



This morning we have held our first Sunday Eucharist in church for nearly 5 months. As I got up earlier this morning than I have on a Sunday for months there felt something like normality. It was far from normal with less people there and no hymns to sing, no moving around and no gathering of people at the end but it was peaceful and reflective.

Peaceful reflective worship always takes my mind to a style of worship used by the Taizé community. It is 80 years this year since Brother Roger founded a community of monks in Taizé, an area of Burgundy in France. The community's strong devotion to peace and justice only heightened the horror when 15 years ago today Brother Roger, at the age of 90 was murdered by one of the attendees during the evening prayer service. It is now a 100 strong community of monks from over 30 countries. Tens of thousands of mainly young people are drawn there each year to share in the ecumenical community's simple way of life, to study the bible and to share in its traditional contemplative prayer and meditative silence that is a huge part of the Taizé experience. The singing of distinctive and much-repeated prayer chants during candlelit prayer services is also one of its trademarks. The simple repeated words are designed to help meditation and prayer. On zoom our intercessions today will have a Taizé style to them. With the lovely melody and simple words of the Taizé chant, 'O Lord hear my prayer' sung between each prayer and a time of short silence for your own meditation and prayer. I have printed the words for you to say if you wish to use them.

Our Gospel reading relates one of the many healing miracles of Jesus. The Canaanite woman outright asks Jesus for help, after ignoring her initially, Jesus' eventual reply seems cold and harsh, and almost derogatory, referring to her as a dog. As we so often have to do when reading the bible we have to look to the

language of the time. At that time the Jews referred to the gentiles as dogs. Both the disciples and the woman would have understood the metaphor and Jesus' comment only serves to make the woman more persistent. Having tested her enough, Jesus is confident of the strength of the woman's faith and he heals her tormented daughter. Sometimes we too have to ask. Many of us were raised in an era when it was impolite to 'ask' for anything, but, as with the woman God tests us too. We too need to be persistent in our asking for us to see results. During the Taize style intercessions, having read the words of the prayer, don't be afraid to use the quiet time to outright ask God to help with the things that mean the most to you – God may just be testing the strength of your faith.

Collect for the day

Let your merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of your humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please you; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

A reading from the book of Isaiah

Thus says the LORD:

Maintain justice, and do what is right,
for soon my salvation will come,
and my deliverance be revealed.

⁶ And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,
and hold fast my covenant—

⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples.

⁸ Thus says the Lord GOD,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,
I will gather others to them
besides those already gathered.

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Romans

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰ Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹ so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. ³² For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

A reading from the Gospel according to Matthew

²¹ Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." ²³ But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." ²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." ²⁶ He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷ She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.



Words from Fr Rodney

Under normal circumstances, this Sunday we would have been celebrating the festival of the Blessed Virgin Mary who's special day was yesterday. Sadly due to the controversies of the Reformation, and the need to restore balance to the Christian faith that had become distorted over the centuries, the reformed Christian tradition over compensated, and Mary no longer had a living place within the life of the Church. The passage of time has allowed for Mary to again have a more significant place within our worship and her festivals have been restored. But apart from Christmas with the plethora of nativity plays etc. she still has not regained that place in many Christian hearts as the person who embodies what Christian discipleship is all about. In the gospel reading we will be using today we hear the story of the Canaanite woman who comes to Jesus to beg Him to heal her daughter, Jesus says to her as He heals her daughter "Woman, great is your faith !" These are words that we see embodied in Mary whose costly response of "yes" to what God asked of her brings us here today ! We give thanks for Mary's faith, and pray that our own faith may grow to reflect the qualities of hers, and that we may be open to God and become the "Mary like" disciples He needs us to be in the world today.



Let us pray

O Lord hear my prayer, O Lord hear my prayer, when I call, answer me.

O Lord hear my prayer, O Lord hear my prayer, come and listen to me.

Father as we come together with our brothers and sisters in faith we give thanks for this opportunity to worship together from the safety of our homes and for all the steps we have been able to take moving forward towards the new 'normal.' Today we ask especially for your blessings on our renewal of Sunday morning worship in church, we give thanks for the hard work of those involved in the planning this long awaited occasion and the joy and hope it brings. We ask for your guidance on all who are involved in moving the whole church forward as we look to the future, blending its traditions and taking new opportunities to spread wide the gospel of faith.

Time to reflect followed by O Lord hear my prayer

Father we bring before you our world and it's many problems. We ask for healing for the many divisions so evident at this time and in particular we bring before you all those who feel harnessed and helpless in the face of disease, poverty and prejudice. In particular we pray for the people of Beirut and all those trying to bring aid to that area. We ask that compassion, tolerance and empathy replace self-interest, lack of understanding and hatred in the minds of all people, especially those in authority. We especially pray for wisdom and guidance for our own government and local authorities as they attempt to make difficult decisions in ever changing circumstances.

Time to reflect followed by O Lord hear my prayer

Father we pray for our families, friends, neighbours and all those who bring support to our communities. We thank you for the opportunity to reassess the things that are important to us: faith, love, friendship and kindness, praying that we build on this for the future. We pray for all those who for whatever reason continue to feel isolated and afraid of the future and continue to pray for all our young people dealing with their exam results, at this time as well, especially those who have been disappointed and bewildered by their grades. We also pray for those supporting them in their next steps in such challenging circumstances.

Time to reflect followed by O Lord hear my prayer

Father we pray for the sick and all those in need of love and support at this time, particularly any we wish to pray for today...We pray for all those suffering in the pandemic, their loved ones and those who care for them. We pray for all those whose mental health has suffered greatly during this period and all those working in our health and social care services and we ask for your blessings on the efforts of all those working on effective treatments and vaccines.

Time to reflect followed by O Lord hear my prayer

Finally, we remember today all those who have gone before us, those who have died recently, especially in the pandemic, those whose anniversaries are around this time; especially today we pray for Brother Roger of the Taize community, murdered during an evening prayer service; and any we wish to pray for ourselves today... we thank you for their love, friendship and our memories of them and we pray for comfort and strength for their loved ones. Finally, remembering God's gift of eternal life, freely given we ask that they rest in peace and rise in glory.

Time to reflect followed by O Lord hear my prayer

The Lords prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.