

Fed by
God's Grace

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COMMUNION PRAYERS for Year C

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Introduction

The table is ready. Worshipers gather. We sing, we pray, we hear the Word. We are invited to come to the table, to eat and drink, to do as Christ's disciples did in the upper room long ago. And we pray. The spoken prayers of the leaders mingle with the unspoken prayers of the community. Then, by the grace of God, we are spiritually fed.

Fed by God's Grace, Communion Prayers for Year C is one of three books designed 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 more models. For each Sunday, you will find four prayers: 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.

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- 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, spend a few moments in silent prayer and reflection or take time to pray together with others who are leading worship.

As mentioned above, these collections of prayers for the communion table follow the seasons of the church year, which begins in late November or early December 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 lectionary scriptures. Not every scripture is used in each Sunday's set 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 and 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.

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 2000: last Sunday of Pentecost 2001

Advent 2003: last Sunday of Pentecost 2004

Advent 2006: last Sunday of Pentecost 2007

Advent 2009: last Sunday of Pentecost 2010

First Sunday of Advent

Jeremiah 33:14–16

Psalms 25:1–10

1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

Luke 21:25–36

PRAYER FOR THE BREAD: To you, O God, we lift up our souls. In you we put our trust. You are a merciful God, and your steadfast love leads us on the paths of faithfulness. We see your mercy at this table, as we break the bread, for we are fed by your grace. We remember your love at this table, because the bread recalls for us the Christ that you sent to save us. May your Spirit prepare our hearts for our Savior that we might learn to love as we have been loved, to be merciful as we have received mercy. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE CUP: Good and gracious God, we continue in prayer at this, your table. Long ago, you gave a promise to your people that you would send a righteous and just leader to bring salvation. We believe that Jesus Christ came to fulfill that promise. The cup we drink reminds us of why Jesus came into our midst, to offer his life so we might know real life with you. As we begin this Advent season, we pray that your Spirit will prepare our hearts and minds to accept Christ's ways as ours in a deeper way than we have done before. Amen.

UNIFIED PRAYER: Renew us, O God, as we come to your table. We are a take-charge people who are uncomfortable trusting in a future that only you can control. We are a here-and-now people who have difficulty in preparation and planning, even when the one we are preparing for is your Son and our Savior, Jesus the Christ. Even when we can get our heads and hearts around preparing for the coming of the baby in Bethlehem, we are awkward and uncomfortable in thinking about Christ returning in glory. Teach us here at your table, dear God, that we may learn to trust you completely with our lives, and that we may turn our will over to be guided by yours. For it is here at this table that we learn how Jesus Christ, in complete trust and love, offered himself for us. Through this bread we eat and this cup we drink, let us offer ourselves to your loving and gracious will. May your Spirit work within our hearts as we partake. Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION: God of love and mercy, we thank you for this time of communion, and pray that through it we may increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. Amen.

*Sandy Dixon, *Everlasting Light* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), pp. 52–53.

Second Sunday of Advent

Malachi 3:1–4

Luke 1:68–79

Philippians 1:3–11

Luke 3:1–6

PRAYER FOR THE BREAD: Plant within us the seeds of righteousness, nurturing God. Sustain their growth and increase their harvest, abundant God. Purify and cleanse us, O renewing God. As Christ offered himself up as bread for the world, may we offer ourselves in loving service. May this bread that we now break nourish our bodies and spirits to sustain us in doing your will. Bless us with the presence of your Spirit in this moment of communion and throughout the weeks and years of our lives. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE CUP: Gracious and self-giving God, help prepare our selfish and frightened hearts to receive your overflowing love. Open our eyes to glimpses of your presence everywhere. Open our hearts to the needs of others. Open our souls so that we may receive your compassion, poured out for us in Christ's self-giving love. May this cup we drink fill our lives with your Spirit, so that we might receive this self-giving love and learn to love others as you have loved us. Amen.

UNIFIED PRAYER: Prepare our hearts for the coming of our Savior, dear God. Straighten out the rough places in our attitudes; fill with your love the low places of fear and depression; tear down the hills of prejudice and pride. Here at this table may our spirits commune with your Spirit, so that your Spirit may touch and influence our lives. Bless this bread, so that in eating of it we may participate in Christ's body, given for us. Bless this cup, so that in drinking it we may participate in Christ's self-giving love, poured out for us. Guide our feet on the paths of peace. Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION: Faithful God, you have always been true to the covenants you have given your people. From the time of Abraham, you have sent prophets to call us to remember your tender mercies. In the fullness of time, you sent Jesus Christ to give us the knowledge of salvation and the forgiveness of sins. At this table of communion we have been called from darkness into light and have participated in the covenant of love that Christ instituted for us. May the light of your love continue to guide us in this Advent season. Amen.

*Dixon, *Everlasting Light*, pp. 55–56.

Third Sunday of Advent

Zephaniah 3:14–20

Isaiah 12:2–6

Philippians 4:4–7

Luke 3:7–18

PRAYER FOR THE BREAD: In a world of hatred, O God, you invite us to eat the bread of love. In a world of inequity, you invite us to eat the bread of justice. In a world of fear, you invite us to eat the bread of joy. In this Advent season, we come, daring to accept the living bread that you invite us to eat. Transform us by your Spirit, so that in eating this bread we may bind ourselves to the Christ whom you send. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE CUP: We sing your praises, dear God, for you have given us salvation. We have drunk from the well of living water; you have filled our lives with joy. As we gather at this communion table in this time of preparation, we drink deeply of the love poured out for us in Jesus Christ. Open our hearts that we might realize the depth of your love for us and for all the human family. Let us learn from what we experience here how to love one another as you love us. Amen.

UNIFIED PRAYER: God of justice and love, how easy it is to stray from the paths you have set before us. Prejudice, fear, self-righteousness, and greed tempt us. Yet when we stray, you call us back through your prophets and through your word. We come to this table seeking to be true to your way. With repentant hearts, we eat the bread and drink the cup that you have given us. Help us learn to be more faithful and more loving. Open our hearts, so that we may receive the Christ you send us. Guide us by your Spirit that we may stay on your paths. Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION: Here at your table, dear God, we have experienced something of the peace that passes all understanding. May your peace continue with us as we go into the world. Amen.

*Dixon, *Everlasting Light*, p. 58.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Micah 5:2–5a

Luke 1:47–55 or Psalm 80:1–7

Hebrews 10:5–10

Luke 1:39–45 (46–55)

PRAYER FOR THE BREAD: Our spirits rejoice in you, O God our savior. You have lifted us up from despair. You have filled us with good things. You have given your children the promise of peace and love. This bread that we eat is a sign of your generous love and a reminder of the one you sent to feed a hungry world, Jesus Christ. As we receive this bread, help us receive also the Christ, who came to show us your tender mercy. Direct us by your Spirit. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE CUP: We have lived too long in darkness, O God of light and life. Greed and fear, selfishness and narrowness have dimmed our vision. We pray that through the light of Jesus Christ a new dawn will break, upon the world and upon us. As we anticipate the birth of Christ, may this cup recall for us that wonderful gift of love. In drinking it, we affirm that your love was poured out for us for our salvation. As we attempt to live as Christians, may your Spirit guide our feet on the paths of peace. Amen.

UNIFIED PRAYER: Shepherd us, dear God. Guide us and protect us. Prepare our hearts to be open to the love that you have to give. Bring to our hearts the joy of knowing your promise, the promise fulfilled in Jesus Christ our Savior. We come to your table to eat the bread and drink the cup that remind us why Christ came to earth. Bless us with your Spirit's presence as we receive the precious gift of love. Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION: We have come to your table, gracious God so that we might know more fully the one you have sent to us, Jesus Christ. As we go, guide us in your peace, that Christ's love might be born in us. Amen.

*Dixon, *Everlasting Light*, p. 61.