

A Liturgy for When We Cannot Meet

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When circumstances and concern for the common good keep us from gathering to share the Eucharistic Feast in person, we gather to pray, separated in the body, yet one in the spirit and one in Christ Jesus.¹

Before beginning, gather a candle and matches (or a small lamp), a Bible, a piece of bread, and a small glass of water.

CENTERING: *Recognizing the presence of God*²

God is with us. [We are not alone.]

Christ is with us. [The Risen One has met us,
blessed and fed us on the road that leads us home.]

The community of the Holy Spirit is with us.

[We gather with the communion of the saints in light
throughout history and with God's people around the world.]

With brothers and sisters, absent in body but united in Spirit, we pray:

Holy One, Trinity of grace and power,
Maker and Mother, Beloved and Lover, Father and Friend:
Thanks be to you, O God!

[You are ever the father who gives us bread, not stones.
You are the mother who never forgets we're her own.
From the beginning of life to the closing of time,
you are the One who is with us to the end.]

And so, with all who breathe on earth and all who sing in heaven,
we praise your name and join Creation's song:

¹ This service may be done alone, with another, or in a digitally-gathered community. Bracketed material may be read by a second voice. Note: At this point in digital technology, we recommend that one other voice speak the responses, rather than multiple people speaking at once.

² Adapted from Great Thanksgiving Four by Heather Murray Elkins in *The Book of Offices and Services of The Order of Saint Luke*, OSL Publications, 2012, pp. 22ff.

(said or sung or read silently)

[Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done in whom this world rejoices,
The one eternal God, whom earth and heaven adore,
for thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.]

Martin Rinkart, 1663, translated by Catherine Winkworth, 1858

WORD AND RESPONSE ³

First reading: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Light the candle.

[Jesus Christ, you are the light of the world. You are our Risen Lord in whom light has conquered darkness.]

Sit silently in the light, feeling the power and presence of the Risen Christ.

Second reading: Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." (John 14:6)

Hold the Bible.

[Here in our hands is the story of God's covenant of steadfast love with God's people. We are assured of God's presence with us at all times and places – even in the midst of fear and difficulty.]

Sit quietly and absorb the stories of God's love and grace that can sustain you wherever you are.

Third reading: On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'" (John 7:37-38)

Hold the glass of water in your hands.

[Without water, there can be no life. In creation, the Spirit of God hovered over the water and brought forth light. God brought John to the Jordan River to call us to repentance. We were nourished in the water of the womb. We were baptized by water and the Spirit into God's family. Water reminds us of the gifts of creation that God has so abundantly given us, and of the love and grace we have all received.]

³ All readings are from *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, Thomas Nelson, Inc. Nashville, TN 37214.

Drink the water slowly. Feel it flow into your body. Know that God's love is flowing into your body and soul right now.

Fourth reading: Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35)

Take a piece of bread in your hands.

[Christ broke bread and fed the multitudes. Christ broke bread and formed a new covenant with his closest friends and with all who break bread in remembrance of him. Christ was made known to his disciples in the breaking of the bread. Bread reminds us that, just like individual grains of wheat are gathered together to make a single loaf, we who are scattered are one body in Christ.]

Break and eat the piece of bread that you are holding. Remember the times you have received bread in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Remember those who gathered with you. Remember the presence of Christ in that moment. Be assured that Christ is with you in every moment of your life. Sit silently and allow Christ's love to surround you.

PRAYER

In the silence after every petition (marked by . . .) specific names or situations may be spoken aloud or held closely in the heart.

Lord Jesus Christ, light of the world, you speak to us words of life.

Call forth in us rivers of living water, and feed our deepest hunger.

[In trying times, in times of loneliness or confusion, in times we feel most alone, remind us that we are never alone, for you are with us always.]

Hear us now, and pray for us in our weakness with sighs too deep for words, as we lift up:

- ❖ Those whom we love – those present with us and those from whom we are separated . . .
- ❖ The prisoners, and those held captive physically, mentally, or spiritually . . .
- ❖ The sick and the suffering . . .
- ❖ Those who care for the sick, both medical caregivers and families who wait and watch with them . . .
- ❖ Those who mourn the loss of loved ones, the loss of freedom, the loss of security, the loss of a livelihood, or the loss of a sense of order and control . . .
- ❖ Those with more questions than answers, and all who long for your guiding light for their path . . .
- ❖ The lonely, the isolated, and those who long for a loving touch . . .
- ❖ Those whose remaining days on this earth are few, and for those walking in the valley of the shadow of death . . .
- ❖ Those whom we too easily forget, and those whose needs are known only to you . . .

[God of compassion, hear our prayers;
fill us with your grace, and inspire us to be instruments of mercy and hope,
for we pray in Christ's name. Amen.]

GOING FORTH

(said or sung or read silently)

[When we are living, it is in Christ Jesus,
and when we're dying, it is in the Lord.
Both in our living and in our dying,
Somos del Señor, Somos del Señor
(We belong to God, we belong to God.)]

In these days of anxiety and uncertainty,
may we go forth in Christ's name into all our interactions (digital or otherwise)
as a people of hope.

[May we be for the world the body of Christ, broken and shared to be a blessing for all.]

May God bless us and keep us.
May God's face shine upon us and be gracious to us.
May God look upon us with kindness and give us peace.⁴ [Amen.]

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⁴ Adapted from Numbers 6:24-26.