# Salt of the Earth / Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2016

## The 8 Days

### Day 1 - Let the stone be rolled away

Ezekiel 37:12-14

I am going to open your graves.

Psalm 71:19 -23

Your power and your righteousness, O God, reach the high heavens.

Romans 8:15-21

We suffer with him so that we may also be glorified.

Matthew 28: 1-10

He is not here: he has been raised.

#### Starting Point

**Reflections from the Catholic Youth Centre of the Archdiocese of Riga**

From their experience of organising an annual Ecumenical Way of the Cross, the CYCAR reflect on the meaning of the passion and resurrection in their context, and the Lord’s mighty acts that Christians are called to proclaim.

Latvia’s Soviet history continues to cast a shadow. The grief and pain of wounds inflicted are difficult to forgive and, like the stone at Jesus’ tomb, they can imprison us in a spiritual grave. Jesus’ resurrection is the earthshaking event that opens our graves, frees us from pain and bitterness, and re-unites us with our brothers and sisters who have been imprisoned and hurting too. And like Mary Magdalene we must “go quickly” from this great moment of joy to tell others what the Lord has done.

#### Reflection

##### The Stone

You have drawn the stone

over the door of your fine

and private tomb.

A cosy death this.

Night embraces the broken

body of Christ,

shrouded in complacency

on its solid rock of dogma.

Shush!

Let no one roll away the stone

lest you must go forth, whole,

in his footsteps

to meet the day’s challenge.

#### Questions

• There is an odd comfort about a tomb because it protects us from the strangeness and challenge of Christ’s resurrection. What is it in our lives that makes us resist the stone being rolled away?

• How can we share our experience of God with others?

#### Prayer

Risen Lord Jesus,

the stone was no barrier to you;

your resurrection brings love, new life, new challenges.

Give us strength and courage

to allow ourselves to believe this

and so to roll back the stones that imprison us,

embrace the glory of the Easter morning,

and meet the believers from whom we are separated.

In your name, O risen Lord, we pray. Amen.

#### Go and Do

* Exchange stones between churches with a word of peace or blessing written on each stone creating a cairn in each place of worship. When you hold or see these stones pray that each fellowship and congregation would be living stones in your community.
* Together tidy up your local community garden/neglected graves in your cemetery.
* Blessed are those who mourn – In Colombia names are written on stones to commemorate the disappeared. Visit Go and Do to read Maria’s story.

### Day 2: Called to be heralds of joy

**Isaiah 61: 1-4**

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me.

**Psalm 133**

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

**Philippians 2:1-5**

Make my joy complete: be of the same mind.

**John 15: 9-12**

I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you.

#### Starting Point

**Reflections from the creators of Christian programming at Latvian State Radio**

In the Soviet era a Christian presence through public media was impossible in Latvia. Since independence, Latvian State Radio broadcasts Christian programmes providing a forum for leaders from diverse churches to encounter one another. This public witness of mutual respect, love and joy contributed to the spirit of Latvian ecumenical life.

The joy of the Gospel calls Christians to live the prophecy of Isaiah: “…to bring good news to the oppressed”.

When we are saddened by our own suffering, we may lack the vigour to proclaim the joy that comes from Jesus. Even when we feel unable to give anything to anyone, by bearing witness to the little that we have, Jesus multiplies it in us and in those around us. When we love one another as Jesus loves us, so we discover mutual love and joy at the heart of our prayer for unity.

#### Reflection

**Good news**

Good news indeed!

Such nice people,

in such a nice part of town:

 no immigrants,

no offenders,

no prison.

A new vicar:

young, white, and thankfully male,

to match the new church roof

and the state of the art

kitchenette

that cost thousands.

The poor?

Ah yes. The poor...

Isn’t something sent

to a place called the Third World?

And doesn’t someone collect tins and stuff

for a Food Bank somewhere?

But this is a good area.

The sleepy stillness

of its Sundays knows

no sigh of need,

no howl of pain,

no cry of despair.

#### Questions:

• Pope Francis writes of the ‘joy of the gospel’. What do you think the joy of the gospel is for the world and for the churches?

• Joy is Christ’s gift, and he gives it through other people. What can you receive from other Christians so that Jesus’ joy may be in you, inspiring you to witness?

#### Prayer

Lord Jesus, Lord of joy,

the world craves good news;

the world craves your love and joy.

Fill us with that love and joy.

Help us to see the plight of others,

to hear the sighs of need,

 the howls of pain

 the cries of despair,

and to respond, always, in the love and joy

of you, our Saviour and our Lord. Amen

#### Go and Do

* Agree on a song of joy to be sung in each place of worship during the offering.
* Invite your local community to participate in an activity you enjoy doing together. e.g. a picnic or a walk.
* Blessed are the poor in spirit – in Ethiopia joy is being brought to communities living in poverty. Visit Go and Do to read Adi’s story.

### Day 3 - The witness of fellowship

**Jeremiah 31:10-13**

They shall come and sing aloud.

**Psalm 122**

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

**1 John 4:16b-21**

Those who abide in love, abide in God.

**John 17:20-23**

That they may become completely one.

#### Starting Point

**This reflection is inspired by Chemin Neuf. http://www.chemin-neuf.org/**

Chemin Neuf is an international Catholic community with an ecumenical vocation that has been present in Latvia since the early 2000s.

Catholic and Lutheran members experience the joy of the ‘common life’ in Christ which is “to welcome, love, serve, pray and witness with Christians from diverse traditions”. They also experience the pain of disunity: “the world cannot believe that we are Jesus’ disciples when we cannot receive together the body and blood of Christ.” As a sign of this division, they place an empty paten and chalice on the altar during evening prayer.

#### Reflection

**‘That they may become completely one’**

You weep for your faith, for few

come to your festivals;

churches are desolate;

priests groan.

This, you say,

is a second exile.

“Our retrograde God

will restore his people,

as he restored Israel.”

Hear the word of the Lord,

as you sugar-coat doctrine,

water-down liturgy

in the futile pursuit

of a fractured mission:

“My people divided

and unrepentant

shall never rebuild Jerusalem”.

#### Questions

• What does it mean to you to be ‘one in Christ’?

• How does being ‘one in Christ’ help us to overcome the prejudices caused by centuries of division amongst Christians in our own islands as well as in mainland Europe?

#### Prayer

Lord Jesus, Lord of wholeness,

your prayer for unity amongst your disciples

has fallen on closed ears and on hard hearts.

Forgive us our closed ears,

forgive us our hard hearts

 which perpetuate suspicion,

 prejudice and division:

forgive us our fractured mission.

Open our hearts, eyes and minds

to your love and truth within all Christian people

and strengthen in us the resolve to work

to restore the unity of your Church and your creation

to the glory of your name. Amen

#### Go and Do

* Place a communion cup and plate centrally in your place of worship.
* Host a meal for the wider community.
* Blessed are the meek – in Brazil the Quilombola community are living meekly on the earth. Visit Go and Do to learn from their story.

### Day 4 - A Priestly People called to Proclaim the Gospel

**Genesis 17:1-8**

Your name shall be Abraham, the ancestor of a multitude of nations.

**Psalm 145:8-12**

The Lord is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love.

**Romans 10:14-15**

How can they believe in him if they have never heard about him?

**Matthew 13:3-9**

But some seeds fell on fertile soil.

#### Starting Point

**Reflections inspired by the Producers of ‘Vertikale’, a Sunday morning Christian programme on Latvian TV.**

They have learnt “that only when we recognise other Christians as brothers and sisters can we dare to take God’s Word into the public space.”

Words flood our lives: in conversation, from television, radio and social media. These words have the power to build up and to knock down. Much of this ocean of words can seem meaningless: diversion rather than nourishment. This ocean could drown us, where there is little meaning to grasp. But the saving Word we have heard has been thrown to us as a lifeline. It calls us into communion, and draws us into unity with others who have heard it too. Once we were not a people, but now we are God’s priestly people.

#### Reflection

**Words**

Priests of Babel, your words

are launched

like missiles

from your pulpits

to justify where you stand

and why you cannot

in conscience

but agree to disagree.

Words, words, words.

subtle, serpentine,

their poisonous shells

stifling in the soil the seed

of the one

Word

of the Kingdom of God.

#### Questions

• In what ways do your attitudes to other Christian traditions hinder the proclamation of the Gospel?

• Who hears the word of life from our lips?

#### Prayer

Lord Jesus,

the Word made flesh and sent to live among us,

the Word of truth, of love, of joy,

the Word of compassion, of acceptance, of unity.

Forgive our negative, critical, wounding and divisive thoughts and words.

Inspire us with your Spirit

and give us that unity which will empower us

to speak words of joy, acceptance and of reconciliation.

Make us life-giving, priestly people in our communities,

to your glory. Amen.

#### Go and Do

* Choose to read the Gospel of John together as churches.
* Hold a poetry evening for your local community.
* Blessed are the persecuted – sometimes the words of the persecuted and the persecutors need to be heard. Visit the Go and Do to hear about Israeli NGO, Breaking the Silence.

#### Day 5 - Listen to this dream

**Genesis 37:5-8**

Listen to this dream that I dreamed.

**Psalm 98**

O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous things.

**Romans 12: 9-13**

Love one another with mutual affection.

**John 21:25**

The world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

#### Starting Point

**Reflections from the Editors of an Ecumenical journal ‘Kas Mus Vieno?’ (‘what unites us?) founded in 2005 as a response to disunity.**

Christian disunity hurts. Churches suffer from their inability to be united as one family at the Lord’s Table. They suffer from rivalry and from histories of combativeness.

When Joseph shares his dream with his brothers they react with anger and violence as the dream implies they must bow down before him. In Egypt when they ultimately do bow before him they experience reconciliation and grace rather than the abasement and dishonour they feared.

Jesus, like Joseph’s story, unfolds a vision of unity to us. But like Joseph’s brothers, we are fearful of the vision when it implies we submit to the will of another. We fear what we might lose. But the vision is about gain: regaining our once separated brothers and sisters.

#### Reflection

**Joseph’s dream**

A dream of abasement this,

turned into a tale

of reconciliation

with suffering brothers

in a moment of grace,

foreshadowing the dream:

“that they may become

completely one”;

estranged brothers and sisters

reconciled

in prayer and mission.

This, you know, must be right.

Disunity hurts,

strife cripples;

and there is even

in your debatable doctrines

nothing that speaks

of a schism in heaven.

#### Questions

* What does it mean to place our dreams for Christian unity at the feet of Christ?
* In what ways does the Lord’s vision of unity call the churches to renewal and change today?

#### Prayer

Jesus, our suffering Lord,

our disunity as churches compounds your suffering

and causes pain to those who long

for your dream of unity to become reality.

Forgive us our part in continuing division;

grant us humility to hear your voice

ever urging reconciliation.

Inspire us to work tirelessly to be one

so that the world may believe in your name.

Amen

#### Go and Do

* Share your dreams for your church and the community with each congregation in your area.
* Share these dreams with local community leaders in a request for necessary changes to make them happen.
* Blessed are the pure in heart – in India those considered impure, the untouchables, dream of a time when all are treated equally. Visit Go and Do to hear Seema’s story.

#### Day 6 - Hospitality for Prayer

**Isaiah 62:6-7**

I have posted watchmen on your walls

**Psalm 100**

Shout with joy to the Lord all the earth!

**1 Peter 4:7b-10**

Be earnest and disciplined in your prayers.

**John 4:4-14**

Jesus, the spring of eternal life.

#### Starting Point

This reflection comes out of the experience of an ecumenical prayer chapel in the centre of the small town, Madona. The chapel grew out of the experience of praying through the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity together. The group represents Lutheran, Catholic and Orthodox traditions. They continue to join in round the clock prayer.

As long as God’s people are divided, and Christians are estranged from one another, we are like Jesus in Samaria, strangers in a foreign land, without safety, refreshment or a place of rest. Isaiah tells us of the Lord’s mighty act: he posted sentinels on the walls of Jerusalem so that his people could worship him in safety day and night.

In the Week of Prayer our churches and chapels become places of safety, rest and refreshment for people to join in prayer. The challenge from this week is to create more places and protected times of prayer, because as we pray together, we become one people.

#### Reflection

**Sentinels**

This is the one week

when, as you encircle the church

with prayer

you become,

all too briefly,

one people.

Persist in this prayer.

Persevere,

watchful as the sentinels

upon the walls of Jerusalem.

Be not silent.

Take no rest.

Give the Lord no respite

until, at last, he binds you

together and to himself:

one people,

one mission,

one God,

that the world may believe.

#### Questions

• What would it mean for the church to be ‘one’ in your locality?

• How important is it to pray together?

#### Prayer

Lord Jesus,

You asked your apostles to stay awake and pray with you.

May we offer the world sacred space and holy time

in which to find refreshment and peace,

so that praying together we come to know you more deeply.

Amen

#### Go and Do

* Organise a 12 hour prayer room where each church commits to one prayer slot. End with a joint time of prayer together.
* Put a prayer box, identify a tree or similar so the local community can post or tie on their prayers and requests for prayer.
* Blessed are the merciful. Many of Syria’s refugees to Lebanon are children. Visit Go and do to get a glimpse into their lives.

#### Day 7 - Hearts burning for unity

**Isaiah 52:7-9**

Messengers of peace.

**Psalm 126**

The Lord has done great things for us.

**Colossians 1:27-29**

Christ in you, the hope of glory!

**Luke 24:13-36**

Were not our hearts burning within us?

#### Starting Point

**Reflections inspired by Latvians who have come to faith through the Alpha Course** remaining open to learning from and being enriched by the gifts of other Christian communities. http://www.alpha.org/

The disciples who leave Jerusalem for Emmaus have lost their hope that Jesus was the Messiah and walk away from their community. It is a journey of separation and isolation. By contrast, they return to Jerusalem full of hope with a Gospel message on their lips. It is this resurrection message that drives them back into the heart of the community and into a communion of fellowship. So often Christians try to evangelise with a competitive spirit, hoping to fill their own churches. Ambition overrides the desire for others to hear the life-giving message of the Gospel. True evangelism is a journey from Emmaus to Jerusalem, a journey from isolation to unity.

#### Reflection

**The Road to Unity**

You have withdrawn,

baffled and disillusioned,

from the communion

of fellowship,

and taken the lonely road

to your own Emmaus:

a journey of separation

and isolation.

When your eyes are opened

to recognise

him who comes near

and goes with you,

explains to you

the scriptures,

blesses

and breaks the bread,

you will return

at once,

your hearts burning within you,

to your companions, gathered

together

in Jerusalem.

#### Questions

• Is mission just an excuse for perpetuating our own particular tradition?

• What challenges and opportunities would there be in doing mission together in our localities?

#### Prayer

Lord Jesus, constant companion on the journey

you have made our hearts burn within us,

and have sent us back on the road

towards our brothers and sisters,

with the Gospel message on our lips.

Help us to see that hope and obedience to your commands

always lead to the greater unity of your people.

Amen

#### Go and Do

* Organise a pilgrimage around each of the churches in your area.
* Invite the local community on that walk to visit these buildings.
* Blessed are the peacemakers. Pray for those who are working to build peace in the many conflict hotspots across the world. Visit Go and Do to inspire these prayers.

### Day 8 - The Fellowship of the Apostles

**Isaiah 56:6-8**

My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

**Psalm 24**

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?

**Acts 2:37-42**

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship.

**John 13:34-35**

Love one another.

#### Starting Point

**Reflections from Levi Ivars Graudins, the founder of the Gaizins House of Prayer.**

Set on Gaizins, Latvia’s highest hill, this house of prayer regularly hosts the 40-hour fellowship of Christian leaders who, for the duration, are supported in prayer and worship by the faithful. These encounters renew the leaders as fellow-workers in Christ, and help shape the visible expression of ecumenical life in Latvia.

Jesus’ commandment to love one another is not theoretical. Our communion of love with one another becomes concrete when we gather together intentionally, in apostolic simplicity, as Christ’s disciples to share fellowship and prayer.

The more Christians, especially their leaders, encounter Christ together in humility and patience, the more prejudice diminishes, so we discover Christ in one another and become authentic witnesses to the kingdom of God.

#### Reflection

**Fellowship**

The sermon was about healing,

wholeness,

the feast of rich food

and well-matured wines,

that is for all peoples.

Out in the street,

Christ’s body and blood

still sweet on your tongue,

you eye with disdain

strangers

drifting out of alien

churches.

Outcasts, you say

Children of darkness.

Outcast yourself,

Christ’s body and blood

a noxious poison now

in your crabbed soul.

#### Questions

• We have no greater gift to give God or others than our time. What gifts have we received from God when we have spent time with our fellow Christians?

• Share a little of what you mean by leadership. How can leaders encourage the visible unity of the church? How can we support and encourage them in that?

#### Prayer

Lord Jesus,

you commanded us to break bread

together

and to drink one cup in remembrance of you

- your imperative ignored.

Forgive us, Lord.

Open the hearts and minds of Christians world-wide,

especially those entrusted with leadership in your Church,

to the joys and blessings of this fellowship.

Create in all of us a passion to realise the hope

to which you have called us:

one body and one Spirit,

one Lord, one baptism,

one God who is above and through and in all.

Amen

#### Go and Do

* Identify your nearest mountain or hill and encourage the church leaders to walk it together, if they are able. Set out a bowl of salt to remind you to pray for their expedition.
* Have a reception for your community leaders and gift them with a candle from your churches.
* Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness – many communities across the world experience real food and water shortages as a result of a changing climate. Visit Go and Do to help work for righteousness in the world.