



THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
ARUNDEL & BRIGHTON

THE PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL GUIDELINES



FOREWORD FROM BISHOP RICHARD

The Prayer of the Faithful, Universal Prayer or Bidding Prayers, as they are popularly known, forms an integral and valuable part of the celebration of the Mass. These prayers provide an opportunity for the community to pray for the needs of the world, for the Church, for those in need and those who have died, as well as for issues of local significance.

It is important that careful preparation is given to these intercessions, for they assist the community in praying for those things that only God can give.

I am grateful to those who have prepared these revised guidelines and I commend them for use in the Diocese in the hope that they will enhance our worship and praise.

Rt. Rev. Richard Moth

Bishop of Arundel and Brighton

The following recommendations concerning the Prayer of the Faithful are offered to help foster liturgical formation and promote good practice.

GUIDELINES FOR THE PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

*Also known as the Universal Prayer or
General Intercessions*

History, Renewal and Guidance

In the First Letter to Timothy, the early Christians are urged to devote themselves to prayer for all people, with particular mention of civil rulers (Timothy 2:1-8). They followed this recommendation, and the Prayer of the Faithful was part of the liturgy of the early Church. The form of the intercessions developed and differed with the liturgical practice of the church in the East and West, but, by about the 6th Century, the Prayer of the Faithful had disappeared and only a short 'Kyrie eleison' response remained, reflecting a decline in the people's participation in the Eucharist.

The restoration of the ancient practice of the Prayer of the Faithful was among the earliest changes in the renewal of the liturgy after the Second Vatican Council. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium) stated that 'The prayer of the faithful is to be restored after the gospel and homily, especially on Sundays and holy days of obligation.'¹ thus reclaiming the role of the baptised in praying for the needs of the world.

1 - Sacrosanctum Concilium 53 (SC)

Although this is its official title, it is also commonly known as 'The General Intercessions' or 'The Bidding Prayers'. The official name, though, does give us a profound insight into its nature – the prayer of the faithful, the baptised, and a universal prayer for all people in need, joining our prayers to those of Christ, praying with and through him.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal states that 'In the Universal Prayer or Prayer of the Faithful, the people respond in some sense to the Word of God which they have received in faith and, exercising the office of their baptismal priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all. It is desirable that there usually be such a form of prayer in Masses celebrated with the people, so that petitions may be offered for holy Church, for those who govern with authority over us, for those weighed down by various needs, for all humanity, and for the salvation of the whole world.'²

Theology

Enlightened and inspired by God's word, the community of faith exercises its priestly function by praying for all people everywhere, because the 'joy and hope, the struggle and anguish of the people of this age and especially of the poor and those suffering in any way, are the joy and hope, the struggle and anguish of Christ's disciples'.³ The Church prays not just for its own needs but for the salvation of the world, for civil authorities, for those who are oppressed by any burden, and for the local community, particularly for those who are sick or who have died.

The Prayer of the Faithful in the liturgy also commits us to action in daily life. Our prayer for God's salvation must be accompanied by our working for it.

Preparation

As with all those ministries we exercise on behalf of our Christian communities, it is important to prepare ourselves carefully through prayer. This is at the heart of Christian ministry. If those among us who compose or read the Prayer of the Faithful prepare in this way, we will be helping others to pray through our ministry. The Prayer of the Faithful should be composed prayerfully for praying – as its name implies – by the faithful, the whole assembly.

The composition of the Prayer of the Faithful, as with all aspects of liturgy preparation, takes its inspiration from the scripture readings of the particular liturgy, and so it is highly recommended that reflection on those scripture readings is an essential part of the prayerful preparation for those who compose and read the Prayer.

Good practice encourages those responsible for preparing the Prayer of the Faithful to look beyond the concerns of the local community alone (i.e. beyond this parish, this assembly) to the needs of the whole Church and to those of the wider world. Essentially, the Prayer becomes a powerful sign of the communion of the local assembly with all other communities and with the Universal Church.

Those who compose the Prayer of the Faithful should keep in mind the following guidelines on the form and structure of the Prayer.

THE FORM AND STRUCTURE OF THE PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

'It is for the priest celebrant to regulate this prayer from the chair.'⁴ He or, in his absence, the leader (for example at a non-Eucharistic liturgy), briefly invites the faithful to pray and, at the end, draws their intentions together in a brief concluding prayer. The intentions are announced by either the deacon, or a cantor, a lector, or one of the lay faithful, from the ambo or from another suitable place. The assembly stands and gives expression to its prayer either by an invocation said after each intention or by praying in silence. The assembly affirms the concluding prayer of the priest or leader with 'Amen'.⁵

Introduction

The priest introduces the Prayer in the form of an invitation to the whole assembly. This invitation is not a prayer to God, nor to any of the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. It serves as a bridge between the proclamation of God's word and the response of the assembly in petition, made with faith and trust in God's love. The content of the invitation to prayer and the intentions should relate to the mystery being celebrated, the feast or season, or some particular aspect of the word of God proclaimed in the scriptures.

2 - General Instruction of the Roman Missal 69 (GIRM) and cf. Sacrosanctum Concilium 53. 4

3 - Gaudium et Spes 1.

4 - GIRM 71.

5 - Cf. GIRM 71.

Intentions

Both the priest's introduction and those intentions proposed are addressed to the assembly, not to God. The reader presents each intention and the faithful then pray for the intention in the silence of their hearts. A communal response: spoken, sung, or silence, marks the conclusion of the particular intercession.

Concluding Prayer

The concluding prayer, said by the priest, is normally in the form of a collect prayer, which collects the silent prayer of the assembly into a spoken prayer addressed to God. The assembly gives assent to this prayer by saying 'Amen'.

COMPOSING INTENTIONS

The intentions need to be **short, clear and precise**. They should reflect our Catholic Christian witness. They should also be objective, inclusive and as wide-ranging as possible in order that people might easily understand and respond to them. Four intentions are usually sufficient, with perhaps five or six on special occasions.

CATEGORIES OF INTENTIONS

The series of intentions usually follows an established framework:

The needs of the Church - it is good to pray for the leaders of the Church, but remember that the Pope and bishops are always prayed for in the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass. The Church includes all of us.

For public authorities and the salvation of the whole world.

For those burdened by any kind of difficulty.

For the local community.

In particular celebrations, such as confirmation, marriage or a funeral, the series of intentions may reflect more closely the particular occasion.⁶ Even on such special occasions, the Prayer of the Faithful should have an element of the 'universal' about it. For example, not just, 'We pray for Ania and Alex on their wedding day,' but, 'We pray for Ania, and Alex, and all those who are getting married today.'

The Prayer of the Faithful is not the time to announce news which may shock the community e.g. a significant world event or a notable death in the community. In such cases, it would be appropriate to make an announcement at the beginning of Mass, after which the Prayer of the Faithful can support the community's prayer for the situation at hand.

OPENING PHRASES

The following opening lines for each intention are suggested:

'Let us pray for'

'We pray for'

'We pray that' or simply 'For . . .'

It is important to remember that intentions should never begin 'Dear God' or 'Dear Jesus' - they are addressed to all those assembled.

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN COMPOSING AN INTENTION

- Is the intention short, succinct, and accessible?
- Does it help people to pray?
- Does the wording of the response make sense after each intention?

RESPONSE

The response, which may be said or sung, is a prayer evoking a sense of imploring, as opposed to being a statement of praise, thanksgiving or repentance - which are properly integral to other parts of the Mass. It should be stressed that silent prayer alone is also an appropriate response - the silence of the assembly actively praying together.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

It is important that people involved with the preparation of the Prayers of the Faithful have a good understanding of the basic principles underpinning their theology. This is particularly the case for teachers and those concerned with the formation of our children and young people, and those with learning and other disabilities – so that all are given accurate guidance and information.

DEVOTIONAL PRAYER

The Roman Rite does not envisage the inclusion of devotional prayers in the Prayer of the Faithful since, as a set of prayers directed to the Father, through the Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit, it contains no obvious place for prayers to the Saints. The Holy See has discouraged such additional prayers.

There is a longstanding practice in England of praying the 'Hail Mary' after the last intercession in the Prayers of the Faithful. There will be some occasions during the year – for example, the months of May and October, and the Marian Feasts – when the inclusion of the 'Hail Mary' may be particularly appropriate. The inclusion of the Hail Mary would also be inappropriate in ecumenical liturgies.

SPECIAL DAYS OF PRAYER

There are several days of prayer for particular intentions during the year. Resources are often provided for these, including sample intercessions for the Prayer of the Faithful. These will sometimes need adapting according to the guidance outlined in this document.

It is important that the particular focus on these days shouldn't overwhelm the wider themes that should be brought to prayer in the Prayer of the Faithful. Parishes should make a careful selection from any materials provided, and make use of the **Cycle of Prayer** and the diocesan Ordo (found in the Annual Directory) identifying other themes for the Prayer of the Faithful.⁷ It is worth making these resources available to families, schools, and parish groups for times of prayer during the week.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL IN THE ROMAN MISSAL

Examples, including intercessions for the seasons of the liturgical year, may be found in Appendix V of the Roman Missal, pp. 1515-1527.

GOOD PRACTICE AND 'GOLDEN RULES' FOR THE READER

Look at the intentions in advance and read them carefully. Consider them prayerfully and reflectively and check the pronunciation of any difficult words.

Arrive in good time – at least 10 minutes before the liturgy begins. This will give you an opportunity for prayer, and to ask any questions you may have.

Check that the Prayer is placed on the ambo (lectern) before Mass begins. You may also wish to make sure that the priest's copy is at his chair.

Will there a sung response? Check that those involved with the music have a copy.

OTHER POINTS TO CONSIDER

Approach the ambo at the appropriate time. During Mass this occurs after the homily and Creed. Bow to the altar on your way to the ambo. Every care should be taken that the dignity of this special time of prayer is preserved. If there is more than one reader, they should approach the ambo together, and leave together at the end. During the intercessions, each reader should give way to the next with dignity and calm.

Take time to gather your thoughts, there is no hurry. Make sure that the microphone is at an appropriate height for you and make eye contact with the people you are about to lead in prayer.

The priest will introduce the Prayer of the Faithful at the appropriate time. When the priest has completed the introduction, begin confidently.

Maintain eye contact as you are reading the intentions (this is a very helpful tool of communication) announcing the intentions slowly and clearly.

Good use of the microphone is vital – particularly for people who rely on a hearing loop system. If possible, make sure you are familiar with the sound system beforehand.

Try to take your time, pausing after each intention to allow the assembly to make the prayer its own (and for you to pray yourself!). Silence has a pre-eminent place in the liturgy of the Church, you do not need to be afraid of leaving reasonable spaces of up to 10 seconds.⁸

After pausing say confidently “Lord, in your mercy,” or a similar response. At the end, remain at the ambo while the priest concludes the prayer as this is an integral part of the whole. After you have joined everyone in saying “Amen”, bow to the altar before returning to your place in the assembly.

GLOSSARY

Ambo: Also known as the lectern, this is the place from which the word of God is proclaimed during the liturgy. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that ‘the dignity of the word of God requires the church to have a suitable place for announcing his message so that the attention of the people may be easily directed to that place during the liturgy of the word.’

Assembly: A clearer term than ‘congregation’ because it includes everyone– priests and people – who are gathered together in a single place, usually a church, to worship God.

Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy – Sacrosanctum Concilium (SC): This important document was the first to come out of the Second Vatican Council and contains the important statement, ‘The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the fount from which all the Church’s power flows.’⁹

Gaudium et Spes (GS): Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the world of today, is the longest document of the Second Vatican Council. It examines the link between the Church and the world today. It is notable for its wide range of concerns. Instead of the world being described negatively as a place of sin, the Council describes it as the ‘stage of human history... kept in being by its Creator’s love.’¹⁰

General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM): The official guide to the celebration of Mass prepared for the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world.¹¹

Liturgy: The public prayer and worship of the Church.

Liturgy of the Word: That part of the Mass which contains the proclamation of God’s word and the homily. It concludes with the Prayer of the Faithful.

8 – For more on the place of silence visit the Liturgy Office website: www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/Preparation/Silence.pdf

9 – SC 10

10 – GS 2.

11 – See the front of The Roman Missal, or www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/GIRM/Documents/GIRM.pdf

Please note that this document was devised in 2016 and updated in 2022.