**May 2023 Celebration**

Welcome to the May Prayer and the ninth in a series of twelve. Each month we will explore different themes and different ways of praying which we hope you will find helpful as ways in which to encounter God. *The Provincial Spirituality Group in the Church in Wales.*

**Introduction**

The word celebration is derived from the Latin *celebrare* which has a variety of meaning including *assembling to honour, to meet together to praise*, all of which are very appropriate for this month as we celebrate together several major festivals in our Church’s year including Rogation, Ascension and Pentecost. We also have the opportunity to remember with gratitude individuals who have contributed to the deepening of faith through their work and worship, including St. Asaph (May 5th), Julian of Norwich (May 8th) and St. Melangell (May 28th).

This month is also a time when we can remember with joy and gladness the blessings we have received in our own lives, including our own particular gifts and talents. Perhaps one of the challenges for us now is to reflect on the ways we use these gifts in all aspects of our lives.

**Prayer**

Loving God, you know who we are.

You know our strengths and weaknesses,

Our hopes and fears.

Be a bright flame before us,

A guiding star above us,

A smooth path beneath us,

A kindly shepherd behind us,

Today and ever more.

*Columba (521-597).*

**Reflection**

*How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land* reflected the psalmist and perhaps we too may ask what there is to celebrate at this time when we face so many challenges in our lives. However, the concept of celebration is more than just having a good party (though these are not prohibited!) and includes the joyful yet perhaps sombre recognition that whatever our external circumstances, we are held in the loving care of God.

Our great festivals provide sparks of light in a world which can seem dark. Pentecost, for example, is a celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit bringing us many gifts from God. Rogation time, often seen as the time to “walk the bounds” of the parish, may be a time to walk our own bounds – to revisit questions about our identity and to unpack the challenging and thrilling concept of “knowing who we are in Christ”. This can include taking time to become aware of the gifts and talents which God has given us.

Everyone (regardless of age, health, etc!) has at least one of these gifts and as God is a generous giver, some people may be blessed with more than one gift. However, we may not realise or recognise the gifts that God had given us, or we may not be using them. God gives us gifts so that we may help and support others, not just for our own benefit.

This month is a time to thank God for the gifts he has given you and to explore what God wants to bestow on you for the future. Perhaps you are a good listener - you enjoy having conversations with people, you let the other person speak without interrupting and you actively try to understand what they are saying. Or perhaps you have the gift of encouragement – you are able to give encouragement to others who may be struggling. This is not a false optimism but a genuine ability to help others to see a way forward. Celebrate your gifts!

We are blessed with a wealth of treasures upon which to reflect during this month, and so we begin with some verses from the bible:

**Bible Passage** *Philippians 4: 4-7*

**4**Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! **5**Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. **6**Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **7**And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This passage is full of exhortations, many of which may seem a little challenging, but it ends on a life–giving assurance of God’s presence in our lives. You may find it helpful to spend a few moments reflecting on each of the verses:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! - *Spend a few moments bringing to mind those things in your life for which you can rejoice. Don’t limit yourself to the “big” events and include small things in your daily life – like seeing a flower bloom or stroking the cat.*

Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near- *What does “gentleness” mean to you? In what ways are you, or not, gentle?*

Do not be anxious about anything – *how do you respond to this exhortation? Does this seem impossible, possible, or maybe possible? Prayer includes sharing our deepest feelings and emotions, including when we are anxious, and so it is to speak with God as you would a friend.*

In every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God- *Is this your “go-to” response in every situation? Are there any events/situations which you do not want to bring to God?*

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus – *This is the call to rest in the presence of God and the feel God’s loving gaze upon you.*

**Prayer for the Month: Walking a Labyrinth**



[Photo by Ashley Batz on Unsplash – royalty free]

In Wales, walking as prayer has an ancient origin as many of our Celtic saints used to travel around, visiting different locations as they brought the message of the good news of Jesus Christ to Wales. This month’s prayer invites us not to walk for many miles like the saints, but to walk a labyrinth.

Labyrinths are ancient spiritual pathways found across the world and embraced by the Christian church as a walking pathway for prayer and reflection. If you do not have access to a labyrinth, you could use a finger labyrinth or draw one yourself. To find out more about labyrinths, where they are near you, a finger labyrinth or how to draw one, see the ‘other resources’ section.

A labyrinth is different from a maze. A maze can be fun but has dead-ends. In a labyrinth there is a clear path in and out and you can stop or leave at any time. Also, there is no right or wrong way to walk a labyrinth, no set pace. Just follow the path and you will always reach the centre – or the exit on the outward journey.

As you slowly walk the path it gives you time to think and reflect on the gifts you have been given on your journey through life and how you might use them. If using a drawn labyrinth slowly trace the path with your finger. There is no need to rush.

**Suggestions on how to walk a Labyrinth:**

Before you enter the labyrinth, pause for a moment to consider what to think or pray about.

You might like to imagine that Jesus is walking alongside you or you are walking towards him at the centre of the labyrinth.

Use the time walking around the labyrinth to simply slow down and reflect. Become of aware of all you see, hear, smell and can touch.

As you walk the labyrinth, you may wish to reflect on your journey of faith from your earliest memories up to the present day. Or to reflect upon the many gifts you have received along the way, ones to celebrate. What images, experiences, people come to mind?

As you walk, be aware of:

* + Times you felt a sense of love, hope, peace, or joy (the fruit of the Spirit).
	+ Times you felt tired, exhausted, drained, frustrated. Where was Jesus in this?

When you reach the centre, pause awhile and look around you. Become aware of Jesus presence with you in this moment. What are the gifts to celebrate at this moment? What are the gifts you have that can be shared with others?

As you walk out of the labyrinth reflect on the ways in which this time of reflection and prayer will influence your daily life, and how you will use your gifts.

When you have completed the labyrinth, you may want to spend a few moments noting down any reflections. Write, draw, doodle, or use symbols and images – whichever you feel most drawn towards.

**Concluding Reflection**

The great festivals of our church call us to celebrate together the gifts and grace of God. However, what of the small but no less important things we could celebrate in our own lives? Even if this is a hard time for you, what are the everyday or mundane things which you can celebrate? As you live through your day, notice all the small things for which you can give thanks and any occasions when you felt drawn closer to God. These are occasions for celebration too!

**Prayer:**

Generous God,

you looked at all that you made and proclaimed it ‘good’.

You give us precious gifts and wonderful occasions for celebration.

Help us to be grateful for the gifts we receive from others

and to be generous in using our gifts for the benefit of all.

All we have has come from you,

help us walk the path of life using these gifts for good.

Amen.

**Additional Resources:**

**Bible Passages for discerning gifts:**

Romans 12; 6-8

1 Peter 4: 9-11

1 Corinthians 12 : 7-14, 27.

**Poems:**

The Way through the Woods – Rudyard Kipling. Available at : <https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poem/poems_woods.htm>

The Road not taken – Robert Frost. Available at: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44272/the-road-not-taken>

**Music suggestion:**

Be Thou my vision, Oh Lord of my heart. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CMclLT_Hjg>

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cd14v0e1RWU>

One more step along the world I go. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jhAzbdKq6U>

**Books :**

Mourant, J. 2016. Listening to Your Life: 30 ways to discern direction for your future. Norwich: Canterbury Press.

Welsh, S., 2020. *Journey to Contentment: Pilgrimage principles for everyday life*. London: BRF.

Williams, D., 2011. *Labyrinth: Landscape of the Soul.* Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications.

**Other resources:**

**How to draw a simple labyrinth**: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Ug9diWb_fU>

**Locate a labyrinth near you :**

<https://labyrinthlocator.com/locate-a-labyrinth?action=locate&country=Wales&state>

Find out more about **St Asaph** who we remember on May 5th at

<https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=1568>

Find out more about **Julian of Norwich**, who we remember on May 8th at <https://julianofnorwich.org/pages/who-is-julian-of-norwich>

Find out more about **St Melangell,** who we remember on May 28th **at** [**https://stmelangell.org/saint-melangell/**](https://stmelangell.org/saint-melangell/)

**Finger Labyrinth Prayer Guide:**

<https://llandaff.contentfiles.net/media/documents/Finger_Labyrinth_Prayer_Guide.pdf>

**The labyrinth at Chartres:**

<https://www.cathedrale-chartres.org/en/cathedrale/monument/le-labyrinthe/>

**Next Month**

We hope that you have found these reflections and prayers helpful, and they may of course need thinking about and praying more than once. Next month our theme and prayers will look at images of God and praying with art.