

Fed by
God's Grace

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**COMMUNION
PRAYERS for
Year A**

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Introduction

January 1, 2001. We realized this evening as we wrote the last two prayers for this collection of three volumes of communion prayers, that these were the last ones. Three years of work have gone into these prayers. There is a sense of completion, of pride, and yet the grief of an ending.

Sitting down at the computer, each time we read the texts for a given Sunday, we asked for God's guidance as we put our fingers to the keyboard to form words...that God would inspire us as we took these scriptures, interpreted them, and put them into thoughts for the table. And we felt God's presence as we wrote.

For those of you who have used the other volumes and have commented upon their helpfulness, we are grateful! And we pray that this final volume will help guide your thoughts at the table.

Fed by God's Grace, Year A is one of three books published for those of you who are called on to pray aloud at Christ's table. We hope that these prayers will serve as promptings, models, or clues to give you input as you prepare your own prayers. If they stimulate your thoughts, sharpen your insights, and focus your attention, they will serve their purposes. If, on some Sundays, you want to use the prayers as written here, adopting these words as your own, that's all right, too.

Many previous books of communion prayers have followed a single model, such as separate prayers for the bread and the cup. *Fed by God's Grace* offers four prayers for each Sunday: one for the bread, one for the cup, a unified prayer for both bread and cup, and a closing prayer to be used after the communion service.

That way, you can choose the model that is best for your congregation.

We offer these suggestions on how to prepare for praying at the Lord's table.

- If your congregation uses the Revised Common Lectionary, check to see what Sunday of the church year you will be praying, then find the appropriate page in this book.
- If your congregation does not use the Revised Common Lectionary, it may follow the general seasons of the church year. Find a set of prayers appropriate to the season.
- If your congregation does not use the Revised Common Lectionary and you want to choose a prayer that connects with the scripture lesson for the day, use the scripture index in the back of the book.
- When you have selected a prayer, read and reflect on all the scripture readings at the top of the page. This is a part of your spiritual preparation for serving at the table and can help you understand the concepts behind the prayer.
- Read the prayer to yourself (and to God), as spiritual preparation and rehearsal. Revise the prayer as necessary to fit your own beliefs or those of your congregation or denomination, and to fit any particular contexts of your local situation. Write out the prayer, make notes, or commit it to memory, as is right for you.
- Before the service begins, take a few moments of silent prayer and reflection or take time to pray together with others who are leading worship.

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- If you are one who plans the worship service, you have permission to quote individual prayers in your congregation's worship bulletins. People who have used the books have mentioned that it was helpful to print the Prayers after Communion in the bulletin as unison prayers.
- Sometimes the prayers quote a verse or more of a hymn. These can be read by the person leading prayer, or they can be sung by the congregation or choir.

As mentioned above, these collections of prayers for the communion table follow the seasons of the church year. The church year begins with Advent, the season of preparation before Christmas. From there we move into Epiphany, Lent, Eastertide, and finally Pentecost, the longest season of the church year. The Revised Common Lectionary, a three-year cycle of scripture readings increasingly being used in many congregations, follows a progression of scripture passages designed to give the minister and congregation an overview of the Bible: Hebrew Scriptures, psalms, epistles and gospels. For Year A, the major gospel is Matthew, year B Mark and year C Luke. All three years use John.

Prayers in *Fed by God's Grace* pick their eucharistic themes from the scriptures. Not every scripture is used in each Sunday's sets of prayers, but we tried to touch base with the themes, if not the words, of each set of scripture texts.

We have used as our source of scripture listings *The Revised Common Lectionary*, developed by the Consultation on Common Texts, published in 1992. Following the lectionary plan, this book has built in all

the variables for the calendar years. Confusingly, not all the seasons are the same length from year to year. Lent counts forty days backward from the date of Easter, and Pentecost falls seven Sundays after Easter. Since Easter moves, Epiphany may be very short and Pentecost very long in a given year, or Epiphany will be longer and Pentecost shorter in another year. You might want to check with the pastor to see what Sunday of the church year you will be serving at the table.

Since the church year begins with the first Sunday in Advent in late November or early December, we offer the following chart so that you will know when to use these books.

Year A

Advent 2001—last Sunday of Pentecost 2002
Advent 2004—last Sunday of Pentecost 2005
Advent 2007—last Sunday of Pentecost 2008
Advent 2010—last Sunday of Pentecost 2011

Year B

Advent 2002—last Sunday of Pentecost 2003
Advent 2005—last Sunday of Pentecost 2006
Advent 2008—last Sunday of Pentecost 2009
Advent 2011—last Sunday of Pentecost 2012

Year C

Advent 2003—last Sunday of Pentecost 2004
Advent 2006—last Sunday of Pentecost 2007
Advent 2009—last Sunday of Pentecost 2010
Advent 2012—last Sunday of Pentecost 2013

On a personal note, it is always so amazing to see ways that God's grace abounds! The years we have been

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writing these books of prayers have been filled with some special sorrows. Each of us has lost a parent in these three years. These have been occasions filled with grief and despair.

Yet in the midst of the grief and despair, we feel God's grace at work. We feel the prayers of our families, our friends, and colleagues.

And we are once more blessed by grace.

Writing these books has been an exercise filled with grace. The last prayer Sandy wrote was for the sixth Sunday of Easter. Psalm 66 was one of the texts: "But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me" (vv. 19–20).

May all our readers truly feel that they are fed by God's grace.

Mike and Sandy
January 2001

First Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 2:1–5

Psalm 122

Romans 13:11–14

Matthew 24:36–44

PRAYER FOR THE BREAD: On this first Sunday of Advent, we think we know what time it is. All the ads and commercials tell us it is time to get ready for Christmas. It is time to want, shop, purchase, clean, and cook for the holidays.

Yet we are taken aback when we really listen to your Word for today. For the *time* is about salvation, light, and living honorably. These emphases remind us of how we are to get ready to celebrate your coming as the child Jesus, and your coming again.

Jesus, we thank you for your life and death, which made possible the resurrection and life eternal. Wake us now into life anew as we wait for you. Let this bread, your body, give us strength to ready the world for you. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE CUP: God of light, in a world filled with uncertainty, we come to this sacred table today. We have heard your words telling us to prepare, for we do not know when you are coming. We have heard your words telling us how to live lives worthy of our Savior. In this uncertain world, you have given us guidelines.

We see the light of the first Advent candle; it gives us hope in a dark world. We see the cup on this table; it gives us life in a finite world. We are given the gift of life

eternal in this cup by the life, death, and resurrection of the Son of Man.

As we drink from this cup, we receive the strength to walk in the light. Amen.

UNIFIED PRAYER:

O God of goodness, peace, and light,
we come to your table today seeking
the peace you want for your people.

Help us make our swords into plowshares
that we may nurture the earth and plant.

Show us how to turn our spears into pruning hooks,
that we may reap bountifully.

With the abundance of your feast set before us,
the bread harvested from the wheat,
the grapes from the vines,
we remember your gift to us
in your Son, Jesus Christ.

In this season of preparation, let us
walk in goodness and light. Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION: Because we are here in your house of worship, O God of all good things, we know that you have already come. Again, though, we celebrate Advent in thanksgiving—and anticipate your coming again in Christ to complete what you have already begun. We go forth looking to the light! Amen.

*Sandy Dixon, *Everlasting Light* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), p. 14.

Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 11:1–10

Psalms 72:1–7, 18–19

Romans 15:4–13

Matthew 3:1–12

PRAYER FOR THE BREAD: God of steadfastness and encouragement, guide us to live in the harmony of Jesus Christ. In this Advent season, we hear many conflicting claims for our attention and loyalty. Help these silent moments of communion be a time when we can hear your voice, a time when we can give you glory and praise. The bread we offer reminds us of the Christ, who offered his body for our sakes. Help us open our hearts to the joy and peace that your Spirit gives. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE CUP: We are at this holy table serving you, Wondrous God, who can create a place where wolves and lambs live together, and where a child shall lead a parade of wild beasts. You can create a new heaven and a new Earth. Then you can forgive all our sin and restore our brokenness. The cup that we are about to take is all about restoring brokenness, for it is your Son's brokenness that makes us whole. We drink from the cup, and in Jesus, the Christ, you act in love to make all things new. Thanks be to God!*

*Adapted from Linda McKiernan-Allen, ed., *Celebrating Incarnation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), p. 54.

UNIFIED PRAYER:

Lo, how a rose e'er blooming from tender stem
hath sprung,
of Jesse's lineage coming by faithful prophets sung;
it came a flow'ret bright, amid the cold of winter
when half spent was the night.
Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the rose I have in mind;
with Mary we behold it, the virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright she bore to us a
Savior when halfspent was the night.*

Blessed are you, God, for the wondrous things you have done for your people. You have sent to us a Savior in your Son, Jesus Christ. We celebrate the greatness of your love in coming to this table today. The bread and cup, the body and blood of your Son are given to us by your grace. In the presence of the Holy Spirit, let us eat and drink these emblems set before us. Amen.**

STATEMENT AFTER COMMUNION:

“Children of God, arise!
Go from this place nourished by bread and cup,
inspired by a vision of God's peace,
eager to live 'as if' the whole world were God's
holy mountain,
where no one will ever again hurt or destroy.”***

*“Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming,” German carol (15th century), trans. Theodore Baker (1894).

**Dixon, *Everlasting Light*, p. 18.

***McKiernan-Allen, ed., *Celebrating Incarnation*, p. 61.

Third Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 35:1–10

Psalm 146:5–10 or Luke 1:47–55

James 5:7–10

Matthew 11:2–11

PRAYER FOR THE BREAD: O God who plants seeds in the desert to see them bloom, enter our spiritual desert. Plant within us the seeds of promise and hope. Help us to blossom into Christians who show our faith by our actions.

You have acted in our behalf by sending us your Son, Jesus, to be our Savior. We have accepted this gift of grace. The bread on this table is an earthly symbol of that gift—the body of our Savior. As we eat of this bread, help our spiritual desert come to life that we may share the good news with all your children. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE CUP: The scriptures nearly shout this day the message of good news! Things that are wrong will be righted. Miracles will happen. In your reign, mighty and compassionate God, all news is good news.

A baby will be born. He will be the answer to the promise made to Israel. He is the answer to our salvation. Miracles will happen.

The cup before us is also a miracle—a miracle of love and life eternal in Jesus Christ. We praise you, God, as we drink from this cup. Holy Spirit, guide us into paths where we may proclaim your good news to others. Amen.

UNIFIED PRAYER: We are a fortunate people indeed, God. You have shared with us that which is most important to you—your Son. By his life, death, and resurrection, you give us the good news of life eternal in your love. The loaf and cup before us tell of this love each time we come to the table. By the eating and drinking of the bread and wine, we commit ourselves to sharing what you have so freely given to us. Help us, Holy Spirit, to act in the name of our Savior, who comes again to us. Amen.*

STATEMENT AFTER COMMUNION: God is saying to us that in Jesus Christ, God is with each of us. Emmanuel, God with us. We believe the promise of God. Go! Share the good news!

*Dixon, *Everlasting Light*, p. 20.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 7:10–16

Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19

Romans 1:1–7

Matthew 1:18–25

PRAYER FOR THE BREAD: Savior God, we wait for your coming during this Advent season. We know the time is now near. Help us take the words of scripture we have heard in these weeks to reflect on a new way to live our lives, confess our sins, and wait in faith and hope for the coming of our Lord, Emmanuel.

Give us the courage to act for good and not for evil, hold us by the hand, and lead us in your paths.

We know the bread we take is for the forgiveness of our sins; we eat of it cleansed of what is not acceptable to you. We offer to you thanksgiving for our Savior. Holy Spirit, be with us we pray. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE CUP: The psalmist cried, “Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.”* We anticipate your coming, Immanuel, knowing that we have the power to be saved if we but ask. We confess your name, O Jesus, and know we belong to you.

The cup is truly the symbol that we are saved, for it is the blood of our Savior. Increase our faith, and let our hope reign in this season of waiting for the coming of the one we call Christ. Amen.

*Psalm 80:19.

UNIFIED PRAYER: O God who is ever near us, in these final days before your coming, we offer our prayers to you. We thank you for life itself; we thank you for our church family. Most of all, we give you thanks for your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. In this meal today, we eat and drink in anticipation of the coming of the Christ. Help us to feel your presence, Emmanuel, God with us, as we take the bread and cup. Amen.*

STATEMENT AFTER COMMUNION:

Go as risk-takers,
for God has nourished you with bread and cup.
Go as new creatures,
for God is saving you from your sin.
Go as children of God,
for God will be with us all. Amen.**

*Sandy Dixon, *Everlasting Light*, p. 23.

**Diana Hagewood Smith, in McKiernan-Allen, ed., *Celebrating Incarnation*, p. 69.