

Gifts, Giving, Almsgiving, Forgiving – a Mothers' Union Service for Lent

'Your talent is God's gift to you; what you do with it is your gift back to God.'
Leo Buscaglia, author

The Gathering

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Deep within your soul
there is a knowing place
a sanctuary where gifts are nurtured.
Enter that sacred space.
Spend time there tending your gifts.
There in the chapel of your heart
you will become a gift to be given. *Macrina Wiederkehr*

The Greeting

The Lord be with you
and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God -
to the God who gives us love, light and truth.
Amen

Introduction

Lent we know and recognise to be a time of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Through our prayer we attend more closely to the presence of God in our lives. Through our fasting we 'clear the decks' to see the presence of God in our lives. Through our almsgiving we attend to the presence of God in those around us.

Today we look at almsgiving not simply as the giving of money or material things, or even as the giving up of time.

We will look at almsgiving as the giving of self:

what we each, uniquely, through being fully ourselves, bring to the people and situations we encounter each day.

We will look at almsgiving as forgiving:

the healing gift of forgiveness, when we forgive ourselves, when we help others to forgive themselves, and when we learn, profoundly, to forgive each other.

The Collect – *invite 2 people to light a candle each saying the following words:*

As we light this first candle:

may see in it the sanctuary light of the 'knowing place' deep in our souls,
the 'sanctuary where gifts are nurtured'.

May it light our way to know and tend our gifts

so that we may become the gift we were created to be, the 'gift to be given'.

As we light the second candle:
we ask for the light by which to see into the depths of unforgiving
with which we burden ourselves and each other.
May its warmth melt the hardness and blindness of heart that we carry,
may it open us to be the healing presence of God in our daily lives.
Amen

Liturgy of the Word

First Reading: Genesis 9:12-16 (*gift of self, self as gift*)

And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.

This is the Word of the Lord:
Thanks be to God.

Second Reading or Gospel Reading: John 21: 15-17 (*forgiving*)

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"
"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."
Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"
He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."
The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"
Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."
Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

This is the Word of the Lord:
Thanks be to God.

Sermon or Meditation
(notes on separate sheet.)

Profession of Faith

**I believe in God, the Father the Almighty,
the Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:
who was conceived of the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day he arose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,
whence he shall come
to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen**

Intercessions

– members are invited to lead their own intercessions on the theme of gifts.

Mothers' Union Prayer

**Loving Lord,
We thank you for your love so freely given to us all.
We pray for families around the world.
Bless the work of the Mothers' Union as we seek to share your love
through the encouragement, strengthening and support
of marriage and family life.
Empowered by your Spirit, may we be united in prayer and worship,
and in love and service reach out as your hands across the world.
In Jesus' name.
Amen**

Symbolic Action – Giving of Gifts

Members are invited to offer up symbols of their gifts and symbols of their local or diocesan collective Mothers' Union gifts. These may be aspects of their project work, or symbols of their faith through listening, praying or pastoral skills, or symbols of their marketing, finance or policy work.

Reflection – to be read by a different member.

The Bridge

There are times in life
when we are called to be bridges,
not a great monument spanning a distance
and carrying loads of heavy traffic,
but a simple bridge to help one person from here to there
over some difficulty
such as pain, grief, fear, loneliness,
a bridge which opens the way
for ongoing journey.

When I become a bridge for another,
I bring upon myself a blessing,
for I escape from the small prison of self
and exist for the wider world,
breaking out to be a larger being
who can enter another's pain
and rejoice in another's triumph.

I know of only one greater blessing
in this life, and that is,
to allow someone else
to be a bridge for me.

Joy Cowley, Aotearoa Psalms, New Zealand

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth
as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.
For yours is the kingdom and the power
and the glory forever.
Amen**

Final Blessings

A Beauty Blessing

As stillness in stone to silence is wed
may your heart be somewhere a God might dwell.
As a river flows in ideal sequence
may your soul discover time is presence.
As the moon absolves the dark of distance
may thought-light console your mind with brightness.
As the breath of light awakens colour
may the dawn anoint you with wonder.
As spring rain softens the earth with surprise
may your winter places be kissed by light.
As the ocean dreams to the joy of dance
may the grace of change bring you elegance.
As clay anchors a tree in light and wind
may your outer life grow from peace within.
As twilight fills night with bright horizons
may beauty await you at home beyond.

John O'Donohue

Go out into the world with all your gifts
and go in the love and peace of Christ.

Thanks be to God.

Amen