



## CHAPTER 4: PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Many people share the desire to come together in solidarity to pray in the face of significant events or tragedies. This chapter examines the theology and the practicalities of multi-religious prayer.

Summary: Joyful human celebrations, the response to natural disasters or tragedies, or simply the meeting in friendship of people engaged in interreligious dialogue often means that people want to come together to pray or worship. An example and model of such multi-religious prayer was the meeting of the leaders of different Christian traditions and different world religions at Assisi called by Pope John Paul II in 1986.

All authentic prayer is inspired by the Holy Spirit and is the work of the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, within us. Through the one Spirit the prayer of the Church and the prayer of other religions is closely connected. Yet it cannot be called Christian prayer because Christian prayer is always to the Father, in the Spirit, through the Son, Jesus Christ.

Prayer expresses belief. The different beliefs of the religions are expressed in their prayers. This means that we cannot literally 'pray together' as our prayers all express different beliefs. However, we can and should 'come together to pray'. This means praying for one another in solidarity and love, with respect for one another. To 'come together to pray' is an authentically Christian act that promotes human unity and solidarity and shows awareness of the universal presence of the Holy Spirit.

When people of different religions come together to pray each prays from their own tradition *in the presence* of the other religious groups while the others remain in respectful silence. Multi-religious prayer requires sensitivity and careful preparation, whether one is hosting the prayer or is accepting hospitality in another place of worship. We need to be attentive to the customs, postures and dress of people of other religions when we visit their places of worship and make sure they feel reassured and at ease when they are our guests.

### Multi-religious prayer:

- Is the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Is encouraged by the Catholic Church.
- Should be 'coming together to pray' as happened in Assisi.
- Cannot be 'praying together' because prayer expresses belief. Christian prayer is always to God, in the Spirit, through the Son.
- Means praying according to one's own traditions and belief while respectfully being present at the prayer of others.
- Is an authentically Christian act because it promotes the unity of all people and their unity with God.
- Witnesses to the universal presence and action of the Holy Spirit.

Catholics should thus feel confident, and be encouraged to 'come together to pray' with those of other religions. To take part in such occasions is an authentically Christian act, serving to promote the unity of all people and their unity with God. It is part of the mission of the Church.

## **Questions for discussion:**

### **On the text**

- When is it appropriate for people of different religions to come together to pray?
- For what reasons did Pope John Paul II call together leaders of different world religions in 1986? What is your reaction to Pope John Paul II's initiative at Assisi? How is it a helpful model for multi-religious prayer?
- On what basis can we pray together with people of other religions?
- What makes Christian prayer different from other forms of prayer?
- If all authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, why can't we pray together?
- What is the difference between 'praying together' and 'coming together to pray'? Why is this important? What does this mean for taking part in the acts of worship of other religions?
- How is interreligious prayer different from praying with Christians of other traditions?

### **From your experience**

- How do you feel about the Church's teaching on prayer and worship?
- Have you ever joined people of different religions in prayer, or let them know that you are praying for them?
- Have you ever attended a service in a non-Christian place of worship?
- What is your experience of visiting the places of worship of other religions? What puts you at your ease, and what makes you anxious?
- Do you find the prayers of other religions helpful to your own faith? How can they be used appropriately by a Christian?

## **Ideas for Action:**

### **To begin with**

- Pray for your brothers and sisters of other religions and their needs.
- Find out about your nearest “interfaith forum” and ask about visits to places of worship of other religions, or visit a place of worship in your area. There might be prayer meetings you can join, too.
- Try and learn about the prayer customs, postures and dress of other religions.
- Join an interreligious walk or pilgrimage.

### **To go further**

- Read up on the scriptures of other religions and their stories that inspire prayer.
- Choose some Christian prayers which you think would be suitable to use in an interreligious service. Select readings from the Christian Scriptures and tradition which you might use in an interreligious service.