

Mears Ashby and Hardwick and Sywell with Overstone



**Prayers and Reflections
for use at home**

**Sunday 3 July 2022
St. Peter and St. Paul**

Welcome to this week's Prayers and Reflections. It is a special edition as we are celebrating the lives of two of the leaders of the early Church, Peter and Paul, Sywell's saints. Both of them dedicated their lives to spreading the good news of Jesus and were willing to die for him. Why? Because in the words of Simon Peter, 'Jesus, you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. To whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.'

May their stories inspire your own race for life. Keep your eyes fixed on the prize - Jesus!

Every blessing,

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Run the straight race through God's good grace,
lift up thine eyes and seek his face;
life with its way before us lies;
Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.

John Samuel Bewley Monsell (1811-1895)

**Prayers and Reflections
for St. Peter and St. Paul
Dedicating our lives to God's service**

PREPARING OURSELVES

Take a moment to be still in God's presence and feel his love. If you are indoors, you may wish to light a candle as a sign of God's love - here, in your room. You may also wish to have a bowl of water ready for the time of letting go. When you are ready, say this opening prayer.

Lord, as I sit and wait in silence,
I place my hopes and dreams,
my fears and concerns,
into your safe and loving hands.
Enfold me with your love,
make my heart beat in time with yours;
in Jesus' name,
I pray. **Amen.**

LETTING GO

If you come to this time of prayer and reflection with any regrets, with things that you wish you had not said, done or been, offer them to God in the silence of your heart. And then, reflect on this verse from 'Fight the good fight'.

Cast care aside, lean on thy guide;
his boundless mercy will provide;
trust, and thy trusting soul shall prove
Christ is its life, and Christ its love.

JSB Monsell

If you wish, dip your finger into a bowl of water and make the sign of the cross on your palm.



Feel God's love and forgiveness. It is a forgiveness made real for us by Jesus on the Cross. With his dying breaths, he said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' If Jesus can forgive those who nailed him to the cross, there is nothing that can separate you from both his and his Father's love. Open your heart to Jesus. Allow him to take on your burdens. May he set you free to run - or walk - the race of life focused on following his gracious and self-giving example.

*With Jesus as our Messiah, we do not run on our own.
Jesus is beside us. His Spirit is with us.*



Reflect on this as you read or sing this closing verse.

Faint not nor fear, his arms are near;
he changeth not, and thou art dear;
only believe, and thou shalt see
that Christ is all in all to thee.

JSB Monsell

PRAYING TODAY'S PRAYER (The Collect)

*Across our villages and the worldwide Church,
this prayer is being said today. Add your voice to this earthly circle
of prayer to the Father who loves us.*

Almighty God,
whose blessed apostles Peter and Paul
glorified you in their death as in their life:
grant that your Church,
inspired by their teaching and example,
and made one by your Spirit,
may ever stand firm upon the one foundation,
Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

Amen.

Our prayer for Peter and Paul speaks of their life of faith. They picked up the baton from Jesus and ran with it to the finishing line. When I think of the race that they ran, I see a cross country run with uneven terrain, plenty of hurdles over which to climb, and some deep water to wade through. Life can be very challenging at times. Peter and Paul had the added challenge of winning hearts and minds in the face of much opposition. Theirs was a dangerous calling.



Truly, they focused on doing what Jesus would do - talk of God's love, teach God's way, and reach out to those who are struggling with life. Facing personal danger and death, both refused to give in and kept on speaking and acting in Jesus' name.

In our first reading, we hear how they were able to do this.

LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD

Faithfully running the race of life

St. Paul writes:

As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Looking back on his life

In this passage from the second letter to Timothy, Paul is in a reflective mood and is looking back at his life. He is pondering how he has run the race that Jesus set for him. What has he learnt about himself? And, about Jesus? What hard earned wisdom can he pass on to his apprentice Timothy as he prepares to hand over the baton to him so that he can carry on the race to build Christ's church?

Where were these musings written? Possibly, in prison, where Paul was for the last time. Facing death - his own execution - there is no sense of regret at sacrificing his life for Jesus. He is looking forward to his prize, a place in heaven at Christ's side. It will be like winning a gold medal at the Olympics. A medal that each one of us can win if we run the race of our life for Jesus with love in our hearts.

And, the prize will be ours because Jesus is at our side. Like a good coach, Jesus runs beside us offering wise and encouraging words. If we stumble, he will pick us up and set us back on our feet again. If we find ourselves faltering because of the obstacles that lie before us, Jesus is there - at our side - giving us the courage and the strength to overcome them.

We only have to look at Paul's life (and Peter's too) to know that we can rely on Jesus to run the race with us. He will not desert us when the going gets tough. He did not desert Paul when he faced floggings and torture, shipwrecks and bandits, and prison. He saved him time and time again, and when on death row Paul puts his faith in him with such brave words, 'To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.'

Take some time to contemplate your own life's race. Where do you see Jesus at your side? How has following him shaped the way that you have lived your life? Renew your trust in him as you look at the road to come.



O Jesus, I have promised to serve thee to the end;
be thou for ever near me, my Master and my friend:
I shall not fear the battle if thou art by my side,
nor wander from the pathway if thou wilt be my guide.

John Ernest Bode (1816-1874)

Peter's declaration about Jesus

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'

Matthew 16:13-19

Peter's calling

Of the dozen and more followers at Jesus' side, Peter was the only one who had the courage to say what he was thinking. Well, no surprise there as Peter is famous for speaking before engaging his brain. But, on this occasion, what he says feels Spirit-inspired. It is a heartfelt declaration, 'Jesus, you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' It is a declaration that will keep him strong - post-Pentecost - when he faces similar perils to St. Paul: floggings and torture, prison and death. Spirit-filled, he will be who Jesus calls him to be: a brave and inspirational leader of his Church.

Who has Jesus called you to be?

How has his Spirit encouraged you in your calling,

and equipped you to be who Jesus would love you to be?

Our calling may change as we move through life. What is yours today?

OUR PRAYERS

Feel free to use one or more of these prayers and to add your own.

Lord Jesus, you called Peter and Paul to be builders of your Church, and you call me to be one of your living stones. A stone who encourages others to come to faith. A stone who is carved with love, as a witness to your love.

Lord, I thank you for calling me to follow in your footsteps,
and inspire family, friends and strangers to do the same.

Lord, hear my prayer.

Lord Jesus, you gave us the rules for daily life,
to love God and to love others as ourselves. Rules that bless life,
and build strong communities. Rules that when broken,
destroy lives and homes. Longing for your love to reign, I pray for...

Lord, hear my prayer.

Lord Jesus, you came to be good news to the poor and vulnerable,
reaching out to them in love. You have the power to lift me
over life's hurdles. You will not desert me even when I walk through
the darkest of times. Trusting in your steadfast love, I pray for...

Lord, hear my prayer.

Offer your own heartfelt prayers and yearnings, praise and thanksgivings.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF BLESSING

A closing prayer of blessing for this week.

O God, you search me and you know me,
all my thoughts and feelings are open to your gaze,
you see the paths I will take before I take them. Guide my daily living.
Bless me and keep my loved ones safe, I pray. **Amen.**