

# Prayer in Support of the Bishops' Conference Plenary Meeting

May 2019

During the course of their Spring Plenary Meeting, the Bishops will work with Survivors of various forms of abuse and others to seek to understand the impact of abuse on the lives of individuals and communities. They will explore ways forward for the Broken Body of Christ by praying with some of the people who are at the heart of that brokenness.

The following sessions are designed for those who would like to support the meeting with prayer and reflection. Others might prefer to try to attend Mass daily—or have a Holy Hour—or pray the Rosary. All prayer is valid and valuable and each moment of prayer will support what is likely to be a testing week for everyone.

**The first day—Saturday 4 May—is the Feast of the English Martyrs.** We call upon their intercession and those of all the saints of England and Wales as we enter the Octave of Prayer. The litany of saints is by no means exhaustive—please add your own and use as much or as little of it as is helpful.

**From Sunday, the format of the sessions follows the same pattern:**

**Acclamation** – praying that the Scriptures will awaken our hearts and minds to the presence of the Spirit.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Lord Jesus, explain the Scriptures to us.

Make our hearts burn within us as you talk to us. Alleluia!

**Gospel for the Day**

The Gospel Reading for the Third Sunday of Eastertime is John 21: 1-19.

An extract from this will form the Gospel for the Day (except for Saturday)

**From “Do You Love Me?”**

This Gospel forms the basis of the Bishops' Conference Document on Catholic Spirituality “Do You Love Me?” The focus of the document is Peter's journey from feelings of loss and despair to Jesus' entrusting him with leadership of the flock—the People of God—with all its joys—and challenges. We will use short extracts to offer insights that may prove helpful as we ourselves journey through the week spiritually.

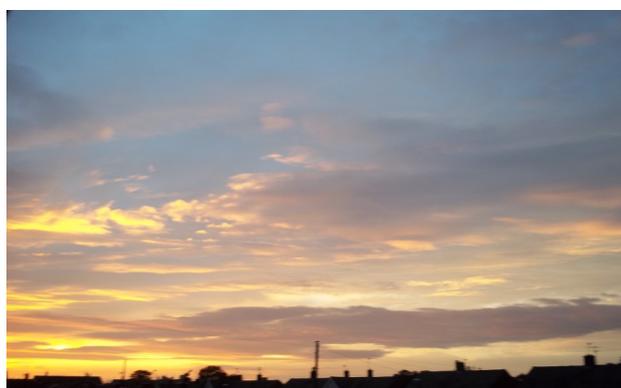
The document is available in full as a free download from the Bishops' Conference website or as a book from members of the Spirituality Committee (contact via the Liturgy Office)

**Prompts for reflection**

A thought followed by questions to which there is no right or wrong answer but which will, hopefully, deepen our thoughts and reflections on the Scripture, the Bishops' document and the situation for which we are praying.

**Psalm**

Each chapter of the document closes with a Psalm which we use for our own prayer.



**Saturday 4 May - Feast of English Martyrs**  
and drawing on the Intercession of all saints and England and Wales

**Based on Collect of the Day**

Almighty God,  
who in our countries raised up martyrs and saints from every walk of life  
to vindicate the authority of your Church in teaching and worship,  
grant through their intercession, we pray,  
that all our people may be gathered once again  
to celebrate the same sacraments  
under the one Shepherd, Jesus Christ, you Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.

**Gospel for the Day**

Jesus said,  
“Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

*Matthew 10: 17-20*

**Prompts for reflection**

Over coming days, people will offer testimony to our Bishops. There will be great anxiety and fear. For some, there will be questions along the lines of: What should I say? How will it be received? Will they really listen? Is this going to stir things up that I can't cope with? For others: What will I hear? How will it make me feel? How am I supposed to respond? Is this going to stir things up that I can't cope with?

Insofar as you can, put yourself in the place of the Survivors and the Bishops and think about the anxieties and fears. Pray for the graces of courage – of trust in God and in each other – of compassion for each other – of hearts speaking to hearts.

**Psalm 30(31)**

Be a rock of refuge for me,	Into your hands I commend my spirit.
a mighty stronghold to save me,	It is you will redeem me, Lord.
for you are my rock, my stronghold,	As for me, I trust in the Lord;
for your name's sake, lead me and guide me.	let me be glad and rejoice in your love.

Let your face shine on your servant.  
Save me in your love.  
You hide them in the shelter of your presence  
from the plotting of men.  
Into your hands I commend my spirit.



## Litany of Saints of England and Wales

St David  
St George  
Our Lady of Walsingham

St Alban – the first martyr

St John Almond  
St Edmund Arrowsmith  
St Ambrose Barlow  
St John Boste  
St Alexander Briant  
St Edmund Campion  
St Margaret Clitherow  
St Philip Evans  
St Thomas Garnet  
St Edmund Gennings  
St Richard Gwyn  
St John Houghton  
St Philip Howard  
St John Jones  
St John Kemble  
St Luke Kirby  
St Robert Lawrence  
St David Lewis  
St Anne Line  
St John Lloyd  
St Cuthbert Mayne  
St Henry Morse  
St Nicholas Owen  
St John Payne  
St Polydore Plasden  
St John Plessington  
St Richard Reynolds

St John Rigby  
St John Roberts  
St Alban Roe  
St Ralph Sherwin  
St Robert Southwell  
St John Southworth  
St John Stone  
St John Wall  
St Henry Walpole  
St Margaret Ward  
St Augustine Webster  
St Swithun Wells  
St Eustace White  
Blessed John Ingram  
Blessed Robert Southgate  
and all martyrs of the Reformation  
St John Fisher  
St Thomas More

St Aidan  
St Augustine  
St Bede  
St Bega  
St Benet Biscop  
St Beuno  
St Cuthbert  
St Edwin  
St Hilda  
St Oswald  
St Paulinus  
St Wilfrid  
St Winefride  
St Blessed John Henry Newman

## Sunday 5 May

Alleluia, alleluia! Lord Jesus, explain the Scriptures to us.  
Make our hearts burn within us as you talk to us. Alleluia!

### From the Gospel

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will go with you.' They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

### From "Do You Love Me?"

Peter had been through a series of devastating events. Post-traumatic stress is nothing new! We cannot know exactly what was going through his head but we can perhaps imagine it. Jesus, the person he had trusted and loved so much had died a very public, painful and shameful death. It had all happened so quickly and, no doubt Peter's grief was compounded by the fact that he never got to say the things he wanted to say. Why did Jesus have to die? Why did God let it happen? What sort of God is this anyway? And now there's all this talk of the resurrection and those appearances that seemed to be the Jesus he knew of old and yet how could that be? We can't know whether big questions like these were in Peter's head before he gets into the boat but we do know what he does.

Like many of us when grief hits, Peter decides to do something. He gets busy. Life has to go on so he goes back to his old job. There is something very comforting in returning to the familiar routine. So he and his companions go fishing. If Peter thinks he is going to be cheered up by a good return for all his hard labour he is sorely disappointed. It's a disaster. They catch nothing. *(page 16)*

### Prompts for Reflection

The Body of Christ has been gravely wounded. Some of our brothers and sisters have been abused—physically, emotionally and spiritually. Some of our brothers and sisters have caused that abuse—some unaware of the damage they were inflicting—others all too aware.

Like Peter at this point in the Gospel, we know that Resurrection is real—but, like Peter at this point in the Gospel, wonder what it means and how on earth it can come about.

- How do Peter's feelings echo those of many people in the Church today?
- How does our temptation to get busy—to DO something—sometimes get in the way of the deep work we have to do in order to be open to the way forward?

### Psalm—Yearning for God...

As a deer longs for flowing streams  
so my soul longs for you, O God.  
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When shall I come and behold the face of God?

I say to God, my rock,  
"Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I walk about mournfully  
because the enemy oppresses me?"

My tears have been my food day and night,  
while people say to me continually,  
"Where is your God?"

As with a deadly wound in my body,  
my adversaries taunt me,  
while they say to me continually,  
"Where is your God?"

Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God.



## Monday 6 May

Alleluia, alleluia! Lord Jesus, explain the Scriptures to us.  
Make our hearts burn within us as you talk to us. Alleluia!

### From the Gospel

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?' They answered him, 'No.' He said to them, 'Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

### From "Do You Love Me?"

At the centre of our spirituality is not a "what to do" or a "how to do it" but a "who". It is a person, the person of Christ. This is a non-negotiable element in our spirituality. If in our prayer and devotions we have not recognised who it is that is before us, we have missed the point. "It is the Lord" says John. John has this flash of recognition, not on his knees in a quiet place but as he is hauling in the net. We can have what we might call recognition moments too. They happen when something occurs, or something is said, or we see something and we just know something special is being shown to us. Our spirituality helps us to see not only what this is but who is there and to respond "It is the Lord".

### Prompts for Reflection

Times of dedicated prayer are hugely important but the Lord often makes himself known in the middle of our work or daily life and conversations. It reminds us that he is present with us — "to the end of the age". We may not always be fully aware of him—but prayer keeps us alert to the signs and the promptings that help us to recognise his presence and find the courage to "jump into the lake" — to take the risk of a leap of faith that can feel as if it makes no sense but leads us closer to him and to God.

- What are the leaps of faith our Survivors—Bishops—and others might need to make?
- How can those of us less involved offer them a "safety net" or a "life belt"?

### From Psalm 138(139) - a Prayer of Trust in the God who knows us

O Lord you have searched me and known me.  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
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 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 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.  
How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast the sum of them!  
I try to count them - they are more than the sand;  
I come to an end - I am still with you.



## Tuesday 7 May

Alleluia, alleluia! Lord Jesus, explain the Scriptures to us.  
Make our hearts burn within us as you talk to us. Alleluia!

### From the Gospel

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.' So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

### From "Do You Love Me?"

One of the great treasures in our spirituality is the experience of silence. We live in a very noisy and sound-ridden world. We are wired for sound with our mobile phones, iPods, and computers. Sometimes we are so unused to silence that, faced with it, we would prefer to fill it up with noise. And when we do find it, we can sometimes be unsure what to do with it. Yet our spirituality says silence is important. It values silence because silence helps us hear where God is calling us to a more balanced life. The great Trappist monk, Thomas Merton once said, "We are what we do with our silence". (p37)

### Prompts for Reflection

There is little spoken conversation in our Gospel—but a lot is being communicated.

One of the most serious criticisms of Church leaders in relation to the revelations of the systematic abuse of children and other vulnerable people has been their silence. There are many kinds of silence—some stem from a wilful suppression of facts—others from simply not knowing what to say—still others are holding a place of silence to try to listen fully—to hear fully—and to take what has been heard deep into our beings so that we can offer a truer and more healing response.

- What kinds of silence have played a part in the abuse crisis?
- How might a healthy, God-filled silence help to heal the anguish caused by the suppressive and cruel one?

### Psalm 131—a Psalm of Stillness

O Lord my heart is not lifted up,  
my eyes are not raised too high;  
I do not occupy myself with things too great  
and too marvellous for me.

But have calmed and quieted my soul,  
like a weaned child with its mother;  
my soul within me is like a weaned child.  
O Israel hope in the Lord  
From this time on and for evermore.



## Wednesday 8 May

Alleluia, alleluia! Lord Jesus, explain the Scriptures to us.  
Make our hearts burn within us as you talk to us. Alleluia!

### From the Gospel

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me.'

### From "Do You Love Me?"

Our conversations with the Lord are not so much about receiving nice comfy feelings as about saying "yes" to a relationship which will challenge us as much as it will comfort us, and stretch us as much as it will embrace us. It will affect who we are and what we do.

It also suggests that sometimes God has to ask us the same questions over and over again as he did with Peter. ... Thirdly it suggests that sometimes this conversation may not be easy. Peter felt hurt because of the questions Jesus asked. Was he hurt because they were a painful reminder of how he had denied Jesus three times and run away? Or was he hurt because Jesus did not seem to believe him when he avowed his love? Conversations are easily misunderstood and it is important to try and ensure our dialogue with the Lord does not become a way of hearing what we want to hear or a way of opting out from responding to whatever we are being called to. (p49-50)

### Prompts for Reflection

Sometimes, conversations with God and with others can be comforting and reassuring. At other times, they can be challenging—sometimes so challenging that we would rather not be party to them. But imagine if Peter had walked away when Jesus' questions became uncomfortable or, even, positively painful... It takes courage to stay with a conversation that speaks of the pain of another and highlights our failures in alleviating it. But, sometimes, this is the only way forward—to hear things that are so devastating that we do not know words deep or strong enough to say sorry for them —or say things that leave us fearful of another person's response—whether this is anger or shame or utter bewilderment.

- How can difficult conversations lead to healing?
- What creates an atmosphere where deep and painful truths can be said and heard?

### From Psalm 88 - A psalm of lament

O Lord, God of my salvation, when at night,  
I cry out in your presence, let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry.  
For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol.  
I am counted among those who go down to the Pit;  
I am like those who have no help,  
like those forsaken among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave,  
like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand...  
My eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call on you O Lord;  
I spread out my hands to you.  
But I, O Lord, cry out to you;  
in the morning my prayer comes before you. O Lord, why do you cast me off?  
Why do you hide your face from me?  
Wretched and close to death from my youth up I suffer your terrors. I am desperate...  
You have caused friend and neighbour to shun me; my companions are in darkness.



## Thursday 9 May

Alleluia, alleluia! Lord Jesus, explain the Scriptures to us.  
Make our hearts burn within us as you talk to us. Alleluia!

### From the Gospel

Very truly I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

### From “Do You Love Me?”

This part of the narrative ends with the command of Christ, to “follow me.” There is something very profound in the way this is recorded. Things happen in an ordered way. Jesus asks the big question first, do you love me? Next he commands Peter to feed my sheep then to follow me. This order is significant. Peter is called first to commit himself in love for his Lord. Out of this love he is to actively care for the flock. Finally he is reminded that he will only be able to care for the flock faithfully if he follows the way of Jesus. In other words it is only if he keeps his eyes on Jesus who is leading him that he can do what Jesus wants. If we are to follow the example of Peter it means that our spirituality is about keeping close to the Lord in order that we might hear what he wishes us to do. So the order is love the Lord first, hear the call to service and act on it and always keep following; listening and speaking to the one who loves us through thick and thin, whatever happens in our lives. (p66)

### Prompts for Reflection

It is interesting that Jesus calls Peter to be a shepherd to his people—but then tells him to follow him. Peter’s journey will be long and hard and his life will end as did his Lord’s in death by crucifixion. Jesus is not promising an easy path—but reminds Peter that, as he leads the flock, he too is being led—by the Good Shepherd—the one who bears the scars of suffering—betrayal—denial—humiliation. Perhaps today, our Bishops are being called to follow Christ—not in his kingship and power—but in his brokenness and his honesty of the wounds that his broken Body has borne and which now need his healing.

- How might the Lord be leading his shepherds to a deeper understanding of the needs of “the sheep”?
- And how might the sheep—the wounded and bruised—be called to lead the shepherds?

### From Psalm 86—a Psalm calling on the Lord

Incline your ear O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.  
Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you; save your servant who trusts in you.  
You are my God.

Teach me your way O Lord,  
that I may walk in your truth give me an undivided heart to revere your  
name.

I give thanks to you O Lord my God with my whole heart,  
and I will glorify your name for ever. For great is your steadfast love  
towards me;

you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

O God the insolent rise up against me;  
a band of ruffians seeks my life,  
and they do not set you before them.

But you O Lord, are a merciful God and gracious, slow to anger  
and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Turn to me and be gracious to me;  
give your strength to your servant;  
save the child of your serving maid.  
Show me a sign of your favour,



## Friday 10 May

Alleluia, alleluia! Lord Jesus, explain the Scriptures to us.

Make our hearts burn within us as you talk to us. Alleluia!

### From the Gospel

Peter turned round and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" When Peter saw him he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

Follow me!"

### From "Do You Love Me?"

How will we know when we have made a choice in line with the will of God? We can say that there are some things that stand out as the characteristics of good choices. We shall know we have probably made a right choice if these criteria are evident:

- Good choices never isolate us from other people.
- Good choices lead to human flourishing.
- Good choices are about generosity of spirit.
- Good choices give us a sense of "rightness".
- Good choices help us to see things in a new and life giving way.
- Good choices help us deal with our inner demons.
- Good choices help us live in a more integrated way.

### Prompts for Reflection

Peter has choices to make. Jesus has laid a command on him—to feed his sheep and his lambs. However, as humans so often do, he looks at someone else and asks "What about him?" Instead of focusing on the choice facing him, he allows himself to be distracted by the paths laid before others. Why do you ask this of me and not them? Are they getting a better deal than me? Why should I take the risk if you don't ask this of someone else? And so on... and on... All these distractions take us away from the choices that lead us closer to God. They lead to a disruption of our spirits—and to choices that do not give life to us or to others.

- How might the Lord be leading his shepherds to a deeper understanding of the needs of "the sheep"?
- And how might the sheep—the wounded and bruised—be called to lead the shepherds?

### Psalm 22—a Psalm of trust in the Good Shepherd

The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.

He leads me in the right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life-long.



## Saturday 11 May

Alleluia, alleluia! Lord Jesus, explain the Scriptures to us.

Make our hearts burn within us as you talk to us. Alleluia!

### From the Gospel of the Day (John 6: 60-69)

Jesus said to the Twelve, “What about you, do you want to go away too?” Simon Peter answered, “Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God.”

### From “Do You Love Me?”

Once John has pointed Jesus out (on the beach) Peter literally leaps into action. He is so anxious to get to Jesus that he throws himself into the sea taking only enough time to grab the essentials. He just can't wait. He doesn't stop to try and get his act together before making for land. Our spirituality says that once we see who this person is there is a real desire to be with him. This is what our hearts have been searching for. Nothing will stop Peter and nothing should stop us; not the awareness of our failures, nor the fact that we have nothing but what God has given us in our hands. It may be fanciful to imagine it but perhaps there was a smile to the face of the risen Lord as he watched the sheer recklessness of Peter's action. For Peter, and for every Christian, nothing else is needed apart from this recognising and being with Christ because everything else stems from it. (p25)

### Prompts for Reflection

We do not know how long before Jesus' death and Peter's denial the events in today's Gospel take place but we already see something of Peter's impetuosity.. And his capacity to speak for the other disciples. Jesus is getting to know this other “beloved disciple”... not beloved because he is already perfect but beloved because he has fallen in love with someone worthy enough to give his life to. He makes mistakes—massive mistakes at times. Jesus does not ignore them or pretend they do not happen—but he stays steadfast to the one he has chosen—helping him to learn from his mistakes and so learn the strength and compassion he needs to care for the People of God entrusted to him.

- How does Peter's awareness of his own weakness and vulnerability actually make him a stronger and better leader?
- How can he be a model for those in leadership in the Church today?

### Psalm 16—a prayer of trust in God's guidance

Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

I say to the Lord, 'You are my Lord;  
I have no good apart from you.'

I bless the Lord who gives me counsel;  
in the night also my heart instructs me.  
I keep the Lord always before me;  
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;  
my body also rests secure.  
For you do not give me up to Sheol,  
or let your faithful one see the Pit.

You show me the path of life.  
In your presence there is fullness of joy;  
in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.

