



CHRISTIANS TOGETHER IN MALTA

Malta Ecumenical Council



ECUMENICAL SERVICE:

WEEK OF PRAYER

FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2021

Abide in my love
and you shall bear much fruit
(cf. Jn 15:5-9)

Chapel of Our Lady of Manresa
Archbishop's Curia, Floriana, Malta

Tuesday, 12th January 2021

*Due to current restrictions, the Ecumenical Service will
be broadcast on the social media channels of the
Archdiocese of Malta and other media
on Friday 22nd January 2021*

Heartfelt gratitude is due to:

His Grace Mgr Charles Jude Scicluna, Metropolitan Archbishop of Malta,
Mr Kevin Papagiorcopulo, Archbishop's Delegate for Media and
Head, Communications Office, Archdiocese of Malta,
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Mr Joe C. Aquilina for his collaboration

The Spiritual Congregation of Christians

This Ecumenical Service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2021 is being celebrated in the context of the worldwide extraordinary circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Service is being pre-recorded and will be broadcast on the social media channels of the Archdiocese of Malta, as well as other local media. The full text of this Service is digitally available, thus enabling members of different Churches and all men and women of good will to participate from the safety and comfort of their respective parishes, communities and homes.

Due to current restrictions, the only participants at the Service are the heads of only a few Churches and Christian Traditions in Malta and Gozo. They are representing all those of us who would have met at a church in the context of normal circumstances. As we join in praying together for Christian Unity, may we all be one in the Holy Spirit.

The participating ministers will not process into the venue, but will be seated in the chapel of Our Lady of Manresa at the Archbishop's Curia, prior to the commencement of the Service.

As meditative music will be played, His Grace Mgr Charles J. Scicluna, Metropolitan Archbishop of Malta, enters the chapel for the Ecumenical Service of Prayer for Christian Unity.

STAND

Words of Welcome in the name of the Holy Trinity

Archbishop Charles Scicluna: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Ministers: And with your spirit.

Archbishop Scicluna: Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, we have assembled here to pray for unity among Christians and reconciliation in the world, particularly in these challenging times when humanity is enduring physical, emotional and social suffering on account of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Divisions among Christians have existed for many centuries. This causes great pain and is contrary to God's will. We believe in the power of prayer. Together with Christians all over the world, we offer our prayers as we seek to overcome separation. Every cloud has a silver lining, and the difficulties we are experiencing have brought us closer to each other, even as members of different Churches and Christian Traditions.

The resources for this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity have been prepared by a female monastic community in Switzerland, composed of nuns coming from different Churches and Christian Traditions. The place, Grandchamp, is a place of ecumenical prayer, hospitality and common life, open to pilgrims and other visitors who are very warmly welcomed.

Our prayers and reflections, today, and during this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, are centred on the words of Jesus taken from the Gospel of John: "Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit." May the love and respect we show each other today as we pray for Christian unity be with us throughout the whole year.

Rev. Fr George-Alexandru Popescu (Rumanian Orthodox Church): It is the great desire of God, expressed by Jesus, that we might come to him and abide in him. He waits for us tirelessly, hoping that, united to him in love, we will bear fruit that will bring life to all. Faced with the difference of 'the other', we risk withdrawing into ourselves and seeing only that which separates us. But let us listen to how Christ calls us to abide in his love, and so bear much fruit.

In these moments of prayer, we remember the call of Christ, we turn to his love, to him who is the centre of our life. For the path of unity begins in our intimate relationship with God. Abiding in his love strengthens the desire to seek unity and reconciliation with others. God opens us up to those who are different from us. This is an important fruit, a gift of healing for the divisions within us, between us, and in the world.

Archbishop Scicluna: In peace let us pray to the Lord: Lord, you are the vinedresser who cares for us with love. You call on us to see the beauty of each branch united to the vine, the beauty of each person. And yet, too often the differences in others make us afraid. We withdraw into ourselves. Our trust in you is forsaken. Enmity develops between us. Come and direct our hearts toward you once again. Grant us to live from your forgiveness so that we may be together and praise your name.

Listening to the Living Word of God

Archbishop Scicluna: Father in heaven, open our hearts and minds to your Word.

Participants: Your words are spirit and life!

Archbishop Scicluna: Lead us to grow closer to each other in unity and charity.

Participants: Your word is a lamp on our path!

SIT

A Reading from the Prophet Ezekiel (15:1-8) will be proclaimed by Mgr Hector Scerri (Roman Catholic):

15 The word of the Lord came to me:

² O mortal, how does the wood of the vine surpass all other wood—

the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest?

³ Is wood taken from it to make anything?

Does one take a peg from it on which to hang any object?

- ⁴ It is put in the fire for fuel;
when the fire has consumed both ends of it
and the middle of it is charred,
is it useful for anything?
- ⁵ When it was whole it was used for nothing;
how much less—when the fire has consumed it,
and it is charred—
can it ever be used for anything!
- ⁶ Therefore thus says the Lord God: Like the wood of the vine
among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for
fuel, so I will give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ⁷ I will set
my face against them; although they escape from the fire, the
fire shall still consume them; and you shall know that I am the
Lord, when I set my face against them. ⁸ And I will make the
land desolate, because they have acted faithlessly, says the
Lord God.

***The Responsorial Psalm (Ps 80:7-19) will be proclaimed
by Rev. Fr Nomis Kuriakose (Syrian Orthodox Church of
the East):***

The response is: *Let your face shine, that we may be saved.*

- ⁷ Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.
- ⁸ You brought a vine out of Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.
- ⁹ You cleared the ground for it;
it took deep root and filled the land.

Response: *Let your face shine, that we may be saved.*

- ¹⁰ The mountains were covered with its shade,
the mighty cedars with its branches;
- ¹¹ it sent out its branches to the sea,
and its shoots to the River.
- ¹² Why then have you broken down its walls,
so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?
- ¹³ The boar from the forest ravages it,
and all that move in the field feed on it.

Response: *Let your face shine, that we may be saved.*

- ¹⁴ Turn again, O God of hosts;
look down from heaven, and see;
have regard for this vine,
¹⁵ the stock that your right hand planted.
¹⁶ They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;
may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance.

Response: *Let your face shine, that we may be saved.*

- ¹⁷ But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.
¹⁸ Then we will never turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.
¹⁹ Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Response: *Let your face shine, that we may be saved.*

STAND

Alleluia (instrumental)

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to John (15:1-17) will be proclaimed by Canon Simon Godfrey (Church of England):

15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are

gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

The Gospel passage will also be proclaimed in Serbian by Rev. Fr Risto Gorancic (Serbian Orthodox Church).

Alleluia (instrumental)

Biblical Reflection

A biblical reflection will be delivered by Rev. Beata Thane (St Andrew's Scots' Church).

Instrumental music

Lumière de Dieu (Grandchamp)

Maltese transl.: *Dawl t'Alla* (tr. Joe C. Aquilina)

All are invited to listen to the meditative music, and to devote these few minutes to spiritual reflection. The hymn is part of the musical repertoire of the Grandchamp monastic community.

STAND

The Nicene Creed

Archbishop Scicluna: Dear brothers and sisters, as we are united in the Lord Jesus Christ, let us proclaim our common faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Together: We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father,
who with the Father

and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism
for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen,

REMAIN STANDING

Prayers of Petition by the People of God

Fr Popescu: God of love, through Christ you said to us: "You did not choose me but I chose you". You seek us, you invite us to receive your friendship and abide in it. Teach us to respond more deeply to this invitation, and grow in a life that is ever more complete.

Participants: The joy of our heart is in God.

Fr Popescu: God of life, you call us to be praise in the midst of the world and to welcome one another as a gift of your grace. May your loving gaze, which rests upon each person, open us to receive each other just as we are.

Participants: The joy of our heart is in God.

Fr Popescu: God who gathers, you knit us together as one vine in your Son Jesus. May your loving Spirit abide in us at parish meetings and local ecumenical gatherings. Grant that together we might celebrate you with joy.

Participants: The joy of our heart is in God.

Fr Popescu: God of the one vineyard, you call us to abide in your love in all we do and say. Touched by your goodness, grant us to be a reflection of that love in our homes and workplaces. May we pave the way for bridging rivalries and overcoming tensions.

Participants: The joy of our heart is in God.

Mgr Scerri: God of life, you have created every human being in your image and likeness. We sing your praise for the gift of our many cultures, expressions of faith, traditions and ethnicities. Grant us the courage always to stand against injustice and hatred based on race, class, gender, religion, and fear of those not like ourselves.

Participants: God of peace, God of love, in you is our hope!

Mgr Scerri: Merciful God, you have shown us in Christ that we are one in you. Teach us to use this gift in the world so that believers of all faiths in every country may be able to listen to each other and live in peace.

Participants: God of peace, God of love, in you is our hope!

Mgr Scerri: O Jesus, you came into the world and shared fully in our humanity. You know the hardships of life for people who suffer in so many different ways. May the Spirit of compassion move us to share our time, life and goods with all those in need.

Archbishop Scicluna: God of peace, God of love, in you is our hope! Holy Spirit, you hear the fury of your wounded creation and the cries of those already suffering from climate change. Guide us toward new behaviours. May we learn to live in harmony as part of your creation. God of peace, God of love, in you is our hope!

Canon Godfrey: In the context of this Service of prayer, we are inspired by a text of Dorotheus of Gaza, a sixth-century hermit, monk and abbot. We are all called to be ministers of God's healing and reconciling love. This work can only be fruitful when we abide in God, as branches of the true vine which is Jesus Christ.

Although we have, by now, grown accustomed to the so-called 'social distance', and although a large number of us are participating in this Service from their homes, Dorotheus tells us that as we come closer to God we draw closer to one another. He invites us to imagine a circle drawn on the ground. Imagine that this circle is the world. The centre represents God, and the paths to the centre are different ways people live. When people living in this world, desiring to draw closer to God, walk toward

the centre of the circle to the extent that they move closer to the centre, to God, they move closer to one another. They are now much closer to one another and the 'social distance' is minimal. This is our ecumenical journey. This is indeed our ecumenical vocation.

Instrumental music

The Lord's Prayer

Archbishop Scicluna: One in Jesus Christ, let us pray together in the words he taught us.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

The Sign of Peace

Archbishop Scicluna: Our Lord is our strength. We are one in him because we have all received one Baptism. Let us greet each other and share the peace which is Christ's gift to us.

We are sent out together
to proclaim the Good News of Jesus

Archbishop Scicluna: Spirituality and solidarity are inseparably linked. Prayer and action belong together. When we abide in Christ, we receive the Spirit of courage and wisdom to act against all injustice and oppression. We now pray together the words of the prayer recited daily by the sisters of the Grandchamp community:

Together: Pray and work that God may reign.
Throughout your day let the Word of God breathe
life into work and rest.
Maintain inner silence in all things so as to dwell
in Christ.
Be filled with the spirit of the Beatitudes: joy,
simplicity, mercy.

The Final Blessing

*The Church leaders who are present join in proclaiming the
Prayer of Blessing.*

Church Leaders: May God the Father, the vinedresser who
called us from darkness into light, make us true bearers of God's
light and life.
Amen.

Church Leaders: May God the Son, the true vine, who
redeemed us by his precious blood, empower us to follow his
example in serving others.
Amen.

Church Leaders: May God the Holy Spirit, who is Lord and giver
of life, strengthen us to endure the challenges of life and reach
eternal salvation.
Amen.

Church Leaders: May the Almighty and Merciful God, Father,
Son and Holy Spirit, bless and protect us now and forever.
Amen.

Instrumental music