

Writing the Prayer of the Faithful for Sunday Masses

A personal reflection by Jan MacLeod, Mercy parish, South Dunedin, 2022.

St Paul writes to Timothy:

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”(1 Tim 2)

The Prayer of the Faithful, also known as General Intercessions, are read by a member of the congregation on behalf of all gathered at the Mass. For the past 10 years or so I've written these prayers for our parish community. As I'm blind and unable to read print, the software on my computer helps read text and navigate websites. It is not widely known that I'm the writer of our prayers, but I'm blessed to often receive feed-back from some parishioners which I can incorporate into future prayers. It is never just my own work. The following is my personal reflection on writing these important community prayers.

How should we go about writing the Prayer of the Faithful?

There are a number of guidelines which I use to help me stay focussed on the task:

1. Remember that these are written on behalf of the faith community, for the community – those gathered and those beyond our church walls.

I begin by reading, reflecting and praying about the Gospel and find USCCB a useful website to locate the Readings for the day. I think about the needs of the world which may be highlighted in that reading. Sometimes the other readings for the day can also help, but it is the Gospel that is the main focus. It is helpful to read some reflections about the Gospel of the day on the web. I also reflect on what is happening in the world and in our local community, and I bring to mind conversations I've had with other parishioners including what are the needs or significant events which have occurred about which we should pray? E.g. Justice, environment, disasters, poverty, peace, Feast Days, the sick and those who care for them, parish events such as up-coming 1st Holy Communion or beginning of school term, etc.

N.B. Sundays form a 3-Year Cycle called Year A, B, and C, with each year beginning on the First Sunday of Advent. 2022 is Year C and 2023 is Year A, 2024 Year B and so on.

- **Year A – Gospel of St. Matthew**
- **Year B – Gospel of St. Mark**
- **Year C – Gospel of St. Luke**

2. These prayers are traditionally addressed to God the Creator, rather than to Jesus or the Holy Spirit.

3. Prayers should always be focussed on hope and goodness, on our need for God's love and support. E.g. 'We pray that violent parents may learn to gently care for the children in their care.' Never on the negative ... ('We pray that violent parents will be punished and brought to justice.')
4. There should only be 5 or 6 prayers, and they follow a sequence:
 - The first is always for the Universal Church Community, and/or leaders of the Church. For me this often includes prayer for the Pope and/or bishops and clergy. More often it is addressed to all of us as the Church – the People of God - to follow our baptismal call.
 - The last is always for the dead.
 - The middle ones start wide and move in: E.g. The world, our country, our city, and our parish.
5. Inclusive language is important – we bear in mind that the congregation is made up of male and female and each are made in the image of God. As mentioned later, for me, I like to link the prompt for the congregation, and the words of the response, to the time of the liturgical year or theme of the Gospel, so God is addressed in different, inclusive ways.

What form should they take?

There are generally three forms of Prayer of the Faithful:

1. The 'Full form', "For... that"
 - The full form announces who is to be prayed for and what is to be prayed for. E.g. "For all Christians, that they celebrate unity around Christ's table."
2. The 'Partial Form', "That..."
 - The partial form mentions the favour to be requested, referring to the persons to be prayed for with one word. E.g. "That all Christians celebrate unity around Christ's table."
3. The 'Second Partial Form', "For..."
 - The second partial form announces only those being prayed for. E.g. "For the unity of all Christians around Christ's table."

Prayers should be kept fairly brief. Usually no more than 2-3 lines. Anymore and the congregation often stops listening.

Each prayer finishes with a prompt for the congregation to reply. I believe this is best suited to the time of the liturgical year, or particular theme of the Gospel e.g. in Lent, maybe, "We pray to God" and the response from the people, "Merciful God hear our prayer".

It can be a good idea to occasionally change this response by the people in order to better engage them with the prayer being offered. Therefore, it needs to be indicated at the top of the prayers for the reader to read out first. E.g. "The response to the prayers is, "God of

Love, hear our prayer” or “Merciful God hear our prayer” or “Creator God hear our prayer” or “God of forgiveness hear our prayer” or Whakarongo mai ra kia matou”.

The reader of the Prayer of the Faithful says a prompt at the end of each prayer e.g. “In Faith we pray” or “God hear us” or “Together we pray” or “We pray to God” or “E te Ariki”.

Alternatively, some parishes sing a response to each prayer. In our parish there are various musicians, and some cantor the prompt and lead the shared response to the prayers and some don't. So, I include an instruction for readers to check with the musicians if the response will be spoken or sung.

The prayers are concluded with final words by the priest to which everyone responds "Amen".

I always e-mail the prayers to the priest by the Thursday before the Sunday. It provides an opportunity for him to incorporate ideas he might not have thought of, and to know what the congregation is praying for this week in our prayer. In my experience, it's sometimes a prompt for him to say he forgot to send me the Caritas prayer, or that there's a baptism this Sunday, but usually our priest is on to it and gives me plenty of notice. I also send the email to our parish secretary who makes the copy and puts it in the church ready for the Saturday Vigil and Sunday Masses. I copy into the email the musicians who like to be aware of the prayers in case they are doing the call and response as previously mentioned. I also include the chairperson of the parish pastoral council and he/she can also let me know if something important has been missed, or if something needs to be added in the following weeks.

Having written the Prayer of the Faithful for some time, I have saved them in numerical order as MSWord documents, in folders under Year A, B, and C, and within each Year. E.g. 1st Sunday in Advent A 2022; 2nd Sunday in Advent A 2022, and so on. Eventually a good reference bank of examples is built up over the years and putting the year at the end of the file name makes it easy to retrieve previous year's prayers. This is very helpful and often makes me think about what might have been important at that time during a particular year. Prayer of the Faithful for Sundays like Pentecost, Feast of The Holy Family etc fall into alphabetical order within the appropriate Liturgical year in the Word Document file. I rarely use the same prayer again, but it's a useful tool for getting my head and heart in the right space.

Finally, importantly, we need to keep in mind that the Eucharist is the vital centre of all that the Church is and does, and we participate in it in many ways. Our prayers, as the faithful, have a special place in seeking God's help and reminding us that we share the Eucharist in the world. Therefore, our prayers are also always a call for self-reflection and for physical response, and in this way our prayer should bring to mind our experiences at the time, and resonate with our thoughts and actions beyond Mass.