

Ask: Could I have caused this suffering? Could I, albeit unknowingly, have perpetuated this attitude? Did I, out of fear or self-interest, remain silent when faced by an injustice?

Consider the negative attitude towards groups of people whom we consider to be 'different'; of different ethnicity, different groups within the Church, different band clubs. So much mud-slinging takes place, so much defamatory propaganda and false rumours are spread around due to thoughtlessness or, even worse, out of a lack of responsibility.

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The presence of the Lord heals and saves. Choose one of these passages and pray to the Lord that he may heal your heart. Turn your gaze towards him, open your ears to his gentle words, surrender yourself, as you are, to his loving embrace and worship in his loving presence.

Listen, choose and ask

Have I shut off my ears? Mk 7: 31-37

Have I closed my eyes? Mk 8: 22-26; Mt 20: 29-34; Lk 18: 35-43; Jn 9: 1-12

Am I slow to take action? Mt 9: 1-8; 12: 9-13; Mk 2: 1-12, Lk 5: 17-26; Jn 5: 1-18

Have my words, actions or indifference harmed others or contaminated my surroundings? Mt 8: 1-4; Mk 1: 40-45, Lk 5: 12-16, 17: 11-19

Lord, you know me and love me.

The Lord knows you better than you know yourself. Conclude this moment of reflection by resting in God's presence through contemplating Psalm 138 (139) 1-14.

O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down,

and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue,

O LORD, you know it completely. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

it is so high that I cannot attain it. Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me,

and your right hand shall hold me fast.

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,"

even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works;

that I know very well.

Rite of Reconciliation

GENERAL CONFESSION OF SINS

Prsider:

God who is infinitely merciful pardons all who are repentant and takes away their guilt. Confident in his goodness, let us ask him to forgive all our sins

as we confess them with sincerity of heart.

All:

I confess to almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary, ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

Litany of Repentance

Prsider: Let us turn to Christ with confidence and ask his mercy.

Minister: You came into the world to seek and save what was lost.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: You came to give us life, life in its fullness.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: You became the source of salvation for all who obey you.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: Once and for all you died for our sins, the innocent one for the guilty.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: In your mercy free us from the past and enable us to begin a new life of holiness.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: Make us a living sign of love for all to see: people reconciled with you and with each other.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Lord's Prayer

Prsider: Now, in obedience to Christ himself, let us join in prayer to the Father, asking him to forgive us as we forgive others.

Our Father,...

Concluding Prayer

Prsider: Almighty and eternal God, you sent your only-begotten Son to reconcile the world to yourself. Lift from our hearts the oppressive gloom of sin, so that we may celebrate the approaching dawn of Christ's birth with fitting joy. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.



The Thieves

Introductory Rites

Grace, mercy, and peace be with you
from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

And with your spirit.

We gather here today [tonight] because we are confident that God is merciful. We have this confidence because, in every age, God has shown his justice and his mercy.

When his chosen people erred, he sent prophets to call them back. He sent John the Baptist to call sinners to repentance and to announce the coming of the Savior.

And in his greatest act of merciful love, God sent his only Son to live among us, to preach of the Father's love, and to set us free from sin and death.

God continues to save his people and Christ continues to be present to us, especially in the Church's sacraments.

And in this sacrament of reconciliation, though we cannot grasp the richness of his grace nor depth of his compassion, God continues to offer us his mercy

My brothers and sisters,

God calls us to conversion;

let us therefore ask him

for the grace of sincere repentance.

(Silent prayer)

Father of mercies and God of all consolation, you do not wish the sinner to die but to be converted and live.

Come to the aid of your people,

that they may turn from their sins and live for you alone. May we be attentive to your word,

confess our sins,

receive your forgiveness,

and always be grateful for your loving kindness. Help us to live the truth in love

and grow into the fullness of Christ, your Son, who lives and

reigns with you for ever and ever.

Celebration of the word of God

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One." The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." Luke 23:32-43

Examination of Conscience

Through venerating the Holy Cross we come face to face with our Lord and Saviour who is the Good News, Love, Mercy and our Hope. It is an opportunity to be saved, as we prostrate ourselves and offer ourselves just as we are; with all our burdens and our joys. This is a moment—in reality, an attitude— where our focus is just on Him, in His act of infinite love, so that our hearts are converted to Him (and therefore turn to Him). He knows us more than we even know ourselves and He is inviting us to open ourselves to Him like a book, so we can read the pages of our lives, our past and our present, and journey onward together.

God, in His mercy, holds our hands with maternal tenderness to pull us back up when we fall and He shines on us a ray of light when darkness engulfs us. He is ever close to us, but we may be ignoring his presence because our hearts are so full of preoccupations that we forget to make space for Him.

The act when we venerate the image of Christ Crucified is where we fix our gaze upon Him while He fixes His gaze upon us and thus, as our eyes meet, our heartbeats are synchronised with His own and once again, in silence, we create a space where He can turn the pages of our lives, the troubled as well as the joyous pages.

Here I am, Lord.

Here I am Lord. You are my resting place; in your presence my hurts and wounds are healed. You know well what is going on in my life; you are with me in my suffering and, when wounds stab at my heart, there you are, right beside me. When I stagger under the weight of my worries, you are there to support me; you hold me close in your embrace even when all I can see is darkness engulfing me, weighing me down. Like the sun still shining through the night, you are with me always, as you promised.

"Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46, 10).

Allow the Word of God to guide you during this moment of silence.

"Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Mt 28: 16-20)

They went to the mountain – the favoured place where God meets man and woman. Go to the mountain like the apostles, allow God to encounter you. Let your heart soar upwards and allow it to encounter the very heart of God.

They worshipped him ... but some doubted – as you prostrate yourself in his presence, you also may feel doubtful. Your past or your present may make you question God's love, his existence, and whether, after all, we are not all alone, left to our own devices. Allow this moment of silence to be a space where God hears the clamour that rages within you; allow the stillness to lead you into listening to the voice of God.

I am with you always – there is a paradox in the fact that as Jesus is leaving, he is always with us. Do you feel him close to you? If not, do you desire to feel his closeness?

Lord, am I letting you heal me?

We praise you, Lord, for your constant presence in our lives. God's presence in our midst is not for our sole benefit. Our God is a personal God, He is not an individualistic God. God is not calling us to form a small exclusive club huddled around Him. He calls us to Him so that, after we stay with Him for a while, we can go forth and bring Him to others wherever they are. He calls us to drink of His love's goodness so that we can then carry it and transmit it to others.

This love is the fount of our healing; it is the source of our strength which enables us to stand back on our feet and start our journey towards recovery. The medicine that we need is in the presence of Jesus among us. The wounds and hurts in our lives will always be there and they can become like balls and chains from which we cannot rid ourselves. They can nail us to the cross.

Points for reflection (a moment of silence)

Listen to the Lord as He tells you to "Get up and walk," (Mt 9: 1-8; Mk 2: 1-12; Lk 5: 17-26; Jn 5: 1-18); "Talitha, cum ...little girl, get up!" (Mk 5: 21-43). Choose one of these passages and pray that the Lord may enter into your life and heal it.

Ask: What are my personal hurts and wounds? What are the hurts and wounds of my family, of that acquaintance whom I would like to bring to God?

Allow a space in your heart through which God can enter. What is the Lord asking me to do in order to start my healing process and so that the chains of my hurts and wounds may loosen (little by little) and I may reclaim my freedom (without forgetting)?

Lord, forgive me, for I have sinned.

We have not always accepted and transmitted this love. This act and attitude of worship opens us to the hurts and wounds of those around us and allows us to identify the times where we ourselves were the obstacles for God's love to reach others.

The wounds and hurts of others are also ours; they affect us negatively and may become our own wounds.

Consider: So many have been victimised by those who represent the Church. Church structures have caused many hurts; there are divisions between members of the Church; many feel rejected by Mother Church; so many feel disconnected from the Church, strangers in their own home, due to a personal reality or their sexual orientation.

Ask: Could I have caused this suffering? Could I, albeit unknowingly, have perpetuated this attitude? Did I, out of fear or self-interest, remain silent when faced by an injustice?

Consider all the toxic relationships within families, between couples, between siblings. Love can be absent in intimate relationships and instead there can even be abuse. Many have suffered sexual, psychological and financial abuse within their family circle.

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Consider the times you may have been irresponsible with the surrounding environment. There were times when you disregarded what was happening around you and you did not take any steps to protect and restore the environment.