

Advent Sacramental Reconciliation Service With Guided Meditation*

Gathering Rite

Quiet, meditative music is playing as people enter the Church.

*Lights are dim, with the light of the Advent wreath already lit as people gather.
Night lights may be lit around the base of the wreath for use later
(see meditation below).*

In a spirit of quiet prayer and reflection the Presider, as well as the ministers of reconciliation, are already seated in prayer throughout the church for a number of minutes before the liturgy begins.

*As each person enters the church they are invited, by designated greeters,
to take a holly leaf from a basket.*

Introduction:

When it is time to begin a member of the community introduces the liturgy in the following words:

Good evening, everyone and welcome to this celebration in Advent of God's love and forgiveness.

Tonight, at this celebration of reconciliation and healing, we come as a community to acknowledge the failures of the past, to offer healing, hope and reconciliation, to find a new and better future. For as scripture tells us, 'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light'. On this night we acknowledge the darkness but more importantly we welcome the light – the light that is the true source of hope in our world.

At this time of year, nature around us expresses the struggle between darkness and the yearning for the light as we mark the **Winter solstice**. Darkness loses its firm grip to give way to increasing light.

Every one of us has our dark corners. We are all in some way flawed and broken. Tonight, we remember that in the depths of darkness there is hope and there is light.

The birth of Christ marks the birth of One who is the greatest and most inspiring Light – Christ our Light. The invitation now is to invite Jesus, our Light, into our own struggles and darkness; Jesus who comes to us with the healing power of God's forgiving and compassionate love.

The introduction and guided meditation found in this resource were written by **Sr. Eileen Deegan and are reproduced here with her kind permission.*

Opening procession:

The presider stands and comes forward to his place and those leading the music invite the people to stand and to join in singing the chosen opening hymn:

Music Suggestions:

"O Come O Come Emmanuel"

"Come O Long expected Jesus"

"Be Still and know that I am God"

"God of day and God of Darkness" *or another suitable communal hymn*

Sign of the Cross: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

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

Opening Prayer:

Let us pray.

Lord our God,

On this night we invite you into our hearts
as we prepare for the coming of our Saviour.

Come and enlighten us.

Help us to recognise our sin and resolve to change our lives.

Helps us to know and trust in your mercy and healing.

We ask this through him whose was, who is and who is to come,
our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the
unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever.

AMEN.

Invitation to listen to the word of God

Presider: We open our hearts to hear the Word, encouraging us to reach towards the Light that is our hope, to walk in the Light of our faith, and to be that Light for others.

Liturgy of the Word

First Reading: Isaiah 9:1-3 (Lectionary I, page 104)

A reading from the Prophet Isaiah

The people that walked in darkness

has seen a great light;

On those who live in a land of deep shadow

a light has shone.

You have made their gladness greater,

You have made their joy increase;

They rejoice in your presence

As people rejoice at harvest time,

As they are happy when they are dividing the spoils.

The Word of the Lord

Silence

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 24 "To you O Lord I lift my soul" (Lectionary I, page 8)

Or Psalm 845 (Lectionary I, page 28)– sung text Gather # 48: "Lord, let us see your kindness"

Or another suitable psalm

Silence

Alleluia

Gospel: Luke 3:1-6 (Lectionary I, page 32 – *slightly abbreviated below*)

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. He went through the whole Jordan district proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice cries out in the wilderness;
Prepare a way for the Lord,
Make his paths straight.
Every valley will be filled in,
Every mountain and hill be laid low,
Winding ways will be straightened
And rough roads made smooth.
And all shall see the salvation of God.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Homily

Rite of Reconciliation

Examination of Conscience:

Instrumental music can be quietly played in the background during the reading of the meditation. The meditation is introduced by the priest celebrant and read by him or another.

Guided meditation:

Priest/Reader: In the tranquillity of this guided reflection tonight, we have the opportunity to meet with Jesus as we call to mind what we need to bring to Him for healing and forgiveness.

I invite you to take up and hold the holly leaf in your hand.
Make yourself comfortable, and enter into the peace and quiet of this sacred place... try to let go of the busyness of the day and enter into the now, the present moment.
If you wish, close your eyes and focus on yourself and on how you are feeling at this time; tune into your breathing and be still. Enter into the interior room of your heart and rest in the stillness. Hear God speak to you, 'Be still and know I am your God'. *(pause)*

Be aware of the leaf you are holding, feel its sharpness and its smoothness. See in this leaf a symbol of your life as you come to God in this quiet time.

Invite Jesus into this time of quiet and ask Him to journey with you as you reflect on your life. Let the smooth part of the leaf be for you a symbol of all that is good in your life, all that brings you peace and hope. Tell Jesus what is hopeful and life-giving for you, maybe special relationships, family, friendship, good health, the ways in which you live honestly and generously, your sense of gratitude, your faith. *(Pause)*

Now focus your attention on the sharp parts of the leaf, the rough edges. Let these symbolize for you the areas of your life that are not so life-giving. See in these sharp areas something of your life that is troubled, not at ease, in need of healing, in need of forgiveness...

Maybe it is a hurt from the past... a difficult relationship that you are experiencing in your life... actions that you have done that have hurt others or hurt yourself... your failure to forgive yourself or someone else..., *(pause)*

Maybe it is your relationship with God and the time you give – or don't give – to God in daily prayer, and on a Sunday with your fellow parishioners...*(pause)*

Maybe it is your harsh criticism and lack of compassion for someone – for a family member, for a neighbour, or for different groups of people in need in our society....*(pause)*

Maybe it is the ways in which you could take better care for the earth in the way you live your life...*(pause)*

Invite Jesus into these difficult, dark, sharp areas of your life. He knows, He understands. He wants to help make the rough places in your life smooth. *(pause)*

(The following scripture dialogue may be inserted at this point if desired – using two good readers, A & B, for this gentle dialogue)

- A. Out of the depths I cry to you, O God. Hear the voice of my pleading
- B. **God says to us - When you call to me... when you come to plead with me I will listen to you**

- A. O Lord, my God, I cry to you by day...Let my prayer come to you for I cry to you for help
- B. **Do not be afraid, I am with you to help you...**

- A. I am overcome by my troubles; my heart is in anguish within me...
- B. **I, the Lord, am close to the broken hearted... I will heal your wounds. Cast all your burdens on me, your God and I will support you. I know the plans I have in mind for you; plans for peace, not disaster, reserving a future full of hope for you**

A. Hope in God! I will again praise my Saviour and my God)

(Pause)

Priest/Reader *continues*: Imagine Jesus now placing His hands on your head and He is saying to you: You have received my gift of compassion and forgiveness tonight.

Be aware again of the leaf you are holding – this leaf is now a symbol of your life with God; you in your light and darkness; you as you are with your strengths and weaknesses, held lovingly and tenderly in God's hands.

During our time of confession, when you are ready you may choose to go to confession to one of the priests and then return by the centre aisle, dropping your leaf into the basket as you return to your place and taking a light -reminding yourself that Christ is your light and that you wish to always walk in that light.

This is an opportunity to mention what you wish to the priest – maybe name an area or areas of your life for which you feel the need for forgiveness and healing for we can trust in the loving forgiveness of our God.

(Depending on local circumstances, 2 people may be needed to hold baskets and two to present lights)

General confession of sins:

The presider invites the assembly to kneel and to pray the Confiteor together,

Presider: Brothers and sisters, let us call to mind the goodness of God our Father, and acknowledge our sins, so that we may receive his merciful forgiveness:

I confess to almighty God...

Penitential litany:

Presider:

The Lord is kind and merciful. He makes us clean of heart and leads us out into his freedom when we acknowledge our need for forgiveness.

Let us ask him to forgive us and heal the wounds inflicted by our sins,

Presider/Reader:

Lord of light and love, your mercy is our hope; welcome us to the sacrament of reconciliation. Lord, hear us. R. *Lord, graciously hear us.*

Give us the will to change our lives by charity, good example and prayer. Lord, hear us. R. *Lord, graciously hear us.*

As we make our confession remove our hardness of heart and lead us to the light enjoyed by your children. Lord, hear us. R. *Lord, graciously hear us.*

Make us a living sign of your light, for all to see. Lord, hear us. R. *Lord, graciously hear us.*

Through the sacrament of reconciliation, may we grow in your peace and seek to spread it throughout the world. Lord, hear us. R. *Lord, graciously hear us.*

In this sign of your love you forgive us our sins; may it teach us to love others and to forgive their sins against us. Lord, hear us. R. *Lord, graciously hear us.*

The Lord's Prayer:

Presider: Let us stand and pray to God our Father in the words Jesus gave us, and ask him for his forgiveness and protection from all evil. **Our Father...**

Individual Confession and absolution:

Presider: I invite my brother priests to take their places.

As you come forward to confess individually and to receive absolution, I invite you to bring your holly leaf and, on your way back to your place, to drop it into the basket and receive a light.

Later, when we come to the final part of our celebration together, may the growing light of the candles throughout the church, serve as a sign of our willingness to welcome the light of the Christ child into our hearts this Christmas.

(During this time music ministers can lead the assembly in reflective music – both instrumental and sung, for example. Taizé Music – “Wait for the Lord”; “To you O Lord My soul in stillness waits”; “O Comfort my people”; “For you O Lord my soul in stillness waits” ...)

CONCLUDING RITE

Proclamation of praise for God’s mercy

Presider: We have received God’s love and forgiveness. In thanksgiving, let us join with Mary in her great hymn of Praise: ***Either sung or recited***

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.
He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.
He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever.
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Closing Prayer:

Presider: Let us pray.

Lord our God,
On the first day of creation,
You made the light that scatters all darkness.
Let Christ, the light of lights, hidden from all eternity,

shine at last on your people.
Fill our lives with good works,
and fill our hearts with hope, peace, joy, and love,
as we go out to meet your Son with open and welcoming hearts.
We ask through him whose day draws near,
whose coming is certain,
our Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Presider:

Before the final blessing, I invite you to blow out your candles now and as you leave here with God's blessing, go and be the light of Christ in the world.

Blessing: And May almighty God bless you...

Dismissal:

Presider: The Lord has forgiven you. Go in peace. THANKS BE TO GOD.

Going Forth: *A hymn, for example "O Come, O Come Emmanuel", or instrumental music may accompany the people as they leave.*

During the closing procession the baskets of holly leaves can be held aloft and carried out in procession.

*** Link with Christmas liturgies:**

These same baskets of holly might be carried in during a Christmas Eve liturgy and scattered around the crib scene in the Church.