

# Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2003

## Ecumenical Worship Service

### Introduction

This worship service celebrates the flame lit by God our Father in the hearts of believers and of their communities though they come from many different cultures, peoples and nations spread throughout the earth, in a state of perpetual migration and fresh settlement.

Jesus Christ shares the light of faith with us. This faith is "knowledge of the glory of God which shines on the face of Christ". It is the treasure which Paul evokes in 2 Cor 4: 5-18. Every believer and community of believers shares this treasure and bears witness to it in all its richness and from the frailty of the human condition.

From an ecumenical point of view it is most important that we can joyfully celebrate the risen Christ but it is no less important to raise to God our Father through Jesus our only mediator, our prayers for the many men and women, young people and children traumatised by displacement. This will be the theme of the intercessions which, together with our confession of Christ, the light of our lives, is the most important aspect of this worship. Communities of believers have experienced and still experience division, joys yet tribulations, yearnings and hopes that make them painfully aware of the sufferings of people who know the ordeal of emigration. This is why our prayer of intercession for the unity of the churches and our prayer for migrant communities are one and the same.

For this celebration, based upon the original proposal of an ecumenical group in Argentina, it is particularly recommended:

- ◆ To issue invitations beyond the normal circle of Christians who are usually to be found in ecumenical meetings, so as to form a united but diverse assembly of prayer, especially with the immigrant Christian communities which are to be found within our towns and regions. In meeting and preparing worship together we shall celebrate the risen Christ, Light of Light, as our only salvation within the communion of the one faith with all its diversity of expression. Our celebration will pay tribute to this diversity.
- ◆ To use the symbol of light contained in clay jars; or even better, one clay jar. This could be passed from one group to another in full view of the assembly, at the moment of intercession, allowing the symbolism of this precious treasure to be understood in the unity of the one Lord, one faith, one baptism and common hope in Christ - the Christ who is in solidarity with the poor, with migrants, the wounded of this life. At the beginning of worship this jar, containing the light, will already emphasise the unity of Christians gathered to proclaim faith in Christ, light of our lives, and of our hope for the growth of fellowship.
- ◆ The sign of peace sets the seal on this fellowship in the intercessions. The unity that is demonstrated by this act corresponds to the renewed commissioning by Christ at the end of the worship. He expects all his disciples to witness to their unity by committing themselves to face up to the hard realities of migration.
- ◆ To highlight not only the dramatic nature of migrations and their sinful causes, but the fact that, as disciples of Christ on earth, we are also migrants. Avoiding condescension or insincerity, we will welcome each other during this worship as sisters and brothers in the faith. We have so much to share of that which gives us hope during times of trial and our wonderment at that treasure which is God-given faith. Where would our ecumenical pilgrimage be without the exchanges and dialogues provoked by contemporary migrations? We will allow ourselves to be welcomed by Christ, himself a nomad on this earth. Our earthly journey also becomes a pilgrimage with our brothers and sisters towards the house of God. But we have to make sure to be like him and not to exclude anyone from the banquet (*agapé*) which the Holy Spirit has set within the heart of the baptized. And that is why we have to hear, and hear all over again, his call to become

witnesses of the gospel while becoming itinerant bearers of the good news, as Ruth, for example, anticipated in her own way.

It is to be hoped that within the liturgy of the word the person of Ruth can be honoured. At the beginning of the liturgy, the story of Ruth's journey to Bethlehem in Judah with Naomi, her mother in law (whose homeland it was) could introduce other stories of present-day migration told either at the opening of the worship or before each intercession. Those present, whether migrants or persons needing to better understand the life of migrants, could discover how - in the life of Ruth as in their own - a new confidence in God came into being and in the all embracing spirit of biblical revelation, the call to imitate God's special love for the stranger and the poor is heard anew.

The gospel can be chosen from amongst the texts suggested, but the story of the sending forth in mission (Matt 28: 16-20) is recommended. In highlighting universal mission in the presence of the Lord Christ, within the framework of this ecumenical worship particularly sensitive to migrants, this gospel story offers the opportunity within the sermon to underline the power which the gospel has to overturn cultural, social, psychological and religious barriers. The sermon should emphasize that we are sent *together* by Christ and should encourage the churches to undertake common activities with "the stranger in our midst". Doctrinal, spiritual and practical ecumenism today is impossible without taking account of the migration of peoples in our own times. Our advance towards unity is stimulated by it.

Is it not also true that in faithfulness to the double demands of mission and ecumenism, we discover our neighbour in the sisters and brothers of different traditions with whom we work to further God's reign? We are called upon to love different people whether they are migrants or whether the difference comes from an unfamiliar way of confessing the Christian faith, founded upon traditions and practices other than ours. The unity of the church must also be at the service of unity among peoples. From this perspective the liturgy for the 'sending forth' underlines the link between missionary and ecumenical commitment.

The ordering of the six parts of the service can be changed:

- ◆ The **opening** - celebration of the light of Christ
- ◆ The **confession of sins** and proclamation of God's forgiveness
- ◆ **Reading** of the word of God
- ◆ **Confession of faith**
- ◆ **Intercessions**: movement towards the front of the church of representatives from different ethnic groups and churches present for the telling of their migration stories, presentation of their symbols, transmission of the clay jar containing the light, their prayers of intercession, the story of their beginnings, development, establishment, maybe even their exclusion. Alternatively, these stories could be related at the beginning of the worship service as a prelude to the liturgy.
- ◆ **Sending forth**: procession of the assembly towards the outside, a sign of the call of Christ to witness, preceded by the benediction.

It is recommended that the hymn to Christ - the *Phos Hilaron* - is sung either in the opening part of the service, or after the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the illuminator, before the confession of faith (Nicene creed or another text).

The worship service can be enlivened with songs, and symbols of the peoples represented. To take the example of Argentina, the sign of peace could be given in Spanish, the readers or other participants in the service clothed in ponchos, songs accompanied with a guitar, etc.

The service should be prepared by an ecumenical team and its preparation will have given opportunities to meet together and to pray. It would be a pity if the service were but an interlude. Rather, it should be a springboard for a desire to deepen relations between immigrant Christians and those of long-established communities in each region.

## Order of Service

- L. Worship leader
- C. Congregation
- R. Reader

### I. Opening

*It is recommended that the service take place in the evening.*

#### Invitation to pray

- L. Light and peace in Jesus Christ our Lord!
- C. *Glory be to God.*

- L. Alleluia, Christ is risen!
- C. *Truly the Lord is risen.*

*A clay jar containing a lighted candle is placed on the communion table/altar or in some other visible place in front of the congregation while the text 2 Corinthians 4: 5-6, is read. Some members of the congregation come forward to light other candles at the flame and pass the light around to all.*

#### Hymn

*The hymn accompanies the sharing of the light. Argentinian sanctus or a hymn on the theme of light known to an immigrant community represented in the service or another one known to the congregation.*

- C. Be our light in the darkness, Lord, and in your great mercy, protect us from all danger throughout our journey on this earth. Revive in us and in our communities the light of faith shining in our hearts: the knowledge of your glory in the face of Christ, he who reigns with you and with the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

#### Hymn

Phos hilaron (*this hymn could be sung elsewhere in the service as explained in the introduction*).

O joyful light,  
from the pure glory of the eternal heavenly Father,  
O holy, blessed Jesus Christ.

As we come to the setting of the sun  
and see the evening light,  
we give thanks and praise to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit of God.

Worthy are you at all times  
to be sung with holy voices,  
O Son of God, O giver of life,  
and to be glorified through all creation.

### II. Proclamation of God's mercy and confession of sins

L. Let us confess our sins towards God and towards each other.

*(Congregation or several readers in succession)*

C. Merciful Lord,  
We confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, deed and through omission.

Pardon our sins of disunity through pride, our sins against our brothers and sisters of other faiths, cultures, peoples, those whom we have oppressed and excluded. Pardon our apathy and our blindness to the distress of the immigrants among us. Christians of different denominations, we must ask ourselves if we have diligently sought ways of common witness "for Jesus' sake" to struggle against the suffering and injustices suffered by our immigrant brothers and sisters in our homeland.

Forgive our superficiality and laziness, ignoring or even denying the riches offered by *the other*, rather than seeking a true sharing of values and faith.

C. We have not loved you with our whole heart  
We have not loved our neighbour as ourselves  
We sincerely regret and humbly repent of our sins.  
For the love of your Son, Jesus Christ  
Have pity on us and forgive us  
That we may joyfully follow your will, walk in your ways  
and lead a life which shows forth your mercy to the glory of your name. Amen.

L. Our almighty God is merciful. He pardons your/our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, he strengthens you/us in all goodness and by the power of his Holy Spirit gives you/us eternal life. Amen.

### **III. Proclamation of the word of God**

Old Testament: Lev 25: 35-43 or Ruth 1: 1-18 *(cf introduction to the service)*

Ps 43 *(read antiphonally)*

New Testament: 2 Cor 4: 5-18 *(cf introduction to the service)*

C. *Alleluia!*

Gospel reading: Matt 28: 16-20 **or** Matt 8: 5-13, **or** 4: 3-15 **or** Mark 7: 1-9

*(As a sign that the good news of Christ is destined to be proclaimed in every tongue and received in every culture, the gospel could be read in the language of one of the guest communities present.)*

C. *Alleluia!*

**Sermon** *(cf introduction to worship service)*

### **IV. Confession of faith**

L. O God, who through Jesus Christ  
The Lord of all the world and of the church  
Calls us to be one single body  
And to express your love,  
In the confession of the same faith  
We pray to you in all humility.

R. Grant us light and strength of faith  
To overcome the shadows of evil  
Which harm our communion of faith.

Hymn to the Holy Spirit (*as desired*)

R. Pour out your love in our hearts  
That we may know you  
And discern your creative and reconciling presence  
In the lives of those around us.

Hymn to the Holy Spirit

R. Renew in us the gift of your Holy Spirit  
So that by that same Spirit we may now proclaim together  
Jesus Christ as Lord;  
And that each human heart be touched  
In such a way that the barriers which divide us fall down;  
Rumours fade away  
Hatred cease  
And the wounds of disunion are healed;  
So that we may live in justice and in peace,  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn to the Holy Spirit

*(The Phos Hilaron could be sung here.)*

**Nicene creed** (*or another confession of faith*)

**V. Intercessions**

*Representatives of immigrant communities come forward and present their intercessions. Each intercession is preceded by a brief recital of their experiences. The lights are lowered while their voices rise to ask for better understanding of their situation, and to express their faith and their hope in God's deeds.*

*Before praying for Christian unity, each church can also briefly recount its birth and development, perhaps its exclusion or suppression (e.g. The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in France) and the stages of its history on a local or national level.*

*The great clay jar containing the candle will be passed from one reader to another as a sign of faith and solidarity before being placed on the altar/communion table.*

*The refrain Ven Espiritu Santo ven, ven a iluminar (Come Holy Spirit, come enlighten us) - or another similar refrain - could be sung in the original Spanish after each prayer.*

We offer the treasure of our faith in the frailty of our personal witness, our communities and our ecumenical achievements.

May the Lord renew in us his gifts of light, strength and communion.

C. *Ven Espiritu Santo ven, ven a iluminar*

Confronted by so much suffering and evil we are submerged by despair, and we are aware of our weakness even to the point of doubting whether it is worth reacting in favour of justice.

May the Lord help us to hear the witness of people and communities who, under pressure from all sides, have continued to hope and to act in the midst of distress.

C. *Ven Espiritu Santo ven, ven a iluminar*

Faced with the demands of mission in the world and conscious of the importance of the gospel which is entrusted to us, we can feel quite overwhelmed.

May the Lord give us confidence to confess our faith.

C. *Ven Espiritu Santo ven, ven a iluminar*

The ecumenical movement, like migration, is a part of the "globalisation" with which the world is seeking to cope today.

Through the coming together of our churches may the Lord inspire this search for oneness.

C. *Ven Espiritu Santo ven, ven a iluminar*

## **Prayer of St John Chrysostom**

L. Lord, you have given us grace to offer these common prayers with one heart. You have promised to grant the requests of two or three gathered in your name. Fulfil now the petitions of your servants for our benefit, giving us the knowledge of your truth in this world, and granting us eternal life in the world to come. *Amen*

C. *Our Father...*

## **Exchange of the sign of peace**

C. **Hymn**

## **Collection**

*The collection can take place during the hymn. It is a liturgical gesture expressing communion in faith, charity and solidarity and its significance can be recalled when its intended use is indicated.*

## **V1. Sending forth and benediction (Num 6: 24-26)**

L. May God bless you/us and keep you/us.

C. *Amen*

L. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you/us and grant you/us his grace.

C. *Amen*

L. May the Lord turn his countenance towards you/us and give you/us his peace.

C. *Amen*

L. And may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you/us now and for evermore.

C. *Amen.*

*Reading of Matt 28: 18-20 and a call to common witness in the name of Christ*

L. 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'.

C. **Hymn**

*Suggestions: Argentinian hymn of blessing (La bendición de Dios, by Lois Wilson) ; A song from one of the immigrant communities present, or another known to the congregation.*

*To signify the pilgrimage that is our life in the light of Christ and our willingness to respond together to Christ's sending us forth in mission, the congregation leaves the church in procession behind a person bearing the clay jar with the lighted candle.*