



## Opening Responses

As the day draws into its close,  
**we gather to watch and to pray.**

Open our hearts and ready our lips, O God,  
**and our mouths shall proclaim your praise.**

Our help is in the name of the Lord  
**who made heaven and earth.**

## Space for Silent Reflection on the Past Day

### Prayers of Renewal

Jesus told his disciples that if they wanted to follow him,  
they needed to deny themselves, and take up their crosses.

God calls us into that same movement  
of dying to sin and rising again with Christ.

In this quiet space for reflection,  
let us bring to God those things in need of renewal:

We bring to you those things for which we are sorry:  
**Restore us and heal us.**

We bring to you the times we've failed to love one another:  
**Restore us and heal us.**

We bring to you the burdens we carry and sorrows we bear:  
**Restore us and heal us.**

We bring to you the injustices and oppression in our world:  
**Restore us and heal us.**

We bring to you the failings and disunity of your Church:  
**Restore us and heal us.**

God of our journeys and false starts and new beginnings,  
you walk with us all of our days,  
and nothing in life or death or all creation  
can separate us from your love in Jesus Christ.

Thank you that you forgive us our faults and mistakes,  
share with us in our worries and struggles,  
and lead us onwards into fullness of life.

We offer these prayers in the name of Jesus.  
**Amen**

## An Evening Hymn

Before the ending of the day,  
Creator of the world, we pray  
That with thy wonted favour thou  
Wouldst be our guard and keeper now.

From all ill dreams defend our eyes  
From nightly fears and fantasies;  
Tread underfoot our ghostly foe  
That no pollution we may know.

O Father, that we ask be done  
Through Jesus Christ, thine only Son  
Who, with the Holy Ghost and thee,  
doth live and reign eternally.  
**Amen**

## Psalm of the Day – Psalm 71:1 – 14

*At the end of the psalm, the following is said:*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;  
**as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever.**  
**Amen**

**Reading**     Matthew 21:23 – 27

### Reflection

What gives you the authority to do these things? This question takes us to the core of the dispute between Jesus and the representatives of the Jerusalem Temple establishment played out in the early days of Holy Week. Authority was a thorny and complex issue for the folk charged with maintaining an institution at the heart of Israel's life but that was compromised by the context in which it operated. Since 63 BCE, Palestine had been occupied by the Roman Empire and it was they who appointed the High Priest from among the existing wealthy elite. This meant that Caiaphas and company needed to keep them sweet if they wanted to maintain their limited authority, while having one eye upon how they were perceived by the people of Judea, and maintaining enough distinctiveness from Rome to avoid giving more ammunition to groups of religious zealots bent on violent revolution. Walking this tight rope was not easy, and the last thing they needed was a radical like Jesus coming along and unbalancing the situation with his display of messianic symbolism and overturning the traders' tables in the courtyard (21:1 – 17). It is not surprising, therefore, that they questioned Jesus's right to do these things, and to teach about the Kingdom of God (21:3).

Didn't this man see what trouble he was causing, and the risks to Judea if he continued?

Jesus responded to all this hostility with a question of his own, about the baptism proclaimed by his older cousin. In the wilderness by the River Jordan, John the Baptist called the people of Judea to repent, in preparation for the coming of the Messiah (3:1 – 17). This ministry had also attracted hostility from the Temple establishment, because it represented competition to their monopoly on forgiveness of sins, and so no doubt they were happy when Herod locked him up. Jesus effectively asked them whether John's authority was derived from a genuine mandate from God or from human sources (21:23), placing them in a real bind. If they agreed it was from God then why did they not take him seriously? If they claimed that John wasn't acting upon divine authority, then they knew the crowds would be angry, as they saw John as a prophet. Hence, the chief priests, scribes and elders decided that the safest course of action was to say that they did not know (21:27). Having secured this confession, Jesus was then able to refuse to answer the question (21:27), in the process illuminating how compromised the Temple establishment had become.

This episode raises challenging questions for the Church, given that many in our society no longer regard its efforts to speak in the public square as having authority, if they ever did. In some ways, we might see this as a positive thing, as it is arguable that liberalisation of the laws around various human rights issues has only become possible because churches no longer hold a dominant position in the nation's moral discourse. Yet, in my opinion, we still struggle to be prophetic; perhaps we are still too intertwined with the power structures of our day. What would it be like, I wonder, if the Church was authentically living and working on the margins, and able to speak with that same prophetic courage of Jesus in Jerusalem? It would challenge beliefs about ecclesiastical authority, but maybe that it just what we need...

## Responding to the Word

Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

**Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.**

For you have redeemed me, Lord God of truth.

**I commend my spirit.**

Glory to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

**Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.**

Keep me as the apple of your eye.

**Hide me under the shadow of your wings.**

## Canticle – The Song of Simeon (Nunc Dimittis)

Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace:  
your word has been fulfilled.

My own eyes have seen the salvation  
which you have prepared in the sight of every people;  
A light to reveal you to the nations  
and the glory of your people Israel.

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be for ever.**

**Amen**

## Prayers of Intercession

Almighty God,  
as we stand at the foot of the cross of your Son,  
help us to see and know your love for us,  
so that in humility, love and joy, we may place at his feet  
all that we have and all that we are;  
through Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen**

## The Lord's Prayer

## A Prayer of Journeying On

As you journey onwards in God's love,  
towards the foot of the cross of Christ,  
may you step forward boldly and act justly,  
so that through you, all may know that they matter.  
And the blessing of God,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be upon you, and all whom you love and pray for,  
now and for ever. **Amen**