

CCC Ascension to Pentecost Novena
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This Novena was written for the CCC-Christ, Covid, Community Facebook Group. The reflections will be posted each day, along with a simple “contemplative colouring” for those who find this helpful.

Thursday 21 May – Ascension – You are invited...

Reading – (Matthew 28: 16-20)

Jesus said, “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The disciples did not know what Jesus’ promise to be with them until the end of the age meant. They stared at the place Jesus had been until they accepted that he had gone and returned to Jerusalem. This time of prayer and seclusion was a necessary preparation for what was to come next. Without it, they could not have been ready to undertake the commission Jesus had laid upon them. In our own time, some people are beginning to emerge from lockdown, others are still shielding and all of us have still to take care to avoid an upswing in infection rates. It is probably safe to say that none of us will emerge from this time unchanged. The choice we have to make is – what will be the fruits of this time – for us and for the world?

Over the next nine days between now and Pentecost, we will use the Fruits of the Spirit as a guide to reflection and action. You can find them listed in Galatians 5: 22-23

Each day, we will offer a thought for the day. Emma Major will post the beautiful image she has created for the Fruit for those who would like to do a bit of contemplative colouring and Paul Inwood will offer a musical complement to the theme. You are also invited to post things that link to the each day’s fruit – memes, music, pictures and so on. In this way, we will hopefully, have an abundance of evidence of the Fruits of the Spirit to celebrate at Pentecost.

Paul Inwood’s Musical suggestion – Paul Inwood: Alleluia to the end of time (Gospel Acclamation for Ascension Day)

<https://soundcloud.com/paul-inwood-102695347/alleluia-to-the-end-of-time>

Friday 22 May - Fruit of the Spirit - Joy

Reading (John 16:20-23)

Jesus said, “Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.”

Jesus was a realist and knew that hard times awaited the disciples. We are living in such a time now. At the very least, our freedom of movement has been restricted. At worst, some among us are desperately ill – others mourning the loss of a loved one. And the world is not rejoicing – the whole planet is affected. Jesus does not ask us to pretend that everything is alright. We can weep and mourn and rail against what is happening – but never quite losing sight of Jesus’ promise – that this pain will, one day, turn to joy.

- Where have you seen evidence of joy during the last few weeks?

Action – What could you do today to bring some joy into the world?

Paul Inwood’s Musical suggestion - William Byrd: Sing joyfully

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9uK9nVVbGHw>

Saturday 23 May - Fruit of the Spirit - Patience

Reading (John 16: 23-28)

Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete."

Many of us are impatient for life to get back to normal. If we had been asked at the beginning of the crisis and lockdown what that meant, the chances are that we would have wanted it to go back to how it was the weeks and months before. That was probably our prayer: may the lockdown end quickly and things go back to the way they were. Would that prayer still hold today? Or has God used this time to force us to be patient for the answer to this prayer? And has that changed the prayer?

- How has the enforced patience changed what you are praying for?

Action – Who do you know who is struggling with impatience? What can you do today to support and encourage them?

Paul Inwood's Musical suggestion – Taizé (Jacques Berthier): Wait for the Lord (keep watch, take heart)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w5VxXp3CKww>

Sunday 24 May – Fruit of the Spirit – Faithfulness

Reading (Acts 1: 12-14)

All the disciples were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

The disciples, women and brothers did not know what they were praying about – or for. They knew that it was all they could do at this point – they needed to pray in order to be ready for what was to come. As a task, there would have been times of great insight – and moments of a deep sense of rightness. At other times, there would have been sheer boredom and the feeling that this was all a waste of time. All of us will recognise that same dynamic in our own prayer life. But the faithfulness to prayer of that tiny, hidden community might inspire us to be a little more faithful in our own – a gift and a fruit of the Spirit.

- Where is your own prayer life at the moment? And where has it been over recent weeks?

Action – How can you be more faithful to prayer today? And faithful also to any resolutions you made at the beginning of lockdown (the healthy eating and the reaching-out-others ones!)?

Paul Inwood's Musical suggestion – God is our refuge and strength

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEyYIktB5pA>

Monday 25 May (St Bede) Fruit of the Spirit – Generosity

Reading (Matthew 5: 13-16)

Jesus said, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

St Bede lived in what used to be called the Dark Ages. He lived at what had been the edge of the Roman Empire and spent most of his long life in a monastery. And yet, after he died, St Boniface wrote to Archbishop of York saying, ‘to bring joy into our sorrow as you have done before, you should take care to send us a tiny gleam from that candle of the Church, which the Holy Spirit lit within the limits of your province’. How was it that a man who lived pretty much in ‘lockdown’ was able to offer such an abundance of teaching and wisdom to the world?

- Where have you seen generosity being shown by people in modern-day seclusion?

Action – How might you let your own light shine more generously on others today?

Paul Inwood’s Musical suggestion – Psallite (Collegeville Composers Group): Light of the World

<https://soundcloud.com/paul-inwood-102695347/light-of-the-world-by-ccg>

Tuesday 26 May – Fruit of the Spirit – Kindness

Reading (John 17: 1-11)

Jesus said, “(Father), I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

Jesus knows that the end of his life is approaching and that the disciples are going to go through difficult times. Like many people at this stage in their life, his concern turns to the ones who are going to be left behind. Despite all they have done – and will do – to cause him pain, Jesus’ kindness overflows in a prayer that they be protected so that they stick together through all that is to come. It is this kindness that is helping our families and friends to sustain each other during these days and to reach out to those who have known little kindness during their lives.

- Where have you seen kindness in others over the last few weeks?

Action – To whom could you show particular kindness today?

Paul Inwood’s Musical suggestion – John Williams: Theme from Schindler’s List (a large-scale, sustained act of kindness) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1WcP5RBpE4>

Wednesday 27 May (Augustine of Canterbury) – Fruit of the Spirit – Peace

Reading (Luke 10: 1-9)

Jesus said, "Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person."

One of the frustrations of the current situation in the UK is that people cannot visit each other's houses let alone bring peace to them. We may be aware of people who are finding this time particularly stressful and might use this Reading to inspire us to think about ways in which we can still bring peace to them – a phone call – a video call – a bunch of flowers or small gift of goodies popped on their doorstep. As with St Augustine who came to a country he expected to be hostile, personal preparation is important. By finding our own peace first – with prayer, music or art – we become able to share that peace with others. Not everyone will accept it – but that is less important than our desire to offer it.

- When have you had a conversation or received something that has helped you to find peace of mind and heart?

Action – Who can you offer peace to today – with a call or small gift made with the deliberate intention that it shares your peace with them?

Paul Inwood's Musical suggestion – John Rutter: Gaelic Blessing (Deep peace of the running wave to you) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNMxKQ8RjUc>

Thursday 28 May – Fruit of the Spirit – Love

Reading (John 17: 20-26)

Jesus said, "Father, I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and so that I may be in them."

There is a famous song, 'Love, love changes everything...' It includes the lines:

*Love, love changes everything
How you live and how you die.*

This is what Jesus knew so well – true and deep love does change how we live and how we approach death. Love can be the wellspring from which all the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit flow. Times such as those we are living in at the moment, force us back onto our own resources – usually to find that, on our own strength, we are limited and vulnerable. When we are able to draw on the wellspring of Love without our hearts, we find our strength renewed. And when we – and countless others simultaneously draw on it in apparently small and insignificant ways, 'Nothing in the world will ever be the same.'

- Where have you seen love changing how people live – and die? How is love changing everything?

Action – Spend time being aware of the Love of God and presence of Christ within you and be open to how God might want it to influence how you live – and, possibly, approach death.

Paul Inwood's Musical suggestion – Thomas Tallis: If ye love me
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6RgaPTo4hE>

Friday 29 May – Fruit of the Spirit – Gentleness

Reading (John 21: 15-19)

Peter said to Jesus, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’

Jesus and Peter have known each other a long time and Jesus is aware of Peter’s strengths – and also his weaknesses. He is impetuous and, sometimes, judgemental – a tough, down-to-earth fisherman. For the task that lies before him, this toughness needs to be tempered by his love for Jesus. He will have to make difficult decisions as he leads this new movement and will have to draw on his strength when faced with opposition. But, as Jesus teaches him, this leadership must always have at its heart, gentleness and kindness for the weakest and most vulnerable.

- Where has leadership around the world shown awareness of the needs of those in most need of gentleness?

Action – If you are in a position of leadership (in your family, community, at work), reflect on how you might act or decide something today with special emphasis on gentleness. If you are not, pray for those who are.

Paul Inwood’s Musical suggestion – Psallite: All who labour, come to me
<https://soundcloud.com/paul-inwood-102695347/all-who-labour-come-to-me-by-ccg>

Saturday 30 May – Fruit of the Spirit – Self-control

Reading (John 21: 20-25)

When Peter saw John, he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, what about him?’ Jesus said to him, ‘... what is that to you? Follow me!’

Like Peter, we are very quick to look at others and make judgements or compare ourselves with them. Most people are trying to observe guidelines and rules but are probably also quite aware of those who are not “playing fair”: ‘I am doing as we have been asked but what about them?’ Jesus is gently but firmly reminding Peter that some things are not his concern. His task is – as the saying goes – to ‘get his own house in order’ – not to seek to control others before he can control himself.

- Where have you had to exercise self-control over recent weeks?

Action – Notice when your self-control wears thin today – and work out how best to maintain it for the benefit of those around you – but your own too.

Paul Inwood’s Musical suggestion – Erik Mortensen: Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjUn8dWqgKc>

Sunday 31 May – Pentecost/ Visitation.

Reading: (Acts 2: 1-11)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

The 31 May is also the Feast of the Visitation – though, this year, of course, Pentecost takes precedence. However, there are very close links. If we take ourselves back to the beginning of Luke's Gospel, we meet Mary and Elizabeth and hear that:

Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?'

Although Elizabeth would have said these words in Aramaic, they are still prayed countless times around the world every day – in many languages.

The disciples and Elizabeth are all described as being “filled with the Holy Spirit”. They are also in the company of Mary and, although the events are over 30 years apart, perhaps she saw the link between them – witnessing the power of the Spirit at work in people she knew and loved... And knowing that, just as when she and Elizabeth had met in Judea, the Spirit was coming upon God's people to help them to change the world.

Today, our world needs the message of hope. It needs to believe that the world will get through the Covid-19 crisis. It needs to believe that not only will it recover but that the lessons we have learnt will not be lost and that the world will be a better place.

Filled with the Spirit, Elizabeth saw something about Mary's pregnancy that almost no-one else would – and spoke of it with joy. Filled with the Spirit, the disciples found they could speak of the Good News in people's own languages. Filled with the Spirit – what do we do? Perhaps we trust that, when we speak words of wisdom and truth – the Spirit speaks through us. We trust that, when our words are kind, gentle and patient, the Spirit is bearing fruit through us.

Our world needs us. Not because we are great or special but because the Spirit of the Lord has come upon us – and calls us to renew the face of the earth... or, at least, the tiny part of it entrusted to us.

- Where have you seen or heard people filled with the Holy Spirit at work in the world over the last few months?

Action – Pray the Magnificat as your own prayer today. Notice any words or phrases that seem to come particularly easily or powerfully. Stay with them and ask the Spirit to guide you as to what they mean for you in the days ahead.

Paul Inwood's Musical suggestion – Christopher Walker: Send forth your Spirit, O Lord
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAPbfBZrDVg>

Pray the Pentecost Sequence for the world

scribed to Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury (c 1228)

Holy Spirit, Lord of Light,
From the clear celestial height.
Thy pure beaming radiance give.

Come, thou Father of the poor,
Come, with treasures which endure;
Come, thou Light of all that live!

Thou, of all consolers best,
Thou, the soul's delightful guest,
Dost refreshing peace bestow.

Thou in toil art comfort sweet;
Pleasant coolness in the heat;
Solace in the midst of woe.

Light immortal, Light divine,
Visit thou these hearts of thine,
And our inmost being fill.

If thou take thy grace away,
Nothing pure in man will stay;
All his good is turned to ill.

Heal our wounds, our strength renew;
On our dryness pour thy dew,
Wash the stains of guilt away.

Bend the stubborn heart and will;
Melt the frozen, warm the chill;
Guide the steps that go astray.

Thou, on us who evermore
Thee confess and thee adore,
With thy sevenfold gifts descend.

Give us comfort when we die;
Give us life with thee on high;
Give us joys that never end.
Amen. Alleluia.