



*Prayer
and comfortable living
are incompatible.*

—St. Teresa of Avila

**NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
11 October 2020**

Opening Sentences—from the Iona Community, adapted

In the beginning, before time,
before people, before the world began,
God was.

Here and now with me, beside me,
enlisting the people of earth for the purposes of heaven,
God is.

In the future, when I have turned to dust,
and all I have known has found its fulfilment,
God will be.

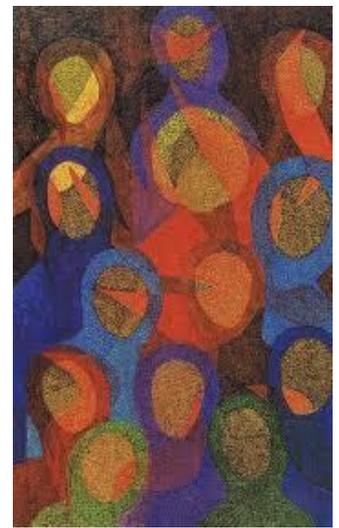
Opening Prayer

Eternal God,
whose love is steadfast and true,
everlasting and without bounds:

Awaken in me as I pray.
In our meeting deep within
stir to life that which is numb
and unsettle those parts of me
that are contrary to your love and will.
Tether my soul to Christ
that I might live wholeheartedly,
completely
for you alone.
Amen

Scripture Reading—Philippians 1:12–30

Following Paul's lengthy and loving salutation to the koinonia (community) in Philippi, he begins his letter proper. In today's section, Paul hopes to assure the community that his suffering—especially in prison—is not a sign of failure as some might believe. Rather, as the death of Jesus revealed, suffering is part of self-giving love. In fact, Paul appeals to the Philippians to be the kind of koinonia that reveals the Gospel in word, deed and being. How we live together—especially in our suffering—matters, says Paul.



Paul speaks, too, of some who are preaching the Gospel with impure motives. Most likely he has in mind those near where he is in Rome who are trying to discredit Paul because of his imprisonment. No matter, says Paul to the Philippians. God can work with our mixed motives to spread the Gospel of Christ, which is the most important thing.

I want you to know, beloved that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear. Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel; the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance. It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death.

For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Going Deeper

Some believed Paul's imprisonment inhibited his mission, but Paul assures the Philippians this is not the case. The Greek word translated as "spread" implies forward movement despite an apparent set back. In Greek philosophy, the word is used to speak of movement towards wisdom.

- When has an experience of challenge or suffering moved you towards God and wisdom?
- In recalling this experience now, what or who enabled this positive movement for you?

Paul implores the church in Philippi to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ. The language he uses here is of citizenship, allegiance and sportsmanship.

- In what ways does your living reflect your citizenship in the Kingdom of God?
- How do you show allegiance to the way of Jesus?
- If you are able to participate in the life of Christian community, how are you playing as a member of the same team? Might there be an invitation for you here?

Paul hopes to encourage the Philippians to be bold in their faith and witness; not to fear retribution or suffering because of their living out of God's love.

- What hardship, misunderstanding or tension do you encounter by living out the values of God's kingdom? (eg how you invest your resources, how you face death, how you view material things, your perspectives on those others might reject)
- How do you live with this?

That which is Christ-like within us
shall be crucified.
It shall suffer and be broken.
And that which is Christlike within us
shall rise up.
It shall love and create.

—Michael Leunig

Prayers of Intercession

Loving God, we give thanks for your nearness, for your presence in all people and things. Help us to look for you always and, in finding you, give ourselves over to joy and gratitude no matter the circumstance. Hear us now as we pray: *Fill us with your Spirit. Lead us to love.*

We pray for a greater courage and boldness when it comes to sharing your Gospel. May our lives witness to your justice, compassion and love for all people through words, actions and by our very presence. *Fill us with your Spirit. Lead us to love.*

Enable us to work in partnership with all who share a calling to love in the world. Dissolve the barriers between us and, by your Spirit, help us be of one mind, moving in a common direction for the wellbeing of creation and all her inhabitants. *Fill us with your Spirit. Lead us to love.*

We bring to mind the situations and people we carry in our hearts, holding them gently before you, allowing your Spirit to pray in ways too deep for words...

Disciples' Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

Blessing—Giles David (Iona Community)

When the world tells us
we are what we do with our activity,
acumen or achievement
let us learn
we are what we do with our silence

When the world tells us
we are what we do with our spending power,
selling power, or our power of speech
let us learn
we are what we do with our silence

When the world tells us
to drown the silent suffering of others
with indifference or noise
or to forget the art of stillness in the storm
let us learn
we are what we do with our silence

When the world tells us
to rush where angels fear to tread,
let us learn that angels listen first
before they take a step
for the voice of God in the silence...