth
glorify you;
through Jesus Christ our Savior.
Amen.

Source: *The Book of Common Prayer*

1. THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY OF FAITH AND LOVE

“Christ, the one Mediator, established and continually sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as an entity with visible delineation through which He communicated truth and grace to all. ... This Church constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity.”

From Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium) # 8

For reflection or discussion:

- In what way is Christ at the center of the understanding of Church?
- To say that the Church as it is constituted “subsists” in the Catholic Church draws our attention to what particular truth of faith for Catholic Christians?
- Describe what elements of sanctification and truth you find outside of the visible confines of the Catholic Church?
- How do these elements of sanctification and truth help us to understand what we hold in common with other Christians?

Psalm 84

Your temple is my joy, Lord of heaven’s might.
I am eager for it, eager for the courts of God.
My flesh, my flesh sings its joy to the living God.

As a sparrow homing, a swallow seeking a nest to hatch its young,
I am eager for your altars, Lord of heaven’s might.
My king, my God.

To live with you is joy, to praise you and never stop.
Those you bless with courage will bless you from their hearts.

When they cross the Valley of Thirst the ground is spaced with springs,
with the welcome rain of autumn.
They travel the towns to reach the God of gods in Zion.

Hear me, Lord of might; heed me, God of Jacob.
God our shield, look, see the face of your anointed.

One day within your courts is worth a thousand without.
I would rather stand at God’s gate than move among the wicked.

God is our sun, our shield, the giver of honor and grace.
The lord never fails to bless those who walk with integrity.
Lord of heaven’s might, blest are all who trust in you.

Reading: Acts 2: 42-47

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

2. UNITY

“The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principle concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only. However, many Christian communions present themselves to men as the true inheritors of Jesus Christ; all indeed profess to be followers of the Lord but differ in mind and go their different ways, as if Christ Himself were divided. Such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching of the Gospel to every creature.”

From Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redintegratio) #1

For reflection or discussion:

- Why would the Second Vatican Council be concerned with restoration of Christian unity?
- In what ways do you think division among Christians betrays the Gospel and is a scandal to the world?
- What are issues you think different Christians have in common that can be a foundation for overcoming our divisions?

Psalm 80

Hear us, shepherd of Israel, leader of Joseph’s flock.
From your throne on the cherubim shine out for Ephraim,
for Benjamin and Manasseh.
Gather your strength, come, save us!

Restore to us, God, the light of your presence,
and we shall be saved.
How long, Lord God of might, will you smolder with rage,
despite our prayers?

For bread you feed us tears, we drink them by the barrel.
You let our neighbors mock, our enemies scorn us.
Restore to us, God of might, the light of your presence,
and we shall be saved.

You brought a vine from Egypt, cleared out nations to plant it;
you prepared the ground and made it take root to fill the land.

It overshadowed the mountains, towered over the mighty cedars,
stretched its branches to the sea, its roots to the distant river.

Why have you now torn down its walls?
All who pass by steal the grapes, wild boars tear up its roots,
beasts devour its fruit.

Turn our way, God of might, look down from heaven;
tend this vine you planted, cherish it once more.
May those who slashed and burned it wither at your rebuke.

Rest your hand upon your chosen one who draws strength from you.
We have not turned from you.
Give us life again and we will invoke your name.

Restore to us, Lord God of might, the light of your presence.
and we shall be saved.

Reading: John 17: 20-26

I pray not only for them but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me. Father they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world also does not know you, but I know you, and they know that you sent me. I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them.

3. FIDELITY TO THE COVENANT

“Every renewal of the Church is essentially grounded in an increase of fidelity to her own calling. Undoubtedly this is the basis of the movement toward unity.

Christ summons the Church to continual reformation as she sojourns here on earth. The Church is always in need of this, in so far as she is an institution of men here on earth. Thus if, in various times and circumstances, there have been deficiencies in moral conduct or in church discipline, or even in the way that church teaching has been formulated—to be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith itself—these can and should be set right at the opportune moment.”

From Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) #6

For reflection or discussion:

- In what way is the Ecumenical movement considered a renewal of the Church?
- Why would the practice of Ecumenism be “an increase of fidelity to her own calling?”
- Why is it important for the document to state the reality of deficiencies in moral conduct or discipline as well as how expressions of faith may have been insufficiently articulated?

Psalm 25

Lord, I give myself to you.
I trust you, God; do not fail me, nor let my enemies gloat.
No one loyal is shamed, but traitors know disgrace.

Teach me how to live, Lord, show me the way.
Steer me toward your truth, you, my saving God,
you, my constant hope.

Recall your tenderness, your lasting love.
Remember me, not my faults, the sins of my youth.
To show your own goodness, God remember me.

Good and just is the Lord, guiding those who stray.
God leads the poor, pointing out the path.

God’s ways are faithful love for those who keep the covenant.
Be true to your name, O Lord, forgive my sin, though great.

Do you respect God? Then God will guide your choice.
Your life will be full, your heirs will keep the land.
God befriends the faithful, teaches them the covenant.

I keep looking to God to spring me from this trap.
Turn, treat me as your friend, I am empty and poor.

Release my trapped heart, free me from my anguish.
See my misery, my pain, take my sins away.

See how they mob me, this crowd that hates me.
Protect me and save my life.
Keep me from disgrace, for I take shelter in you.
Let integrity stand guard as I wait for you.

Free Israel O God, from all its troubles.

Reading: Luke 9: 23-25

Then the Lord said to all, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?”

4. INTERIOR CONVERSION

“There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart. For it is from renewal of the inner life of our minds, from self-denial and an unstinted love that desires of unity take their rise and develop in a mature way. We should therefore pray to the Holy Spirit for the grace to be genuinely self-denying, humble, gentle in the service of others, and to have an attitude of brotherly generosity towards them.”

From Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redintegratio) #7

For reflection or discussion:

- Why is interior conversion central to the task of ecumenism?
- What attitudes persist today among Catholics and non-Catholics regarding the ecumenical movement and the quest for unity?
- Why does the Church state that; “This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement...”

Psalm 51

Have mercy, tender God, forget that I defied you.
Wash away my sin, cleanse me from my guilt.

I know my evil well, it stares me in the face,
evil done to you alone before your very eyes.

How right your condemnation! Your verdict clearly just.
You see me for what I am, a sinner before my birth.

You love those centered in truth; teach me your hidden wisdom.
Wash me with fresh water, wash me bright as snow.

Fill me with happy songs, let the bones you bruised now dance.
Shut your eyes to my sin, make my guilt disappear.

Creator, reshape my heart, God, steady my spirit.
Do not cast me aside stripped of your holy spirit.

Save me, bring back my joy, support me, strengthen my will.
Then I will teach your way and sinners will turn to you.

Help me, stop my tears, and I will sing your goodness.
Lord, give me words and I will shout your praise.

When I offer a holocaust, the gift does not please you.
So I offer my shattered spirit; a changed heart you welcome.

Reading: Romans 12: 3-8

For by the grace given to me I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than one ought to think, but to think soberly, each according to the measure of faith that God has apportioned. For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophesy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

5. COMMON HERITAGE

“... Catholics must gladly acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments from our common heritage which are to be found among our separated brethren. It is right and salutary to recognize the riches of Christ and virtuous works in the lives of others who are bearing witness to Christ, sometimes even to the shedding of their blood. For God is always wonderful in His works and worthy of all praise.”

From Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redintegratio) #4

For reflection or discussion:

- Name and describe a few characteristics you find in other Christian communities that you would like to gladly acknowledge and show esteem? In what way do these characteristics reveal our common heritage in Christ? As a community of faith, what might we learn about ourselves and our tradition through these characteristics?
- What does bearing witness to Christ mean to you? What are the ways we bear witness to Christ in our lives? How does the spirituality of ecumenism bear witness to Christ in the world?
- What does an ecumenical spirituality reveal to us about the nature of God and the presence and work of Holy Spirit outside of the Catholic communion?

Psalm 8

Lord our God, the whole world tells
the greatness of your name.
Your glory reaches beyond the stars.

Even the babble of infants declares your strength,
your power to halt the enemy and avenger

I see your handiwork in the heavens:
the moon and the stars you set in place.

What is humankind that you remember them,
the human race that you care for them?

You treat them like gods, dressing them in glory and splendor.
You give them charge of the earth, laying all at their feet:

cattle and sheep, wild beasts, birds of the sky, fish of the sea,
every swimming creature.

Lord our God, the whole world tells the greatness of your name.

Reading: Matthew 5: 1-12

When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

6. PRAYER

“In certain circumstance, such as in prayer services “for unity” and during ecumenical gatherings, it is allowable, indeed desirable that Catholics should join in prayer with their separated brethren. Such prayers in common are certainly an effective means of obtaining the grace of unity, and they are a true expression of the ties which still bind Catholics to their separated brethren.”

From Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redintegratio) #8

For reflection or discussion:

- What do you understand to be the difference between a prayer service “for unity” and an intentional worship service of a particular community? Why is this difference important to acknowledge for those involved in ecumenical spirituality?
- Why is prayer such an important and underlying foundation to the whole of the ecumenical movement?

Psalm 96

A new song for the Lord!
Sing it and bless God’s name, everyone, everywhere!
Tell the whole world God’s triumph day to day,
God’s glory, God’s wonder.

A noble God deserving praise, the dread of other gods,
the puny gods of pagans; for our God made the heavens—
the Lord of majestic light who fills the temple with beauty.

Proclaim the Lord, you nations,
praise the glory of God’s power, praise the glory of God’s name!
Bring gifts to the temple, bow down, all the earth,
Tremble in God’s holy presence.

Tell the nations, “The Lord rules!”
As the firm earth is not swayed, nothing can sway God’s judgment.
Let heaven and earth be glad, the sea and sea creatures roar,
the field and its beasts exult. .

Then let the trees of the forest sing before the coming of the Lord,
who comes to judge the nations, to set the earth aright.
Restoring the world to order.

Reading: Luke 5: 1-11

While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch. Simon said in reply, "Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets." When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that they were in danger of sinking. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.

7. SPIRIT OF GOOD WILL

“We must get to know the outlook of our separated brethren. To achieve this purpose, study is of necessity required, and this must be pursued with a sense of realism and good will. ... Sacred theology and other branches of knowledge, especially of an historical nature, must be taught with due regard for the ecumenical point of view, so that they may correspond more exactly with the facts.

It is most important that future shepherds and priests should have mastered a theology that has been carefully worked out in this way and not polemically, especially with regard to those aspects which concern the relations of separated brethren with the Catholic Church.”

From Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redintegratio) #9, 10

For reflection or discussion:

- How can the study of sacred theology as well as the study of history help foster a healthy, mature and balanced ecumenical dialogue?
- How is dialogue grounded in “due regard for the ecumenical point of view,” different from an essentially polemical point of view?
- Why is it important for pastors and priests to be well formed in ecumenical perspectives in theology?

Psalm 119: 124-136

God, be merciful, show me your ways.
Help your servant understand and know your decrees.

Lord, act now! They break your law.
I love your commands more than finest gold.
I follow your precepts, I hate every false path.

Wonderful are your decrees, I guard them with my life.
Unfold your word, enlighten the simple.

Longing for you, I thirst for your teaching.
Turn and favor me, because I love your name.

Let your word lead my steps, and evil not master me.
Save me from the oppressor, so I may keep your commands.

Smile upon me and teach me your ways.
I shed endless tears over those who break your law.

Reading: 1 Peter, 2: 4-5 9-10

Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

But you are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises” of him who called you out darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were “no people” but now you are God's people; you “had not received mercy” but now you have received mercy.

8. HONEST COMMUNICATION

“The way and method in which the Catholic faith is expressed should never become an obstacle to dialogue with our brethren. It is, of course, essential that the doctrine should be clearly presented in its entirety. Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false irenicism, in which the purity of Catholic doctrine suffers loss and its genuine and certain meaning is clouded. ... When comparing doctrines with one another, they should remember that in Catholic doctrine there exists a "hierarchy" of truths, since they vary in their relation to the fundamental Christian faith.”

From Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redintegratio) #11

For reflection or discussion:

- Describe ways in which the “manner and order” of expressing Catholic belief could become an obstacle to dialogue with other Christian communities?
- Why is the spirit of ecumenism impeded by a false irenicism (conciliation or peace)?
- How does understanding the principle of a “hierarchy” of truths help to facilitate dialogue regarding doctrines of the Christian faith?

Psalm 19

The sky tells the glory of God, tells the genius of God’s work
Day carries the news to day, night brings the message to night,

without a word, without a sound, without a voice being heard,
Yet their message fills the world, their news reaches its rim.

There God has pitched a tent for the sun to rest and rise renewed
like a bridegroom rising from bed, an athlete eager to run the race.

It springs from the edge of the earth, runs a course across the sky
to win the race at heaven’s end. Nothing on earth escapes its heat.

God’s perfect law revives the soul.
God’s stable rule guides the simple.

God’s just demands delight the heart.
God’s clear commands sharpen vision.

God’s faultless decrees stand for ever.
God’s right judgments keep their truth.

Their worth is more than gold, the purest gold;
their taste richer than honey, sweet from the comb.

Keeping them makes me rich, they bring me light;
yet faults hide within us, forgive me mine.

Keep my pride in check, break its grip;
I shall be free of blame for deadly sin.

Keep me, thought and word, in your good grace.
Lord, you are my savior, you are my rock.

Reading: Luke 1: 26-38

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

9. COMMON UNITY IN BAPTISM

“Baptism therefore establishes a sacramental bond of unity which links all who have been reborn by it. But of itself Baptism is only a beginning, an inauguration wholly directed toward the fullness of life in Christ. Baptism, therefore, envisages a complete profession of faith, complete incorporation in the system of salvation such as Christ willed it to be, and finally complete ingrafting in eucharistic communion.”

From Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redintegratio) #22

For reflection or discussion:

- How is baptism both a point of common unity and a starting point toward a fullness of unity?
- Recognizing that baptism ordains us toward a complete sense of unity (complete profession of faith, complete incorporation, and complete integration into Eucharistic communion), what challenges do you identify as involved in achieving these levels of complete unity?

Psalm 15

Lord, who is welcome in your house?
Who can rest on your holy mountain?

Those who walk with integrity and do only what is right,
speaking the truth with courage.

They never spread slander or abuse their friends
or condemn their neighbors.

They disdain the godless, but honor those who believe.
Before God, they give their word and keep it at any cost.

They neither lend for gain nor take bribes against the guiltless.
These are the just: they stand for ever unshaken.

Reading: 1 John 4: 7-12

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love. In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us.

10. BONDS OF FRIENDSHIP

“In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.”

From Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate) #1

For reflection or discussion:

- Why is it important for the Church to be interested in developing dialogue with non-Christian religions? What innate principles of Christian life are revealed to us through dialogue with those who are different from us?
- Why does the Church claim that she has a “duty to foster unity and charity”? How does the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ point to the principle of solidarity with all peoples?
- Are there a common concerns and foundations that all people of faith share through their religious traditions?

Psalm 133

How good it is, how wonderful,
wherever people live as one!

It is like sacred oil on the head
flowing down Aaron’s beard,
down to the collar of his robe.
It is like the dew of Hermon
running down the mountains of Zion.

There God gives blessing:
life for ever.

Reading: Luke 1: 46-55

And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him. He has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy, according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

11. GOD'S UNIVERSAL LOVE

“The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.”

From Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate) #2

For reflection or discussion:

- From personal experience, describe characteristics, practices or doctrines that you find attractive in a particular non-Christian religion.
- Describe the ways in which the above statement on non-Christian religions addresses both opportunities and challenges for dialogue among the different religions with the Catholic Church?
- Knowing that the Church is duty bound to proclaim Christ as the way, the truth and the life, what can she hope to learn in and through dialogue with non-Christian religions?

Psalm 145

I will exalt you, God my king,
for ever bless your name.
I will bless you every day,
for ever praise your name.

Great is the Lord, highly to be praised,
great beyond our reach.

Age to age proclaims your works,
recounts your mighty deeds.
I ponder your splendor and glory
and all your wonderful works.

They reveal your fearful power,
I tell of your great deeds.
They recall your ample goodness,
joyfully sing your justice.

Gracious and merciful is the Lord,
slow to anger, full of love.
The Lord is good in every way,
merciful to every creature.

Let your works praise you, Lord,
your faithful ones bless you.

Let them proclaim your glorious reign,
let them tell of your might.

Let them make known to all
your might and glorious reign.
Your dominion lasts for ever,
your rule for all generations!

The Lord is faithful in every word
and gracious in every work.
The Lord supports the fallen,
raises those bowed down.

The eyes of all look to you,
you give them food in due time.
You open wide your hand
to feed all living things.

The Lord is just in every way,
loving in every deed.
The Lord is near to those who call,
who cry out from their hearts.

God grants them their desires,
hears their cry and saves them.
Those who love God are kept alive;
the wicked, the Lord destroys.

I will sing the Lord's praise,
all flesh will bless God's Name,
holy, both now and for ever.

Reading: 1 John 3, 1-3

See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure.

12. INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

“Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, ... the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It is, therefore, the burden of the Church's preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.

We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God.”

From Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate) #4, 5

For reflection or discussion:

- What moral and spiritual principles of Christian life does the Church help us to understand in above statement?
- How does proclaiming the “cross of Christ” reveal human dignity for all people?

Psalm 67

Favor and bless us, Lord.
Let your face shine on us,
revealing your way to all peoples,
salvation the world over.

Let nations sing your praise,
every nation on earth.

The world will shout for joy,
for you rule the planet with justice.
In fairness you govern the nations
and guide the peoples of earth.

Let the nations sing your praise,
every nation on earth.

The land delivers its harvest,
God, our God has blessed us.
O God, continue your blessing,
may the whole world worship you.

Reading: Acts 2: 42-47

The first Christians devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.