

## Veneration of the Cross

**In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**

*Father of mercies and God of all consolation:*

*You do not wish the sinner to die but to be converted and live.*

*Come to the aid of your people, that they may turn from their sins and live for you alone.*

*May we be attentive to your word, confess our sins, receive your forgiveness, and always be grateful for your loving kindness.*

*Help us to live the truth in love and grow into the fullness of Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you for ever and ever. Amen.*

### God is merciful

We gather at this time, humbly desiring to be contrite, because we are confident that God is merciful. We have this confidence because, in every age, God has shown his justice and his mercy.

When his chosen people erred, he sent prophets to call them back.

He sent John the Baptist to call sinners to repentance and to announce the coming of the Saviour.

And in his greatest act of merciful love, God sent his only Son to live among us, to preach of the Father's love, and to set us free from sin and death.

God continues to save his people and to offer us, as his Church, his divine mercy, especially through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

God calls us to conversion.

Let us therefore ask him for the grace of sincere repentance as we “behold, touch and seek to be healed by the merciful wounds of Christ”, the Icon of God's mercy in his crucifixion.

“Jesus invites us to behold these wounds, to touch them as Thomas did, to heal our lack of belief. Above all, he invites us to enter into the mystery of these wounds, which is the mystery of his merciful love. Through these wounds, as in a light-filled opening, we can see the entire mystery of Christ and of God: his Passion, his earthly life – filled with compassion for the weak and the sick – his incarnation in the womb of Mary. And we can retrace the whole history of salvation: the prophecies – especially about the Servant of the Lord, the Psalms, the Law and the Covenant; to the liberation from Egypt, to the first Passover and to the blood of the slaughtered lambs; and again from the Patriarchs to Abraham, and then all the way back to Abel, whose blood cried out from the earth. All of this we can see in the wounds of Jesus, crucified and risen; with Mary, in her Magnificat, we can perceive that, “His mercy extends from generation to generation” (cf. Lk 1:50)” (Pope Francis Homily, April 12, 2015).

**We bring to mind how Christ Crucified is the Icon of the Father's Mercy.**

## “Behold, touch and seek to be healed by the merciful wounds of Christ”

Through venerating the wounds of Christ, we come face to face with our Lord and Saviour who is the Good News of mercy, the sweetest taste of love and our everlasting hope. It is an opportunity to experience his salvation, as we prostrate ourselves and offer who we are with all our burdens and joys. This is a moment—in reality, an attitude—where our attention is solely on him, on his sacrifice of infinite love, so that our hearts seek and are opened to his. He knows us more than we know ourselves, as he invites us to open our life-story, so together we can read through the chapters of our lives, the pages of our past, of our present, to journey onward together, as teacher and disciple, as friends.

Through Christ, we become attuned to the Father, who, in his infinite mercy, shines upon us a ray of Light when darkness threatens to engulf us: the Holy Spirit who is their Love. Even if the Father is always Silence and Unseen, he desires to hold our hands with the maternal tenderness of Christ’s Church; to pull us back up when we stumble. Through his chosen holy ones, the Body of Christ, the Father is ever close to us: as close to us as our very heartbeat. But when our hearts are burdened by worries and anxiety, we harden our hearts, become oblivious to God’s presence in our midst, as we shut our eyes tight to the Light and Love who is the Holy Spirit.

As we venerate the wounds of Christ Crucified, as we contemplate the mystery of God’s saving mercy, our hearts can soften and our eyes be gently opened, to adjust to the brilliance of God’s Spirit.

As Christ fixes his gaze upon us, as our eyes rise to meet his, we encounter our Lord, Teacher and Friend, the face of God’s mercy.

As our eyes lock, so our heartbeats become one and, in silence, we start turning the pages of our lives, the painful stories of sorrow mixed with joy, that interior battleground of anguish that God desires to heal.

**As we prepare to venerate each wound, we bring ourselves into God’s presence.**

Here I am, Lord.

“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mt 28: 16-20)

- ***They went to the mountain –***

Go to the mountain... God’s favourite place where he meets man and woman to reveal his Light and glory! Go to the mountain ... like the apostles, allow God to reveal himself to you. Let your heart soar to encounter the very heart of God...

- *They worshipped him ... but some doubted*–

As you prostrate yourself in his presence, you may be terrified, you may also feel doubtful. Your past or your present may make you question God's love, his existence, and whether, after all, we are not all alone, left to our own devices. Allow this moment of silence to be a space where God hears the noise that rages within you; allow the stillness to lead you into listening to the voice of God.

- *I am with you always*–

Here is a paradox: as Jesus is leaving to go to the Father, he also promises that he is always with us. Do you feel him close to you? Do you feel him close to you in those who also love him? If not, do you desire to feel his closeness? Do you desire communion with all those whom he loves?

**As we enter into God's presence, we feel embraced by infinite mercy.**

**"Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46: 10)**

Here I am Lord. You are my resting place. In your wounds I see reflected my own and in your presence my hurts and suffering dissolve to nothingness. You know all too well everything happening in my life; you are with me in the deepest anguish of my heart and, when stab wounds penetrate my body, there you are, right beside me. When I waver and stumble under the weight of my worries, you are there carrying my cross for me; you hold me close in your embrace even when all I can see is darkness engulfing me, weighing me down. Like the sun still shining through the night, you are with me always, as you promised.

I praise you, Lord, for your constant presence in my life, in our lives. Your presence in our midst is not for our sole benefit. You are God who loves infinitely, who loves personally, each one of your children and all of us as one. You do not call me, or those closest to me, to form a small exclusive club huddled around you. You call us to you so that, after we stay with you for a while, on the mountain, we can go forth and proclaim your mercy, so that all may taste your goodness, whoever and wherever they are. You call us to drink and get our fill of your love, so that inebriated with your goodness, we can share our joy of the heart with the whole world.

For your love is the fount of our healing; it is the source of our strength. It enables us to stand back up on our feet; to start our journey to recovery. The wounds of Christ are the medicine of the soul that we bring to others. Even if the memory of wounds and suffering in our lives will always be there, they need not become chains that enslave us, or nails that pin us to a cross. Rather, we can be free, because he has suffered all torture; he has carried the cross; he has died for us that we may live, Christ crucified, the innocent Lamb who chose to die, to conquer the sting of Death.

**As we are immersed in God's mercy, we become attuned to our need for healing.**

**Lord, I desire your healing.**

**Listen to the Lord** as he invites you to “Get up and walk” (Mt 9: 1-8; Mk 2: 1-12; Lk 5: 17-26; Jn 5: 1-18); as he whispers in your heart “*Talitha, cum* ...little girl, get up!” (Mk 5: 21-43)

- What are the wounds, the hurts that keep me face down on the ground?
- What are the wounds, the long-held hurts of my ancestors, in my family that keep us from moving forward?
- What are the wounds, the unspeakable hurts of the neighbour who desperately thirsts for God’s justice and mercy?

**Open the door of your heart so God can enter.**

- What is the Lord asking of me to start my healing process—without forgetting the lessons of the past?
- What is the Lord asking of me so the deep wounds of my lineage no longer hold us hostage?
- What is the Lord asking of me so that my neighbour’s chains of the heart may loosen a little, and he or she may reclaim their freedom?

**We prepare to name each one of our wounds that we may seek forgiveness with contrite hearts.**

Lord, forgive me, for I have sinned.

We have not always accepted and witnessed the joy of God’s love. As we gaze at the Cross, as we prepare for this act of veneration of Christ’s wounds, we also allow Christ to open our eyes to the hurts and wounds of those around us; to help us identify the many times when we ourselves were the obstacle, the scandal, that blocked God’s love from reaching our brothers, sisters and neighbours.

As our sins are seen and named, so we see how the way we wounded and hurt others, made us suffer in return. Our sins affect us negatively and become our own festering wounds.

**In this act of venerating Christ’s wounds, we identify with the many sinners who encountered Christ and tasted of his mercy personally and directly.**

## 1. Peter's sin of betrayal: the wound of the Church that does not live up to her (our) name

### A reading from the holy gospel according to Saint John (13: 3-11)

And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean."

Peter, the Rock on whom Christ chooses to build his Church, is also the disciple who struggles with accepting that his teacher, Jesus—even if he recognizes him as the promised Messiah and indeed, as the Son of God—is not a Messiah according to Peter's own expectations, but according to God's plan. The Messiah, the Anointed One, did not come to the world to be served but to serve; he did not come to be elevated above all, but to give his life on the cross; he did not come to follow the logic of power of the world, but to subvert it by becoming its victim. Peter struggles to see God as God is. Not as the God of power and might; but as the God of gentle humility, of meekness, of radical self-offering love that alone heals the world. Peter's gesture of betrayal is not unlike the worldliness of the Church in our days: when we refuse to be humble, when we refuse to be servants, when we refuse to accept that the world is not there to honour us, but we are there to offer our lives to those who—in our eyes—might seem the least deserving.

- **Consider:** So many have been victimized by those who represent the Church: ordained or lay ministers. The institutional Church has perpetuated injustice and suffering. There are divisions between members of the Church. Many feel rejected by Mother Church or cast out: strangers in their own home, because of personal circumstances, or maybe their sexual orientation, or even past hurts.

**Ask:** Could I have also contributed to this suffering? Could I, albeit unknowingly, have perpetuated attitudes of prejudice, of not welcoming, of judging? Did I, out of fear or self-interest, remain silent when I witnessed, or maybe even suffered, an injustice?

*I ask forgiveness for the times when I followed not Christ, but my own ideas of who Christ is; when instead of witnessing the Good News of mercy, I scandalised with attitudes of judgment, of condemnation, of pride. I stay with Peter who, after the resurrection was still personally encountered by Jesus: "Do you love me?" we hear Jesus echo in our hearts. If we have the courage to answer yes, then we know that he is calling us to tend his sheep ... the littlest ones of his pasture (cf. John 21:15-17).*

## 2. The adulteress' sin of unfaithfulness: the wound of the beloved who rejects the love of our Spouse and Friend

### A reading from the holy gospel according to Saint Luke (7: 36-48)

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner." Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "speak." "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

In Chapter 8:3-11 of the Gospel of John, we find the story of the woman caught committing adultery whom the people sought to stone as the Law demanded. In that story, there is no doubt about the woman's guilt. There is also no doubt that those who sought to stone her were doing so in their belief that this safeguarded societal values. But Jesus asks them to see reality from a different viewpoint—of God himself; of the One who alone is truly good. Jesus challenges those who were law abiders to consider whether they have also, in their heart—even if not publicly—committed wrongdoings, and therefore if they are also complicit in propagating harm to individual persons and the common good.

In this story from the Gospel of Luke, we can imagine that we meet the same woman—still known publicly as "a sinner"; still a pariah—but who, in her heart, is repentant and shows her gratitude for mercy received through this extraordinary gesture of love and devotion to Jesus. She comes close to him, cries at his feet, kisses them with tenderness. Jesus tells her, once again, that her sins are forgiven, even as she can see each one of her wrongdoings through the tears in her eyes. Through her disbelief that she can truly be forgiven, we are reminded of a deeper "adultery": of excluding all those little ones, whom God loves with infinite tenderness, no matter who they are or what they have done, or even of hardening our heart to receiving God's infinite love and of resisting, through our shame, of resting in God's mercy.

- **Consider** all the toxic relationships within families, between couples, between siblings. Love can be absent in intimate relationships and in its place there can even be abuse. Many have suffered sexual, psychological and financial abuse within their family circle.

**Ask:** Am I a hypocrite—judging others, but without acknowledging my complicity through sins of commission or omission? Am I proud—building walls of arrogance and conceit around me—that stop me from seeing God’s love for all his children?

*I ask forgiveness for the times when I rejected the love bestowed upon me; I ask forgiveness for not loving those whom my Beloved died for on the cross. I ask forgiveness for betraying, through my hardness of heart, the logic of God’s love: who is always merciful, always generous, always kind.*

### 3. Our collective sin of tarnishing God’s creation: the wound of violence, horror, and destruction to self, others and the environment

#### A reading from the holy gospel according to Saint Luke (23: 27-31)

A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’; and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

Among those who followed Jesus to Golgotha were a group of women lamenting his execution. As women, whose bodies bear and nurse children, they represent the power of creation itself intended to be lifegiving. Instead, because of original human hubris and sin, creation succumbs to the tragedy of violence and death, and becomes marred and tarnished through forces of destruction. Likewise, as Jesus, the innocent one, bears the cross to Calvary, so his appearance changes. As the prophet Isaiah (52:14) laments, “so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals.”

It is at this moment that legend tells the story of one of the women who takes pity on him and gives him her veil to wipe his face from blood and grime. The veil will bear the “true icon” of salvation; Jesus’ tortured appearance as the very face of God’s mercy. Through being moved, through her compassion and gentle action of mercy, the woman participates in God’s creative action of mercy.

- **Consider** the times you may have been irresponsible with the surrounding environment. There were times when you disregarded what was happening around you and you did not take any steps to protect and restore the environment.

**Ask:** Could I have caused this suffering? Could I, albeit unknowingly, have perpetuated this attitude? Did I, out of fear or self-interest, remain silent when faced by an injustice?

*I ask forgiveness for sins of omission; for the times, when I allowed sin to fester by doing nothing to reveal tenderness breaking through sorrow, hope breaking forth through the entanglements of evil. I am not only complicit through what I do, but through feeling defeated, and not trusting that even the smallest gesture of kindness can bear fruit and witness resplendently God’s infinite love.*

#### 4. Simon of Cyrene's subtle sin of indifference: the wound of turning a blind eye to the suffering of others

##### A reading from the holy gospel according to Saint Mark (15: 21-26)

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews."

We laud Simon as somebody who helped carry Jesus' cross. We laud him, because his children seem to have become disciples and are known to us by name. But they remember and retell the experience, because they witnessed how it changed their father. From a man who preferred to care solely about his own affairs—Simon is just a "passer-by", doing his utmost to ignore Jesus and stay away from trouble—something must have happened to him that fundamentally changed him.

We can speculate that what happens is that it is not Simon who carries Jesus' burden. Rather, in that moment when he takes the cross, it is Jesus who takes on the burden of Simon. Simon encounters Jesus—deeply, intimately—and his sin of indifference is healed. We can imagine Simon being moved, his heart of stone becoming a heart of flesh, his life radically changing.

- **Consider** how the wounds and hurts of others are also the fruit of our inattentiveness. Am I indifferent to what happens around me, because I prefer to be a mere "passer-by" and let nothing affect me? Do I block off my ears? (Mk 7: 31-37) Do I close my eyes shut? (Mk 8: 22-26; Mt 20: 29-34; Lk 18: 35-43; Jn 9: 1-12) Am I slow to take action? (Mt 9: 1-8; 12: 9-13; Mk 2: 1-12, Lk 5: 17-26; Jn 5: 1-18)

**Ask:** Is it fear, hostility, resentment that keeps me distant from the wounds of others? Is it my personal woundedness that I am shying away from? Do I dare touch suffering—my own mirrored in the wounds of others? Do I let Jesus transform my indifference into the joy of the gospel?

*I ask forgiveness for not trusting that your love, Lord, heals and that my woundedness is not the end of my story. There are so many pages in the book of my life that can be written if I let my heart be moved by your mercy, and I learn to love my neighbour as you, Lord, seek to love me first.*

#### 5. The Roman soldiers' sin of ridicule and mudslinging: the wound of harsh words that violate the innocent whom the Lord loves

##### A reading from the holy gospel according to Saint Mark (15: 16-20; 33-39)



Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

(...)

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

In the story of Jesus' execution, we see a triple relation with the political oppressor: the governor who interrogated him, but refuses to see him and thus washes his hands; the soldiers who treat him like any other of the condemned and thus deride him and mock him, even if in their ridicule, there is, ironically, a vague recognition of the truth that he is "king"; and lastly the centurion, "who stood facing him" and actually saw him, their eyes meeting, Jesus' eyes piercing him, and who recognises him as "God's son." Pilate might have shut off his ears to truth because it did not suit him to hear it; the soldiers distorted the truth through mudslinging; but the centurion utters the truth as Jesus "breathed his last."

John 8:44 calls the devil the "father of lies" and no lie is greater than that which makes a mockery of the truth to twist it and cause harm beyond measure. Lies—when our words purposefully distort reality—betray not only our relations to one another, to God and to God's creation... but to ourselves.

- **Consider** the negative attitude towards groups of people whom we consider to be "different"; of different ethnicity, different groups within the Church, even merely having different opinions. So much denigration takes place, so much defamatory propaganda and false rumours are spread around due to thoughtlessness or, even worse, because of pure hatred.

**Ask:** Could I have caused this suffering? Could I, albeit unknowingly, have perpetuated this attitude? Did I, out of fear or self-interest, propagate lies, half-truths, or distort facts for my own self-interest?

*I ask forgiveness for my abuse of words and abuse through words. I beg forgiveness for not taking the responsibility seriously enough to seek the truth and articulate it to the best of my ability. I ask forgiveness for dismissing the power of words to build and destroy.*

## 6. The sin of godlessness: the wound of hardness of heart and not accepting God's forgiveness

**A reading from the holy gospel according to Saint Luke (23: 32-43)**

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

We are all, like those condemned with Jesus, guilty as charged. As we do our examination of conscience, we can all recognise where our lives are in disarray, where our desires have run amok, where our relationships have been damaged. We are all sinners. But the unforgiveable sin is the refusal of God's forgiveness. The real sin is to persist in our denial of God's mercy. It is the hard heart that refuses to be contrite in its smugness. Pope Francis calls this "corruption": that persistence in our evil ways, because we refuse to see them as evil.

- **Consider** the times when rationalisation takes priority over reason and instead of being truthful about our harmful intentions, our violent desires, we justify our objective wrongdoing through making excuses.

**Ask:** Have I refused to allow the Light of God's love to illumine my heart and reveal the darkness within? Have I been too proud to admit guilt and ask for forgiveness?

*I beg you Lord for the desire for a contrite heart. I beg you Lord to illumine my darkness with your Light. I ask that I may see the story of my life with your own eyes; that I may judge my actions with your justice; that I may open my heart completely to your compassionate gaze and healing mercy. I pray for the grace of repentance.*

**As Christ gazes at our woundedness, God cries like the Mother whose heart was broken as she beheld, the Face of God's mercy, in her arms**

**A reading from the holy gospel according to Saint John (19: 25-30)**

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing

beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

*Lord, Father of Mercy,  
as we contemplate the Icon of the Mother and Son,  
who together accepted to bear the horror of sin,  
by the Son carrying death on his flesh,  
and his Mother, still embracing it lovingly,  
we trust that your tender mercy always lifts up our hearts, just as your Son rose from death.  
Like on the third day, when he liberated the world from its imprisonment of sin,  
so we beg that we may receive the grace to contemplate your glory, forever and ever. Amen.*

**Lord, you know me and love me.**

The Lord knows you better than you know yourself. The presence of the Lord heals and saves. As your sin is brought before your eyes, pray to the Lord that he may heal your heart. Turn your gaze towards him, open your ears to his gentle words, surrender yourself as you are to his loving embrace and worship in his merciful presence.

O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise;  
you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue,

O LORD, you know it completely. You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

it is so high that I cannot attain it. Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,”

even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works;

that I know very well. (Psalm 138 (139) 1-14)

**(You can seek the Sacrament of Reconciliation to receive absolution or continue with the prayers.)**

God who is infinitely merciful pardons all who are repentant and takes away their guilt. Confident in his goodness, let us ask him to forgive all our sins as we confess them with sincerity of heart.

*I confess to almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters,  
that I have greatly sinned,  
in my thoughts and in my words,  
in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault,  
through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary, ever-Virgin, all the Angels and  
Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters,  
to pray for me to the Lord our God.*

Minister: Let us turn to Christ with confidence and ask his mercy.  
You came into the world to seek and save what was lost.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: You came to give us life, life in its fullness.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: You became the source of salvation for all who obey you.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: Once and for all you died for our sins, the innocent one for the guilty.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: In your mercy free us from the past and enable us to begin a new life of holiness.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: Make us a living sign of love for all to see: people reconciled with you and with each other.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Now, in obedience to Christ himself, let us join in prayer to the Father, asking him to forgive us as we forgive others.

*Our Father, ...*

*Almighty and eternal God, you sent your only begotten Son to reconcile the world to yourself. Lift from our hearts the oppressive gloom of sin, so that we may celebrate the approaching dawn of Christ's resurrection with fitting joy. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*