



'Where are they now?' - Home Mission Sunday 2007

Prayers of the Faithful

These intercessions are offered as suggestions. Please feel free to choose from them and adapt them to your local community and its needs. This document is available in MS Word if you would prefer to download the text directly and edit as required for your parish. Please see www.caseresources.org.uk

Celebrant: *On this Home Mission Sunday let us intercede like Moses for all God's people.*

For Christians throughout the world, that we may freely share with others the mercy of God which we have tasted.

[pause]

Lord in Your mercy, **HEAR OUR PRAYER**

As we celebrate Home Mission Sunday, we pray for CASE, the Catholic Agency to Support Evangelisation. May they enthuse Catholics for mission, equip us for evangelisation, and help us engage with the cultures of England and Wales so we can live our faith in a changing world.

[pause]

Lord in Your mercy, **HEAR OUR PRAYER**

For those who have left the practice of their faith for whatever reason, that they may experience the warmth of God's welcome back through our words and actions.

[pause]

Lord in Your mercy, **HEAR OUR PRAYER**

For those weighed down by guilt over past sins or sadness at their present difficulties, that they may come to Christ and receive His forgiveness and new life.

[pause]

Lord in Your mercy, **HEAR OUR PRAYER**

For the sick in our parish, especially... *[insert the names of parishioners]*, that they may place their trust in the healing power of Jesus.

[pause]

Lord in Your mercy, **HEAR OUR PRAYER**

For those who have died recently, especially... *[insert the names of parishioners]* and those whose anniversaries occur about this time... *[insert the names of parishioners]*, that God will show them His merciful face.

[pause]

Lord in Your mercy, **HEAR OUR PRAYER**

Let us ask Mary to be a Mother to all those in need, especially those who have lost their way:

Hail Mary ...

Let us pause in silence to make our personal petitions.....

Celebrant: *Father, as we come to celebrate this Sacrament of Your love today, may our lives radiate to others the mercy we hope to receive from You at this altar, and may that mercy extend to all people, no matter how far they may feel themselves to be from You; through Christ Our loving Lord, **AMEN.***

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Homily Notes

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Religion has a reputation in some quarters of our society as a cause of warfare or violence.

Perhaps a more justified accusation is that it can be a cause of complacency and an inward-looking attitude. The Pharisees and scribes exemplify this when they complain about the welcome Jesus gave to sinners. In England and Wales we have our own experience of a 'Catholic ghetto,' for all sorts of historical reasons.

The stories Jesus tells in today's Gospel are a powerful challenge to **look out** beyond the walls of the Church, and to **go out** in search of the lost. In particular, the Prodigal Son, who began life in the bosom of the family but left, is a symbol of those many people who have left the Catholic Church and whom we find it hard to give the right name to: lapsed Catholics, returning Catholics, non-practising... - no label can adequately express the reality behind so many different stories.

There are many reasons why people leave the Catholic Church: some disagree with Church teaching or practice, some may have had a clash with a priest or another parishioner, while others just drift away for no obvious reason.

Surveys also show that many 'lapsed Catholics' would consider coming back if only they were asked. That is the very practical challenge of today's readings to us all, and one that is being taken up by CASE, the Catholic Agency to Support Evangelisation, which today, Home Mission Sunday, is inviting every parish in England and Wales to think of ways to welcome lapsed Catholics back into the Church. They are suggesting that Christmas is a good focus for this, but essentially it's up to us to decide what we want to do and how to go about it.

Every one of us surely knows at least one Catholic who no longer practises their faith. Furthermore, every one of us has been touched by the Mercy of God which is the theme of all today's readings. We are not, please God, like the Pharisees who thought they were better than others, but we know we are only here in Church today because God's mercy has touched us. Like St Paul in today's second reading, we can rejoice that mercy was shown us despite our unworthiness and the grace of Christ has given us faith and love.

If that is so, surely the next step for each of us is to extend that mercy to others, and where better to begin than our fellow Catholics who no longer practise? As Pope John Paul II reminded the Church many times, this concern for others cannot be left to a group of specialists but is the bread and butter of our Christian lives. It does not demand special training or skills, but each of us can play our part in this joint effort by a simple word or a kindly action.

Most of us are now familiar with the RCIA as a 'safe place' where those wanting to become Catholics can explore what that means with like-minded people. Wouldn't it be wonderful if there were a similar group in this parish to which we could invite those who would like to explore returning to the Church they left, a place where that mercy of the Father towards the Prodigal Son could be experienced?

There are various groups in this diocese and others which work with CASE and have experience in these matters, and so today I invite you to join with me in thinking of ways we can welcome back non-practising Catholics in this parish. If we wanted to feed the hungry or look after refugees, we wouldn't dream of just praying for them or telling them in a vague way that they were welcome to come and find help. We would think of concrete ways to extend that help to them. It's the same with spiritual hunger: it's not enough to say that the lapsed are always welcome to return if they choose, it's not even enough to give generously to today's Home Mission Sunday collection, though I hope you will do that. We must turn that welcome into something concrete, and I invite you to let me know how you think we should do that in this parish.