International Board of Pax Christi International
Prayers and Reflections - 24 February 2016
Year of Mercy - Lent 2016

The “Extraordinary Year of Mercy” began on 8 December 2015 (<http://bit.ly/1Y0u7nV>). Pope Francis wrote: “In this Holy Year, we look forward to the experience of opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society: fringes which modern society itself creates. How many uncertain and painful situations there are in the world today! How many are the wounds borne by the flesh of those who have no voice because their cry is muffled and drowned out by the indifference of the rich!”

Song: O Lord hear my prayer, O Lord hear my pray’r: when I call answer me. O Lord hear my pray’r, O Lord hear my pray’r: come and listen to me.

Opening prayer for mercy and justice

Father, you have given all peoples one common origin. It is your [will](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=12332) that they be gathered together as one [family](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=4568) in yourself. Fill the hearts of mankind with the fire of your love and with the desire to ensure [justice](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=6550) for all. By sharing the [good](http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=5257) things you give us, may we secure an equality for all our brothers and sisters throughout the world. May there be an end to division, strife and war. May there be a dawning of a truly human society built on love, merci and peace. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness.
John Paul II, 2002 World Day of Peace Message

Personal reflection - How do we experience our world of today?

How do we experience the ongoing injustices in our world? Name three situations of injustices which affects your life or troubles you. Sharing in plenary.

Lenten Prayer

Awaken in us the desire for a change in lifestyle and a reform of damaging consumption patterns. Show us the way to overcome “structures of sin,” and the pull of our own wants by harnessing our desire to form sustainable communities. Help us see and understand the connection between our own affluence and the poverty of others.

How do we experience personal and structural sin?

Sin has a communal element. It affects other people. It affects the community. I am affected by the sins of others and the sinful structures of our world. Others are affected by my sin. Sin is not just a personal action or a personal violation of some law.  It does something to harm the structures and relationships of society, community and even church. If we reflect only on personal sin as it relates to ourselves alone, we miss something.  Social sin is seen in the realities of racism, in inequalities of economic opportunity, in the lack of educational opportunities for children, in the culture of violence, in the materialistic values of our consumer culture, in the militarism that exists between nations, in acts of terrorism and hatred, in the various failures within our church, in the falsehoods, deceptions and half-truths that are sometimes shared by the mass media, in the dishonest behaviour of political leaders, and in countless realities that are more than the sin of any one person or group.

Just as we experience the forgiveness of our personal sins, we believe that “social sin” can be forgiven and injustice can be overcome. We believe that divine forgiveness can be experienced in the reality of society – the depth of social relationships. Metanoia is possible. Sinful structures and ways of thinking can be healed. Change can happen. We can move into a life of proclaiming the message and inviting people into a community of awareness and freedom from sin – a renewed world of peace and justice for all God’s people.

Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another
Pope Francis, Laudato Si’, 42

**Questions for Reflection in Sharing Group**

Pope Francis refers to “many uncertain and painful situations there are in the world today.” Name some of these situations. How are we being called to address them with a spirit of mercy and compassion?

You may recall a time that you experienced a deep sense of personal sin. When have you had a deep experience of social sin or social injustice?

When has your love been reflected in gift giving to someone in need?

When has your love moved into a “relationship” with the other?

When has your love moved you to challenge the structures of society or church or your own way of thinking?

Present/share two main ideas in broader group.

**Prayers**

Group 1: "O God, all holy one, you are our Mother and our Father and we are your children. Open our eyes and our hearts so that we may be able to discern your work in the universe. And be able to see Your features in every one of Your children. May we learn that there are many paths but all lead to You. Help us to know that you have created us for family, for togetherness, for peace, for gentleness, for compassion, for caring, for sharing.”

Group 2: “May we know that You want us to care for one another as those who know that they are sisters and brothers, members of the same family, Your family, the human family. Help us to beat our swords into ploughshares and our spears into pruning hooks, so that we may be able to live in peace and harmony, wiping away the tears from the eyes of those who are less fortunate than ourselves. And may we know war no more, as we strive to be what You want us to be: Your children. Amen.”

-Desmond M. Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, South Africa

**Song: Bless the Lord, my soul, and bless God’s holy name. Bless the Lord, my soul, who leads me into life.**

Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

*4Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

L. The Scriptures say **“Love is patient.”**

R1 God, how can I be patient when I experience injustice?

R2 God, teach me to patient without being silent or inactive.

L. The Scriptures say**“Love is kind.”**

R1 God, how can I be kind as I confront what is evil?”

R2 God, teach me to love my enemy.

L. The Scriptures say **“Love is not jealous.”**

R1 God, how can I not be jealous of those who have so much wealth or power or control?

R2 God, teach me to keep my values straight.

L. The Scriptures say **“Love is not pompous.”**

R1 God, how can I not be pompous when I am speaking truth to those who seem so wrong?

R2 God, teach me to know how to both speak and listen.

L. The Scriptures say **“Love is not inflated.”**

R1 God, how can I not be inflated with righteousness in the cause of justice?

R2 God, teach me to know my limits, to realize my mistakes and that I don’t always see clearly.

L. The Scriptures say**“Love is not rude.”**

R1 God, how can I be gracious but also committed to what is right?

R2 God, teach me to respect all my sisters and brothers.

L. The Scriptures say**“Love does not seek its own interests.”**

R1 God, how can I move beyond my own limits and desires and needs?

R2 God, teach me to understand the needs and perspectives of others, especially the poor.

L. The Scriptures say **“Love is not quick-tempered.”**

R1 God, how can I learn from my anger?

R2 God, teach me to learn from my strongest emotions.

L. The Scriptures say **“Love does not brood over injury.”**

R1 God, how can I not get discouraged by all the hurts and injuries in our world?

R2 God, teach me to move forward and get into action for what is right.

L. The Scriptures say “Love does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.”

R1 God, how can I stop thinking of what helps my side win and the other side lose?

R2 God, teach me to practice a love that wants the truth to win for all people.

L. The Scriptures say**“Love bears all things.”**

R1 God, how can I bear the stress of trying so hard to do what is right?

R2 God, teach me to let go and to trust in your wisdom and help.

L. The Scriptures say **“Love believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”**

R1 God, how can I possibly love?

R2 God, teach me that I don’t love alone, but rather in community with you and with all my sisters and brothers.

L. The Scriptures say **“love never fails.”**

R1 God, how come I sometimes feel failure? How can I believe?

R2 God, teach me to love with a heart as big as the world and to receive love and help with a big a heart.

All God, may our love be able to focus on the common good of all. Amen.

**Prayers of Intercession**

Response: Bless us on our Lenten journey to life.

* For all those who are struggling through the experience of poverty and injustice, we pray…
* For those who do not have access of good health care, we pray…
* For all children who do not have enough to eat or a decent place to live, we pray…
* For those without access to a good education, we pray…
* For all refugees and immigrants who are struggling to find a home with dignity, we pray…
* For all people caught up in the violence of war, especially civil wars, we pray…
* For planet earth and all its creatures who are affected by human abuse and overuse, we pray…
* For all those who are discouraged as they seek to act for justice and liberation for all, we pray…

Song: Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est - Where charity and love are, God is there.

Closing prayer for the Journey

L. God, as we journey, help us not to get lost.

A. Help us not to wander off the road.

 Help us to remember that your Spirit is guiding us.

 Help us to keep our eyes on the prize.

L. God, may we travel with our eyes open.

A. Free us from all indoctrination.

 Free us from all the pressures of our culture.

 Free us from our fear of the truth.

L. God, may we not travel alone.

A. May the Spirit always walk with us.

 May we walk with the poor and those most in need.

 May we walk in community and carry one another.

L. God, help us now and forever. Amen.

Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope.
Pope Francis, Laudato Si’, 244