

Day 1: God the Creator

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. (Part I)

Reading (Genesis 1: 1-5, 26-31)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was a void, and darkness covered the face of the deep. A mighty wind swept over the waters.

Then God said, "Let there be light."

And there was light. God saw that the light was good. God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light *Day* and the darkness *Night*. And evening came, and then morning, the first day....

Then God said, "Let us make man in our own image."

And God created man in his image, in the divine image he created him, male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying, "Be fertile and multiply. Fill the earth."

God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good.

Song (Psalm 95)

Come, let us sing to the Lord,
Shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation.
For the Lord is a great God,
And a great king above all gods.
In his hands are the depths of the earth,
And the highest mountains as well.
The sea is his, for he made it,
And the dry land, which his hands have formed.

O come, let us bow down and worship,
Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.
For he is our God, And we are his people,
The sheep of his flock.

Day 2: The Purpose of Creation

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. (Part II)

Reading (Hosea 11: 1-9)

When Israel was a child I loved him;
Out of Egypt I called my son.
It was I who taught Ephraim to walk.
I took them up in my arms,
I led them with cords of kindness,
With bands of love.
I nurtured them like one
Who lifts an infant to his cheek.
I bent down to them and fed them.

How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, Israel?
My heart recoils within me,
My compassion grows warm and tender.
I will not execute my fierce anger,
I will not destroy Ephraim.
For I am God, and no mortal,
The Holy One in your midst.

Song (Psalm 103)

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And all that is within me,
Bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And forget not all his benefits.
He forgives all your sins,
He heals all your ills,
He fills you with love and mercy.

The Lord is merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger and abounding in kindness.
As the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is his steadfast love
Toward those who fear him.

As a father has compassion on his children,
So the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.

Reflection

Man could not know the purpose of creation unless it is revealed by the Creator. Man searches the depth and breadth of all things to unlock the secrets of creation. Each generation learns more about the mysteries of our world. But he does not know its purpose, or what will become of all things, including himself.

The purpose of creation is known only in the mind of the Creator. But God has not kept his purpose a secret. He has revealed it throughout the ages through prophets and saints, who have listened to the Lord and been touched by his Spirit.

What they have heard is this: *God created each of us to bless us with his love.* This is the whole purpose of our existence.

God has loved each of us from our very beginning. He has nurtured us, and filled us with his blessings. He will sustain us as long as we dwell on this earth. And when our earthly life is finished, he will bring us home to live with him for all eternity.

Prayer

God our Father, we thank you for the blessings of your love. Even when we wander from you, you do not forsake us, but draw us gently back to you. May we give ourselves up joyfully to your love. And may we share your love with all your children, that all may know that you are our Father.

Reflection

All faith begins with this fundamental truth: that God is the creator of all things. Everything that is comes from God. Everything that is was once nothing, and was called out of nothingness into being. Everything owes its existence to God. This truth is at the heart of all things.

But modern man has all but given up believing in God. Most of the time we live our lives as though there were no God, regardless of what we profess. We carry on our everyday affairs with seldom a thought of God. We are unaware that the life we carry within us is a fragile miracle that is sustained at every moment by the Creator.

But at unexpected times the reality of God forces itself into our consciousness. We experience a tension between faith and unbelief. We cannot comprehend the Lord God; we cannot understand his ways. When we have exhausted our human powers in trying to grasp the wonders of creation, we are left in silence and awe. We bow down before the majesty of the Creator and worship him.

Prayer

Lord God, Creator of heaven and earth, you called us out of nothingness, and you created us in your own image. You filled us with your own life-giving Spirit. We thank you for the gift of life and for the blessings you bestow on us. We sing praise to you and worship you with our whole being.

Day 3: God's Providence

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. (Part III)

Reading (Matthew 6: 25-33)

Do not worry about what you will eat or drink, or what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your Father feeds them. Consider the lilies of the field. They neither toil nor spin, yet even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. Your Father knows that you need all these things. Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Song (Psalm 23)

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
In green pastures he gives me rest.
He leads me beside still waters;
He refreshes my soul.
He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through a dark valley,
I fear no evil;
For you are with me
With your rod and staff
To give me comfort.

You prepare a table for me
In the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life.
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
For years to come.

Day 4: The Incarnation

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary.

Reading (Matthew 1: 18-21)

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother Mary was engaged to Joseph. But before they lived together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph was an upright man, and he did not want to expose her to public disgrace, so he decided to divorce her quietly. But an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him *Jesus*, because he will save his people from their sins."

Song (Luke 1: 68-79)

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;
He has come to his people and set them free.
He has raised up for us a mighty savior,
Born of the house of his servant David.
Through his holy prophets he promised of old
That he would save us from our enemies,
From the hands of all who hate us.
In the tender compassion of our God
The dawn from on high shall break upon us,
To shine on those who dwell in darkness,
And to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Reflection

Nothing that God has done can compare with the wonder of the Incarnation. In the long history of salvation God again and again offered a covenant of love to man. But because of the waywardness of the human heart, God's grace could not take hold in the

world. Finally, to show once and for all the depth of his love, he sent his beloved Son to dwell among us and lead us to salvation. It was a grace un hoped for, and a mystery beyond our understanding. We can only give thanks that God would overlook our unworthiness and come into our troubled world in the form of a beautiful child, the Savior of the world.

Prayer

God our Father, we bow in wonder before the child conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, the Savior of the world. We thank you for the love so great that you sent your only Son as the sign of your covenant and the way to eternal life. May we remain faithful to the new life he has won for us, and may our faith bring light to all the world, that all may be one with you in heaven.

Reflection

Because we are of the earth, we cannot see eternity. In the midst of the cares of this world, we cannot see that we are guided by God's loving hand. All the troubles in our life are passing; they will all be forgotten in eternity. We will look back and understand what we cannot see now: that God's providence surrounds us, and he will bring all things to fulfillment in his own way. Nothing that we can accomplish for ourselves compares with what God has prepared for us. And nothing will prevent him from bringing to completion his great work of love.

Prayer

God our Father, you have nurtured and sustained us from our very beginning. Without you we are nothing. You guide us with a sure hand and with steadfast love. May we not be turned away from you by the passing cares of this world, but may we remain faithful to doing your will until we are united with you in heaven, where we will worship you forever.

Day 5: The Crucifixion

I believe in Jesus Christ, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

Reading (Romans 8: 31-39)

If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for us, will he not give us everything else along with him? Who will bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? It is Jesus Christ, who died and was raised and is at the right hand of the Father, who intercedes for us.

What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? As it is written,

"For your sake we are being slain all the day,
We are looked upon as sheep to be slaughtered."

In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Song (Philippians 2: 5-11)

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
Who, though he was in the form of God,
Did not regard equality with God
As something to cling to,
But emptied himself,
Taking the form of a slave,
Being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
He humbled himself,
And became obedient to the point of death,

Day 6: The Resurrection

I believe in Jesus Christ, who descended among the dead, and on the third day rose again.

Reading (1 Corinthians 15: 12-20)

I handed on to you what I received: that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some say there is no resurrection? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, our proclamation - and your faith - is in vain. If we have hoped in Christ for this life only, we are of all people the most pitiable.

But in fact *Christ has been raised from the dead*, the first fruits of those who have died.

Song (Psalm 118)

Open to me the gates of righteousness,
That I may enter through them
And give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord;
The righteous shall enter through it.
I thank you that you have answered me,
And have become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected
Has become the cornerstone.
This is the Lord's doing;
It is marvelous to behold.

This is the day the Lord has made;
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Blessed is the one who comes
In the name of the Lord.

Reflection

Our faith is founded on the testimony of eyewitnesses to the resurrection. It is the faith of the apostles, handed down from age to age. They were plain men, simple and unlearned. They did not offer eloquence, or profound insights, or worldly wisdom, but the paradox of the cross, and victory over sin and death in the raising of Jesus from the dead. This cross and resurrection is a stumbling block to the world. But it is the way chosen by God to bring all things to fulfillment. The world may pity us for our simple faith, but we rejoice in this mighty deed of the Lord.

Prayer

Lord God, you loved us so much that you gave us your beloved Son to die for our sins. In obedience to your will he gave his life, and you raised him up to overcome sin and death and to reconcile us with you. May we follow his example in doing your will, that we may be raised up with him to eternal life.

Even death on a cross.
Because of this, God highly exalted him,
And bestowed on him the name
That is above every name,
So that at the name of Jesus,
Every knee should bend,
In heaven and on earth and under the earth,
And every tongue should proclaim
That Jesus Christ is Lord,
To the glory of God the Father.

Reflection

God chose the most unlikely way to overcome the forces of evil in the world and win salvation for his people. He gave his own Son up to death to show the depth of his love. When we gaze upon the crucifix, we contemplate the deepest mystery of faith: that God would empty himself and enter fully into the human condition, so that we might be raised up to share in the life of God. If God would do this, surely his love has no limits.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we kneel before you weighed down with sorrow for our sins, but filled with hope by the sign of forgiveness that is the cross. We resolve to turn away from sin and follow you on the way to salvation. We ask for the gift of faith, that we may have the courage to take up the cross, for it is the only way to eternal life.

Day 7: The Last Judgment

I believe in Jesus Christ, who ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Reading (Matthew 25: 31-46)

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, all the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then he will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you have me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me."

Then the righteous will say to him, "Lord, when did we do these things for you?"

And he will reply, "Whatever you did for the least of my brothers, you did for me."

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me to the eternal fire. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison and you shunned me."

But they will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you like this and not help you?"

And he will answer, "Whatever you failed to do for the least of my brothers, you failed to do for me."

Day 8: The Holy Spirit

I believe in the Holy Spirit.

Reading (Acts 2: 1-4)

On the day of Pentecost the disciples were all together in one place. Suddenly there came from the sky a sound like the rush of a strong wind, and it filled the house where they were gathered. Then tongues of fire appeared, which parted and came to rest on each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and empowered by the Spirit, they began to speak in different languages.

Song (Joel 3: 1-5)

In the last days
I will pour out my Spirit on all mankind.
Your sons and daughters shall prophesy,
Your old men shall dream dreams,
Your young men shall see visions.
Even upon the servants and handmaids
In those days I will pour out my Spirit.

I will work wonders in the heavens and on earth,
At the coming of the day of the Lord,
That great and terrible day.
Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord
Shall be saved.

Reflection

When Jesus completed his work on earth, he promised to send his Holy Spirit to remain with us for all ages. He made good on his promise at Pentecost, when his Spirit came upon the apostles. And so began the Church's ministry of proclaiming the good news of salvation to all the world.

The Holy Spirit remains present and active in the world

today, seeking hearts open to God. When we receive the Holy Spirit, the love of God is poured into our hearts, and we are empowered to live a sanctified life. We are no longer ordinary people, but are transformed into a new creation. And like the apostles we are emboldened to proclaim to the world the good news of salvation.

For most of us this proclamation comes not in a formal ministry of preaching and teaching, but in a ministry of action. We proclaim the good news by the way we live - at home, in the workplace, in our neighborhood, and in the larger community. All those whose lives we touch should see the holiness that is in us because of the Spirit who has been poured into our hearts and who has transformed our lives.

Prayer

God our Father, you gave us your Spirit as a sign of your unending love for us. You did not abandon us in this world, but gave us a share in your own life. Open our hearts to your Spirit present in the world, and empower us to live the life of grace that is a foretaste of eternal life.

Song (Psalm 146)

Happy are they whose help is from God,
Whose hope is in the Lord their God,
Who keeps faith forever,
Who executes justice for the oppressed,
Who gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets prisoners free;
He opens the eyes of the blind;
He lifts up those who are bowed down.
The Lord loves the righteous,
He watches over strangers;
He upholds the widow and the orphan.
But the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

Reflection

Everything we do has consequences. In the end we must answer for ourselves. It is of little importance how we are judged by the world. God is our judge, and he knows the whole of us. It would be pointless to try to argue our case before him, or to bring anyone to our defense, for the matter is already settled. Whatever good we do will be acknowledged before God. And if we have done any harm or left any good thing undone, we must give an accounting. God sees the hearts of all and he judges as each deserves.

God's love for us is without limits. But if we reject his love by turning away from our brothers and sisters, we will condemn ourselves to an eternity without God.

Prayer

Almighty God, do not judge me as my sins deserve, but show me your mercy, for I long to put my sins behind me and make amends. Create a clean heart in me, and place a new spirit within me, that I may do your will. And may I find peace in bringing good to others as you have done for me.

Day 9: The Church

Reading (1 Peter 2: 4-10)

Come to him, a living stone, rejected by men but chosen and precious in God's sight; and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people.

Song (Psalm 84)

How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts!
My soul longs for the courts of the Lord;
My heart cries out for the living God.
Blessed are they who dwell in your house;
Happy are they whose strength is in you.

For a day in your courts
Is better than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper
In the house of my God
Than live among the wicked.
For the Lord God is a shield,
He bestows favor and honor.

Reflection

The church is made up of those who are called out of the world to belong to the Lord. It is the community of believers.

To belong to the Lord is not the same as being a member of an organized congregation. The church is a

Day 10: The Communion of Saints

I believe in the communion of saints.

Reading (1 Corinthians 15: 51-56)

What I am telling you is a mystery: we will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. This perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. Then the saying will be fulfilled:

"Death has been swallowed up in victory.
Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?"

Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Song (Isaiah 9: 1-6)

The people who walked in darkness
Have seen a great light;
Upon those who dwell in a land of gloom
A light has shown.
You have brought them abundant joy
And great rejoicing.
For the yoke that burdened them,
The pole on their shoulder,
And the rod of their taskmaster,
You have smashed.

For a child is born to us,
A son is given to us.
Upon his shoulder dominion rests.
His dominion is vast
And forever peaceful.
He will establish justice
Now and forever.

Reflection

By our faith in Jesus Christ we become the people of the resurrection. We live not for this world but for heaven. And we enter into communion with those who have gone before us and who have kept the faith. The threshold of death does not separate us from them. We are closer to them than we are to those with whom we are most intimate in this world. For we are united with them in Christ. What holds together the communion of the faithful, both the living and the dead, is the Lord Jesus. He is our assurance of victory over sin and death. And if these have been vanquished, what is left to separate us from the love of God?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, by your death and resurrection you won for us the forgiveness of our sins and the hope of eternal life. We rejoice in the company of your faithful of every age. Our voices join with theirs in a hymn of praise and thanksgiving. We look forward to the day when we will join them in worshipping you in heaven.

spiritual edifice, made up of the living stones of the faithful. Often they are not known to one another, for what makes them living stones is hidden in their hearts. It is the Holy Spirit dwelling in them and enlivening them, who at unexpected times breaks forth in acts of worship of God and love of others. This edifice of the faithful is holy, because it is sanctified by the Spirit, and universal, because it is open to all. It is the church in the truest sense, the community of those who belong to the Lord Jesus.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you sent your Holy Spirit into the world to draw together those who believe in you into a community of faith. May we be counted among your faithful. May we worship you in the company of fellow believers. And may we give witness in our lives to the faith we share with the community of your church.

Day 11: The Forgiveness of Sins

I believe in the forgiveness of sins.

Reading (Luke 15: 11-24)

A man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, "Give me my share of the inheritance."

So the father divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son took all he had and departed for a distant country. There he squandered his property in dissolute living. After he had spent everything, a famine came over that country, and he became destitute. He hired himself out as a laborer, and his job was to feed the pigs. He would have gladly eaten what he fed to the pigs, but no one offered him anything.

Finally he came to his senses and said to himself, "My father's hired men have more than enough to eat, and here I am starving. I will go to my father, and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I do not deserve to be called our son, but take me in as one of your hired men.'"

So he set out for his father's house. While he was still far off, his father saw him approaching, and was filled with compassion. He ran to him and put his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I do not deserve to be called your son...."

But his father would not let him finish. He called out to the servants, "Bring him a robe and sandals, and get a meal ready. Let us eat and celebrate. For this son of mine was lost, and now he has been found."

Song (Psalm 51)

Have mercy on me, O God, in your kindness;
In your compassion blot out my offense.
My offenses, truly I know them;

Day 12: Life Everlasting

I believe in the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

Reading (John 6: 35-40)

Jesus said to those listening, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never thirst. I will not reject anyone who comes to me, because I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me: that I should not lose anyone whom he gave me, but that I should raise them up on the last day. For the will of my Father is that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

Song (Psalm 27)

One thing I ask of the Lord,
This I seek:
To dwell in the house of the Lord
All the days of my life,
To gaze on the beauty of the Lord,
To worship in his temple.

I will offer in his temple
Sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and chant praise to the Lord.

I believe that I shall enjoy
The goodness of the Lord
In the land of the living.
Wait for the Lord with courage.
Be stouthearted! Wait for the Lord.

Reflection

We live almost our entire life on earth without a thought of eternity. Yet this life is little more than the blink of an

eye compared with what we will be in the future. The brief pleasures, the passing joys, the small successes of this life are nothing compared with what God has prepared for us.

We will be invited one day to join the angels and saints in worshipping God in the heavenly kingdom. We will not be fit to join them if we do not begin to prepare ourselves today. We would do well to turn our thoughts from the passing cares of this life to the concerns of eternal life. We should turn our hearts to God, and come to know him, and learn to love and worship him, or we will not be prepared to know him, and love him, and serve him in eternity.

Prayer

God our Father, you created us to dwell with you in eternal life. Help us to set our hearts not on the passing affairs of this life, but on the love you promise. Keep us free from sin that we may grow in holiness until the day when we are united with you in your heavenly kingdom.

My sin is always before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned;
What is evil in your sight I have done.
From my sins turn away your face,
And blot out all my guilt.
A pure heart create for me, O God,
Put a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me out from your presence,
Nor deprive me of your Holy Spirit.
Give me again the joy of your help;
With a spirit of fervor sustain me.
O Lord, open my lips,
And my mouth shall declare your praise.

Reflection

God's greatest gift to man is the forgiveness of his sins. Yet most of us spend our entire life unaware that we are even in need of forgiveness. And so we are never at peace, because although our heart is divided, we are not aware of our need to be made whole.

But at some point we must come to our senses, and realize who we are, what we have done, and how flawed is our existence. Only then are we ready to turn to God and accept the wonderful gift of forgiveness.

When we humble ourselves, and acknowledge our sinfulness, and turn to God with all our heart, we will find the inner peace that is known only to those who are touched in the depth of their soul by the mercy of God.

Prayer

Lord God, you created us for love, but our sins have separated us from you. You have not judged us as our sins deserve, but have shown us the abundance of your mercy. We resolve with the help of your grace to turn away from sin, to make amends for the wrong we have done, and from this day forward to live according to your will.

Day 13: Our Father

Our Father, who art in heaven...

Reading (Romans 8: 14-17)

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but a Spirit of adoption, through which we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself bears witness with our own spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Song (Psalm 103)

As the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is God's steadfast love
Toward those who fear him.
As far as the east is from the west,
So far has he removed our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion on his children,
So the Lord has compassion on all who fear him.
The steadfast love of the Lord
Is from everlasting to everlasting
On those who fear him,
And his righteousness to children's children
Toward those who keep his covenant.

Reflection

Throughout human history men have feared God. The religious expression of every civilization echoes this fear. Behind the destructive forces of nature, in the silent threats of sickness and death, in the unpredictable course of human fortune, man senses an unknown force that he calls God, and he rightly fears him.

But this is God only as he is known within the narrow limits of human understanding, not as he has revealed

Day 14: The Name of God

...hallowed be thy name.

Reading (Exodus 3: 13-15)

Moses said to God, "If I go to the people and say to them, 'The God of our fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"

God said to him, "*I Am Who Am.*" (Yahweh)

He said further, "Thus you shall say to the people: 'The Lord, the God of our fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has sent me to you.'

This is my name forever, and this is my title for all generations."

Song (Daniel 3: 52-54)

Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers,
Praiseworthy and exalted above all forever;
And blessed is your holy and glorious name,
Praiseworthy and exalted above all for all ages.
Blessed are you in the temple of your holy glory,
Praiseworthy and glorious above all forever.
Blessed are you on the throne of your kingdom,
Praiseworthy and exalted above all forever.

Reflection

Our God is Yahweh, the God who is, and who is the Creator of all that is. He is the source of all things; everything belongs to him; everything is sustained by his creative power. Without him nothing could be, and without his sustaining power nothing can continue in being.

Man is the only creature on earth endowed with the

intellect to know his place before God. He is the only creature on earth capable of worship. In fact, to call upon the name of God in worship is the highest act of man.

But man is quick to forget his place before God. He lives under the illusion that he does not need God, that he is in control of his own world, that he can take care of himself. Human history is a continuous drama of man wavering between the worship of false gods of his own making, and the worship of the true God, the God who is.

In the end man must come to know himself as he really is, as a poor and defenseless creature of the earth, utterly dependent on God. And he must prostrate himself humbly before God, and give thanks that God has graciously revealed his name. For when he calls out to God in worship, he addresses not an unnamed God to be feared, but a Father to be loved.

Prayer

Almighty God, Father in heaven, you graciously revealed your name, that we might know you as our Father and love you as children. May all your children on earth know you as Father, and hold your name in their hearts as holy. May we be one in praising your name until we are united with you in heaven.

himself. The God who has revealed himself throughout the ages is very different from the God of fear; but he is known only to the small number who have opened their hearts in faith to hear his word. What God has revealed - and what his faithful testify to - is that he is the God not of fear *but of love*. This is the truth that is at the heart of all faith: that God is our Father; that he created us for love; and that he remains faithful to his love for all time.

We would not dare to call God our Father unless he revealed himself as Father. We would not dare to call ourselves his sons and daughters unless he revealed to us that that is what we are. And so he did reveal it, when he sent his beloved Son into the world to become man, to take our life upon himself, and thus to make us all the sons and daughters of God.

Prayer

God our Father, you so loved the world that you sent your only Son to dwell among us and to make us your adopted sons and daughters. We rejoice to call you Father. We entrust ourselves to your loving protection, and we resolve to live faithfully as your children, brothers and sisters to one another, both in this life and in heaven.

Day 15: The Reign of God

Thy kingdom come.

Reading (Matthew 4: 12-17)

When Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what had been said through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled:

Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
The way to the sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles,
The people who sit in darkness
Have seen a great light,
On those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death,
Light has arisen.

From that time on, he began to preach, and his message was this: "Repent, for the reign of God is at hand."

Song (Isaiah 11: 6-9)

Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb,
And the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
The calf and the young lion shall browse together,
With a little child to guide them.
The cow and the bear shall be neighbors,
Together their young shall rest;
The lion shall eat hay like the ox.
The baby shall play by the cobra's den,
And the child lay his hand on the adder's lair.
There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain;
For the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord.

Reflection

When God created the world he intended that all his creatures would live by the law of love. But man turned

Day 16: God's Will

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Reading (Matthew 26: 36-46)

Jesus came with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Stay here while I pray."

he took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with him. He began to feel sorrow and distress. He said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death. Remain here and keep watch with me."

And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; but let it be not as I will, but as you will."

He returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Could you not watch with me for an hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

He withdrew a second time. Again he prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking it, then your will be done."

He returned to the disciples, and again he found them asleep. He said to them, "Behold, the hour is at hand."

Song (Psalm 22)

It was our infirmities that he bore,
Our suffering that he endured.
He was pierced for our offenses,
Crushed for our sins.
Upon him was the chastisement
That makes us whole,
By his stripes were we healed.

We had all gone astray like sheep,
Each following his own way;
But the Lord laid upon him
The guilt of us all.
Though he was harshly treated
He submitted and opened not his mouth.
Like a lamb led to the slaughter,
He was silent and opened not his mouth.

Reflection

The sole purpose of our existence is to do the will of God. God created us for himself. He placed us in this world to raise us in the ways of love, so that we might live with him in heaven forever. Everything that happens to us is intended to teach us to love.

God reveals his will to us only one day at a time. He reveals it in the people he sends into our life today. He gives us each new day as an opportunity to grow in love. We can tell what God's will is by this: everything that moves us in the direction of love is from God.

Every movement in the direction of love involves dying to oneself. This is the deepest mystery of God's will: that we must let go of the life we cling to so that God can make us into something more. The only measure of the success or failure of our life is whether we do God's will. Nothing else matters.

Prayer (Offering of St. Ignatius Loyola)

Lord Jesus Christ, take all my freedom, my memory, my understanding, and my will. All that I have and cherish you have given me. I surrender it all to be guided by your will. Your grace and your love are wealth enough for me. Give me these, Lord Jesus, and I ask for nothing more.

away from God, and sin entered the world. And the law of love gave way to the reign of sin.

Again and again God sent holy men and women to call his people back to him. But man showed himself to be stiff-necked. No prophet or holy one could bring men to turn back to God on their own, enslaved as they were by the reign of sin.

Finally God decided that he could leave his children no longer in their fallen state. So he sent his own Son into the world to establish the reign of God on earth and reconcile all people to himself. He saved mankind once and for all from the grip of sin and death, and won for all the promise of eternal life.

The reign of God is still in our midst. God continues to be present and active in the world through his Holy Spirit. He is present wherever men and women open their hearts in faith to his word and grace, and allow his law of love to reign in their lives.

Prayer

God our Father, you sent your Son into the world to free us from sin and lead us to your heavenly kingdom. May our faithfulness to his word give witness to the world of the eternal life you have promised to all your people.

Day 17: Our Daily Bread

Give us this day our daily bread.

Reading (Mark 8: 1-9)

Jesus saw that the crowd had nothing to eat. He said to his disciples, "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, because they have been with me for three days, and they have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry, some of them will faint on the way, for they have come a long distance."

Then he asked, "How many loaves do you have?"

"Seven," they answered.

He ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground. He took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and blessed them. Then he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the crowd. When they had eaten, the disciples picked up the fragments and filled seven baskets. The crowd numbered about four thousand.

Song (Psalm 105)

He spread a cloud for a covering,
And fire to give light by night.
They asked, and he brought them quail,
With bread from heaven he filled them.
He split the rock and water gushed forth,
It flowed through the desert like a river.
For he remembered his sacred promise
To Abraham his servant.
He brought his people out with joy,
His chosen ones with singing.

Reflection

We have no greater need than to satisfy our hunger for the bread of the spirit.

Day 18: Forgive Us Our Trespasses

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Reading (Matthew 18: 23-35)

Jesus told this parable:

"The kingdom of God is like a master who decided to settle accounts with his servants. One servant was brought to him who owed him a huge sum of money. Since the man had no way to pay it back, the master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all his property, in payment of the debt. But the man pleaded with him, and promised to pay him back in full. The master was moved with pity, and let the servant go and forgave the debt.

After he was let go, the man came upon a fellow servant who owed him a day's wage. He seized him and demanded that he pay back what he owed. The fellow servant pleaded with him to give him time to pay back the debt, but the man refused. He had him thrown into prison until he could pay what he owed.

Other servants saw what had happened and reported it to the master. The master summoned the man and said, 'I forgave you your entire debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have done the same to your fellow servant?'

Then the master handed him over to be tortured until he paid back his entire debt. So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

Song (Isaiah 58)

Is this the manner of fasting I wish,
Of keeping a day of penance:
That a man bow his head like a reed,

And lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Do you call this a fast,
A day acceptable to the Lord?

This, rather, is the fasting that I wish:
Releasing those bound unjustly,
Untying the thongs of the yoke;
Setting free the oppressed,
Breaking every yoke;
Sharing your bread with the hungry,
Sheltering the oppressed and the homeless;
Clothing the naked when you see them,
And not turning your back on your own.

Reflection

God places only one condition on his mercy: *that we forgive our brother from our heart*. As we have been forgiven, so too must we forgive.

It is in our nature to be quick to judge the sins of others while making considerable allowance for our own faults. Much self-knowledge is needed to begin to set things right. The debt of sin that God forgives in each of us is like a vast sum of money, too large to count. Compared with this, our brother's sin against us is a pittance.

God has infinite patience with our human weakness, but his mercy reaches its limit when we refuse to show mercy to others. Our pleading before God will go unheard, our prayer and fasting unnoticed, unless we show compassion as God has been compassionate toward us.

Prayer

God our Father, you do not judge us as our sins deserve, but show us infinite mercy. We give you thanks for the forgiveness of our sins, and we resolve with your help to forgive the failings of others. May we accept small injustices gracefully, and endure greater trials with patience, until the day when you will look into the hearts of all people, and judge each of us in truth.

Our prayer is not for bread for the body. God has provided amply for the needs of the body by his abundant gifts of the earth. It is *our responsibility* to see that they are not wasted, but are shared with all people.

Our prayer is for spiritual bread, the food of the soul. It is the food that gives us the strength of spirit we need to abide faithfully in this world until the day of our return to our Father's house.

But what is this spiritual bread? What does it look like? What does it taste like? It is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who fills the hearts of men and women with the grace of God.

It is an abundant gift, too deep a mystery for man to understand; yet it is contained in earthen vessels. It is borne in the inspired words of evangelists, in common objects like bread and wine, in the ritual acts of priests, in the testimony of preachers, and in the ordinary acts of goodness of faithful people.

The bread of the spirit is given in abundance like manna. We need only trust the Lord God to give it.

Prayer

God our Father, we hunger for your life-giving Spirit. Without you we are nothing. Give us bread for this day's journey, and faith for tomorrow's, that we may be sustained until we reach the end of our journey in heaven.

Day 19: Temptation

Lead us not into temptation.

Reading (Matthew 4: 1-11)

Jesus was led into the desert by the Spirit to be tempted by the Evil One. He fasted for forty days, and he was hungry. The Evil One approached and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."

But Jesus said in reply, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God."

Then the Evil One took him to the holy city, to the very top of the temple, and said, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, 'He will command his angels to guard you, and they will protect you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered, "It is also written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Then the Evil One took him to a high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and said, "All this I will give you if you will prostrate yourself and worship me."

At this Jesus said to him, "Go away, Evil One. It is written, 'The Lord your God you shall worship, and him alone shall you serve.'"

With that the Evil One left him, and angels came and ministered to him.

Song (Psalm 73)

I was envious of the arrogant,
For they suffer no pain.
Their bodies are healthy and sleek.

Day 20: Deliverance

Deliver us from evil.

Reading (Mark 15: 22-37)

They brought Jesus to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of the Skull. There they nailed him to a cross. It was morning. The crowd standing around reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, "So you will destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days! Save yourself by coming down from the cross."

The chief priests and the scribes also mocked him and said, "He saved others, but he cannot save himself. If you are the Messiah, come down from that cross, that we may see it and believe in you."

At noon darkness came over the earth. Later in the afternoon he cried out in a loud voice from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

A little later Jesus cried out again; then he gave up his life.

Song (Psalm 22)

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
Why so far from my call for help,
From my cries of anguish?

All who see me mock me;
They curl their lips and jeer.
They shake their heads at me,
"You relied on the Lord; let him deliver you.
If he loves you, let him rescue you."

Many dogs surround me;
A pack of evildoers closes in on me.
So wasted are my hands and feet,
That I can count all my bones.

They stare at me and gloat.
They divide my garments among them;
For my clothing they cast lots.

Reflection

We will never fully understand why evil is present in the world. We find it everywhere, sometimes in horrific forms. It even finds its way into our own hearts, leading us into evil though we do not desire it.

At times evil seems to dominate the world, but it is not so. Evil entered its final conflict with the good when it crucified the Lord Jesus Christ, but it did not prevail. Evil tried to destroy the Holy One of God, but it could not overcome his spirit. By submitting to death on the cross, the Lord Jesus has once and for all delivered the world from the forces of evil and sin.

And so we need not fear the evil in the world around us. We have an advocate and protector who takes up our cause against evil. We have learned from Jesus that the body can be destroyed, but not the spirit. When we become his followers, we no longer live for this life and for the comforts of the body. We live for the Lord and for the comfort of the Spirit.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are our protector in the struggle against all that would separate us from the love of God. We place ourselves under your loving care. May we remain faithful to your way of truth, that we may be worthy of the victory you have won for us.

They are free of the burdens of life;
They are not afflicted like others.

Is it in vain that I have kept my heart clean?
For I am afflicted day after day.
My heart is embittered,
And my soul deeply wounded.

Yet you are always with me,
You take hold of my hand.
With your counsel you guide me;
Whom else have I in heaven?
Though my flesh and my heart fail,
God is my rock and my portion forever.

Reflection

Every day our faith is put to the test. Each day we are faced with choices that place before us good and evil, that require us to choose between doing God's will or following our own inclinations.

Most of these choices are about matters that are of little consequence in themselves. But they are important because they are God's way of reaching out to us and drawing us to himself. When taken together with all the choices we have already made, and those we are yet to make, they set the direction of our life. They determine whether we move closer to God, or move away. And in the end they determine what will become of us for all eternity.

We must pray that God's Spirit will guide us in the choices of our life, that the forces of evil may not prevail against us, but that we be led along the straight path to eternal life.

Prayer

Lord God, send forth your Spirit into our hearts that we may be strengthened by the gift of your love. May we be protected against the forces of evil that would separate us from you. And may we joyfully accept your will as the way to eternal life.

Day 21: The Poor in Spirit

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Reading (Luke 12: 29-34)

Do not worry about what you have to eat or drink. Your Father knows what you need. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these other things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your belongings and give to the poor. Make a purse for yourself that will not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven, that no thief can steal or moth destroy. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.

Song (Psalm 145)

The Lord is faithful in all his words,
And gracious in all his deeds.
The Lord upholds all who are falling,
And raises up all who are bowed down.

The eyes of all look to you;
You give them their food in due season.
You open your hand,
And satisfy the desire of every living thing.
The Lord is near to all who call on him,
To all who call on him in truth.

Reflection

We are all poor creatures of the earth, but most do not know it. Only when we become aware of our poverty do we begin to understand how blessed we are.

Of ourselves we are nothing. Our material possessions, since they have no real value, add nothing to our worth. What is of deepest concern to us - that our life be sustained and that we be loved - we cannot control.

Day 22: The Comforted

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Reading (Revelation 21: 1-5)

I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and earth had passed away. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

"Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people, and God himself will always be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away. Behold, I make all things new!"

Song (Isaiah 61: 1-3)

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
Because the Lord has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly,
To heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives,
And release to prisoners,
To announce a year of favor from the Lord,
To comfort all who mourn,
To place on those who mourn a crown instead of ashes,
To give them oil of gladness instead of mourning,
A glorious mantle instead of a listless spirit.

Reflection

To mourn his losses is the final destiny of earthly man. Everything in this world moves inexorably toward death. Everything that a man clings to will one day be taken away from him. And after he has given up everything else, he must forfeit his own life. He does well to mourn.

Human life would be cruel indeed if all things ended in death. But our Creator is not a cruel tyrant; he is the God of love. In a way far beyond our understanding, he makes all things new. He makes death not an end but a passing, not a loss to be mourned, but a new beginning to be anticipated with joy.

We do not know what is on the far side of death. We are still of the earth, and we do not understand the things of the spirit. But we know that our Father awaits us there. And that is enough for us. Every tear will be wiped away, and our mourning will turn to rejoicing in the house of the Lord.

Prayer

God our Father, you have assured us that beyond death comes eternal life. You have sealed the promise of eternal life by giving us your Son Jesus, who was raised from the dead and leads us in faith through the trials of this life to your heavenly kingdom.

What is most important to us we cannot claim as our own. We are pitifully poor and utterly dependent on God.

Only when we acknowledge our poverty can we be open to the blessings God gives us. Only when we empty our heart of every other desire can we be filled with the treasure of God's grace. The arrogant do not need God. Those who are satisfied with what they have do not hunger for God. Many set their hearts on the seeming treasures of this life - money, pleasure, power - not knowing that these are empty and lead to nothing. Only the one who sets his heart on the kingdom of heaven will possess a lasting treasure.

Prayer

God our Father, you fill us with the blessings of your love. Teach us to recognize that the good things of the earth are intended for all to nourish us on the journey of this life. They are not the purpose of life and they are not a lasting treasure. May we empty ourselves of all attachments to material things, and set our hearts on your kingdom, where we hope to abide with you forever.

Day 23: The Lowly Ones

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Reading (Matthew 18: 1-4)

The disciples approached Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

He called a child over, and stood him before them and said, "Unless you change and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives a child such as this in my name receives me."

Song (Luke 1: 46-53)

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
My spirit rejoices in God my savior.
For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness,
Behold, from now on all ages will call me blessed.
The Mighty One has done great things for me,
Holy is his name.
His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him.

He has shown might with his arm,
Dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.
He has thrown down rulers from their thrones,
And lifted up the lowly.
The hungry he has filled with good things,
The rich he has sent away empty.

Reflection

Jesus came into the world and turned the order of things upside down. He declared that the last would be first and the first would be last, that the lowly would be given the best portions and the powerful and arrogant would be humbled. That is why he was popular with the masses but ran into trouble with the authorities of his time.

Day 24: Righteousness

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

Reading (Matthew 5: 17-20)

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill them. I assure you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest part of the law will be done away with. Therefore, anyone who breaks even the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be least in the kingdom of heaven. But he who obeys and teaches these commandments will be greatest. Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Song (Psalm 119)

Lord, teach me the way of your laws;
I shall observe them with care.
Give me insight to observe your teaching,
To keep it with all my heart.
Lead me in the path of your commands,
For that is my delight.
Direct my heart toward your decrees
And away from unjust gain.
Turn my eyes from what is worthless,
By your way give me life.
See how I long for your precepts;
In your justice give me life.

Reflection

Human nature sees the moral law as a burden. It sets limits on our natural inclinations, and holds us in check. It demands conformity with norms imposed by society. It stifles our freedom.

But to the man who is growing in faith, who has been touched by the love of God and has made God the focus of his life, *the law is a delight*.

To the man of faith the law of God is not a burden but a joy, because it sets before him the clear path to eternal happiness. He is no longer lost in a world of confusion and uncertainty. He is no longer in darkness. The law of God is a light that shows him the way to security and peace. He embraces it as a gift from a loving Father, who does not leave his children lost in a bewildering world, but gives them the law of love to lead them home.

Prayer

God our Father, you place your law in our hearts to guide us through the journey of our earthly life. We give you thanks for your law that lights our path and assures us of a safe arrival at the end of our journey in our heavenly home.

Jesus introduced a different standard for measuring the worth of people. It is far different from conventional standards. It does not consider a person's wealth or talents, name recognition or prestige, power or influence. Instead it looks into the heart of a man or woman to see if she acknowledges her lowliness and opens herself to the love of God. It is God's standard for setting the value of a person. It declares that the worth of each person is inestimable, not because of his own merits or accomplishments, but because he is God's most precious creation.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you have said that the last will be first. You humbled yourself and took on the human condition to show us our worth. May we learn to see with the eyes of faith, that we may recognize each person as a brother or sister to be loved as you have loved us.

Day 25: The Merciful

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Reading (Luke 6: 27-36)

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other as well. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back.

For if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do as much. Rather love your enemies and do good to them. Then your reward will be great and you will children of the Most High, for he himself is good to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful as your Father is merciful.

Song (Isaiah 53)

Even as many were amazed at him,
So marred was his appearance,
So shall he startle many nations.
Because of him kings shall stand speechless.

There was in him no stately bearing
To make us look at him.
He was spurned and avoided by men,
A man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity,
One from whom men hide their faces,
Spurned, and we held him in no esteem.

Through his suffering he will justify many.
Because he surrendered himself to death
He shall take away the sins of many,
And win pardon for their offenses.

Day 26: Purity of Heart

Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.

Reading (Deuteronomy 6: 4-9)

Hear, O people! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and
with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Keep in your heart these words that I am commanding
you today. Recite them to your children. Speak of them
when you are at home and when you are away, when
you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on
your hand and as an emblem on your forehead. Write
them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Song (Psalm 24)

Who will ascend the mountain of the Lord?
Who will stand in his holy place?
Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
Who are not devoted to idols,
Who have not sworn falsely.

They will receive blessings from the Lord,
And justice from their saving God.
Such are the people who love the Lord,
Who seek the face of God.

Reflection

The pure of heart are those who give their love entirely to God, who make God the center of their life, and who devote themselves singlemindedly to doing his will. Because they love God with all their heart, their every thought, word, and deed begins and ends with him.

The pure of heart cannot be found on earth, but only in heaven. We live in this world with our hearts divided. We are bound to the things of this world, yet we long for heaven. As we journey through life, we must purify our

heart by removing one by one the things that weigh us down and hinder us as we make our way home to God.

Yet we do not purify ourselves by becoming empty, but by becoming full. Purity of heart is not sterility of heart. We become pure not by withholding our love but by giving it. Love is like nothing else in this world: if we hold onto it, it disappears; if we give it away, it becomes abundant.

Prayer

God our Father, we accept with joy your commandment to love you with all our heart. Pour forth your Spirit into our hearts and fill us with the purifying power of your love. May we share your love with everyone we encounter, so that your love may be abundant in this world as it is in heaven.

Reflection

When Jesus told his disciples to love their enemies, he gave them a commandment that was unheard of. He gave them - and us - a completely new way to conduct human affairs. He commands us to disregard the distinction between friend and enemy, between countryman and foreigner, between those who are like us and those who differ from us, and instead to be merciful to all as our Father is merciful.

Jesus took this commandment to its limit in his own life. He submitted to the ultimate injustice of being put to death in innocence; and he even went so far as to forgive his persecutors at the point of death.

By submitting to his Father's will Jesus shows us the way to eternal life. Just as the Father upheld him when he gave himself into the hands of his enemies by raising him from the dead and exalting him at his right hand in heaven, so he upholds us when we follow his commandment of love and mercy.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, you showed mercy even to your worst enemies, and thus overcame hatred and sin and reconciled all people to yourself. May we follow your example in showing mercy to our enemies, that we may be worthy of the salvation you have won for us.

Day 27: Peace

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Reading (John 20: 19-22)

On the evening of the first day of the week, when the disciples were together behind locked doors for fear of the Jews, Jesus entered the place where they were staying and stood in their midst. He said to them, "Peace be with you."

Then he showed them the wounds in his hands and in his side. They were overjoyed at seeing him. Again he said to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Song (Zechariah 9: 9-10)

Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion,
Shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem.
See, your king shall come to you.
A just savior is he,
Humble, and riding on a donkey,
On a colt, the foal of a donkey.

He shall banish the chariot from Ephraim,
And the war horse from Jerusalem.
The warrior's bow shall be banished,
And he shall proclaim peace to the nations.
His dominion shall be from sea to sea,
And to all the ends of the earth.

Reflection

The peace that the Lord Jesus brings is not peace as the world understands it. It is not the absence of conflict,

Day 28: Witness

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Reading (Matthew 10: 16-28)

I am sending you like sheep among wolves. You will be led before governors and kings for my sake. Do not worry about how you are to speak. What you are to say will be given to you at that moment. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

So do not be afraid of them. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed. What I say to you in the dark, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

Song (Jeremiah 1: 5-10)

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
Before you were born I dedicated you,
A prophet to the nations I appointed you.

"Ah, Lord God!" I said,
"I know not how to speak; I am too young."

Say not, "I am too young."
To whomever I send you, you shall go;
Whatever I command you, you shall speak.
Have no fear before them,
Because I am with you to deliver you.

See, I place my words in your mouth!
This day I appoint you
Over nations and over kingdoms,
To root up and to tear down,
To overthrow and to destroy,
To build and to plant.

Reflection

Most Christians do not suffer persecution for their faith today. And in those places where Christians are opposed, it is often for social and cultural reasons rather than for matters of faith. But the reason why few are persecuted *for their faith* is that very few actually live by the radical message of the gospel. There is simply not enough evidence to convict us of being Christians.

If we were to live by the gospel, the world would not stand for it. The world would not stand for our challenging it to live by the will of God rather than by our own will, or to see that all are treated with the dignity and justice they deserve as children of God.

To be a follower of Jesus we must listen attentively to his words. We must reflect and pray in solitude, and ponder the message of the gospel in our hearts. Then when the time comes we must speak out, not necessarily with eloquence or with profound insight, but with the simple, straightforward truth that is given to us by the Spirit.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you have called us to carry on the work of salvation by taking the message of the gospel to all the world. Give us the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may have the faith to live by your word, and the courage to proclaim it wherever you send us.

not acquiescence to the state of things as they are. It is not peace through compromise or appeasement. It is peace founded on the reign of God. It is peace based on the justice of God.

The peace of Christ is spread to the world through the faith and action of his followers. They are empowered by the Spirit of Christ to be peacemakers. They do not hide behind locked doors, but stand in the breach against the forces of evil - against ignorance, hatred, greed, oppression, exploitation. They know that the time for tranquility and rest will come later. First they must challenge the forces of evil that deprive the world of true peace.

They enter the conflict under the banner of a mighty leader, the Lord Jesus, who leads them not with a show of force, but in quiet humility. They follow him without fear, because they have the assurance of faith that the weakness of God far surpasses the might of men.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace, you have promised lasting peace to those who place their trust in you. Open our hearts to your word, that peace may reign in us, and through us be spread to all the world.

Day 29: Faith

Faith guides us through the darkness of this world to eternal life.

Reading (Matthew 16: 13-18)

Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

Then he asked them, "Who do *you* say I am?"

Simon Peter spoke up: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!"

Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are *Peter*, and upon this rock I will build my church."

Song (Psalm 115)

Not to us, Lord, not to us
But to your name give glory
Because of your faithfulness and love.
Why should the nations say,
"Where is their God?"
Our God is in heaven,
Whatever God wills is done.

Those who fear God trust in the Lord,
Who is their help and their shield.
The Lord remembers us and will bless us.
He will bless those who fear the Lord,
Small and great alike.

Day 30: Hope

The journey of life will not come to a dead end, but will lead us to our Father's house.

Reading (John 11: 20-27)

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him. When she saw him she said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother Lazarus would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask of God he will give you."

Jesus said to her, "Your brother Lazarus will rise."

She said in answer, "I know he will rise in the resurrection on the last day."

Then Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live; and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Martha replied, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."

Song (Psalm 16)

I bless the Lord who counsels me;
Even at night my heart exhorts me.
I keep the Lord always before me;
With the Lord at my right hand
I shall never be shaken.

Therefore, my heart is glad, my soul rejoices;
My body also rests secure.
For you will not abandon me to Sheol,
Nor let your faithful servant see the pit.
You will show me the path to life,
Abounding joy in your presence,
Delights at your right hand forever.

Reflection

Man living in the world faces a choice between hope and despair. He can live with the conviction that his life has meaning and will one day be fulfilled; or he can make his way aimlessly through life with nothing to look forward to.

The man without hope is barely alive. His wish is to lie down in sleep and never wake up. His desire is to one day cease to be. Man reaches this state of despair when he refuses to be touched by love, when he chooses to be alone in the world and love no one.

The man of hope is one who has been loved and has loved in return, and desires that this love be without end. This love has given him the assurance that the journey of life will not come to a dead end, but will lead him to his Father's house, from whence he was first loved. He knows that there he will find eternal happiness, for he will find fulfillment in the never ending love of God.

Prayer

God our Father, you are the source of hope for a world in darkness and despair, for you give us the promise of eternal life. You sent your beloved Son to be a light to the world and to lead us on the sure path to happiness. May we remain faithful to his word until our hope is fulfilled in heaven.

Reflection

Faith is a gift from God. It is offered to all men and women, but not all accept it. Those who do are guided by the light of truth. Those who do not remain in the darkness.

With faith man comes to know spiritual truth. This truth cannot be discovered by man using his own intellect; it can be known only by revelation. What is revealed to the man of faith is not a private, but a historical and communal truth.

It is the truth that God sent his own beloved Son into the world to reconcile all things to himself. This Son gathered followers to himself, and they were eyewitnesses to his resurrection. They received the truth of faith from him and passed it on to the generations who came after them. This same faith is passed on to us.

What we have received is not true because it passes the test of human scrutiny, but because it comes from God. The community of believers who have passed it on to us have not added to it; rather they have preserved it faithfully as they received it from the beginning.

The faith that we profess today is the faith of our fathers, a holy faith, that guides us through the darkness of this world to eternal life.

Prayer

God our Father, you endowed us with the gift of intellect that we might know you, worship your glory, and find joy in your love for us. Open our hearts to the gift of faith, that we might grow in knowledge of the truth until we see you face to face in the kingdom of heaven.

Day 31: Love

Love is a commitment to leave no one behind on the journey to God.

Reading (1 Corinthians 13: 1-8)

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have the faith to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and even hand over my body, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

Song (Psalm 63)

O God, you are my God,
For you I long.
For you my body yearns;
For you my soul thirsts,
Like a land parched,
Lifeless, and without water.

So I look to you in the sanctuary
To see your power and glory.
For your love is better than life,
My lips offer you worship.

Reflection

Love is one of the most overused and least understood words in any language. Yet it is the secret to understanding the very meaning of human life. Nothing

is more important to our life than to understand what love is and to be sanctified by it.

Love is not a feeling. Leaving aside its spurious meanings, love in its essence is thoughts, words, and deeds that promote the good of others. At the heart of love is God, who created us for goodness, and calls us forth to fulfill that goodness in union with him. When we love, we take part in the creative work of God.

We are all on a journey to God. Love is a commitment to leave no one behind. The only things we will take to heaven are our acts of kindness. May we not go to heaven empty-handed, but take with us a treasure of goodness to help enrich the kingdom.

Prayer

God our Father, you created us for love. May we open our hearts to your love, that you may lead us to the eternal kingdom you have prepared for us. And may the light of your love shine in the world through us, that all your children be brought to the joy of eternal life.