

BLINDED BY YOUR GRACE

Prelude

Your Word, O Lord (Taizé)

Procession with Cloths, Lanterns and Lectionary

Introduction

'When the goodness and kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us ...'
So writes the author of the Letter to Titus (3:5). He is speaking of the grace of God, offering us transformation, in and through the gift of his Son, Jesus. His human words are the Word of God as well, and his human love is the embodiment of God's love for people, God's caring, accepting, forgiving, reconciling, liberating and transforming love. Jesus was and remains the human face of God, God's humanity, revealing God's 'amazing grace' in dozens of human ways.

Song

Amazing Grace (John Newton)

All sing:

Amazing grace, How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now I am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come,
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far
And grace will lead me home.

Opening Prayer

All say:

Let us pray,

Gracious God of mercy and compassion,
Open our eyes to see your care for us.
Open our ears to hear your forgiving voice.
Open our hearts to your liberating love.
We ask this in the Spirit, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Meditation

What if you could love yourself fully, including your imperfections as God loves you? What if you could love others in the same way? You might fear that by loving your anger or laziness, your addictions or your anxiety, that you will never change for the better, that you will become more angry, lazy, addicted, or anxious. But if you experiment, you will see that what happens is often the opposite.

As you love and accept yourself in a bigger, wiser love, your fear and aggression, your neediness and inertia, **lose their hold**. God brings compassion to imperfection itself. With mindful prayer you can become the love you have sought. And with this love you are also returned to yourself.

Try it. Imagine you were to love yourself just as you are – with all these human flaws. Every human has imperfections; this is part of human incarnation. Your task is to see them clearly and love anyway. Now become the loving awareness that can witness and hold your life with its successes and imperfections in a sea of love. Who you are is not the flaws and trauma and fears. These are outer human struggles. You are timeless awareness, born with original beauty, the child of the spirit having a complicated human incarnation, like the other 7 billion of us.

With this deep acceptance and loving awareness, **step out of the judge's court**. Invite yourself to become quiet, at ease with your whole self, kind and thoughtful. With this accepting presence you will see yourself make better choices – not out of shame or self-hate, but because your loving heart teaches you how to care. The loving heart transforms the whole human dance.

After you practice embracing your imperfections, you can choose other people to include in this practice. See and accept all their imperfections with a profound loving awareness. **Take your time.** Notice how this acceptance changes your conflicts and feelings for the better.

Other people are learners, just as you are. And when you envision loving them with all their flaws, notice how your loving gaze and care might inspire the best in them. As Nelson Mandela says, **“It never hurts to see the good in someone.** They often act the better because of it.”

Love yourself. This is the essence. Then take your very human imperfections and make beauty anyway. It is part of God's plan for you.

Song **Shine Jesus Shine (Graham Kendrick)**

All sing:
Shine Jesus Shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word
Lord, and let there be light

Reflection **Saint Josemaria Escriva (1903-1975)**

For many, it takes years to be assured of and be fully converted by the simple love of Jesus. Saint Paul himself stood by with folded arms and saw the love of Jesus on the face of Saint Stephen, and heard it in his voice, as he presided over his violent execution by stoning. He was unmoved. The next time we meet him in Acts, Saul is “still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.”¹⁰

Song **Give Us Your Peace (Matt Maher)**

All sing:
Jesus, give us your peace, bring us together
Let all the fighting cease.
Shatter all our hearts of stone
Give us a heart for love alone.

Reading **Acts 9:1 – 9**

9 Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” ⁵ He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Song **Open My Eyes (Jesse Manibusan)**

All sing:
Open my eyes Lord, help me to see your face.
Open my eyes Lord, help me to see.
Open my ears Lord, help me to hear your voice.
Open my eyes Lord, help me to hear.
Open my heart Lord, help me to love like you.
Open my eyes Lord, help me to love.

Reading

Acts 9:10-19

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹ The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision^[a] a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." ¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; ¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; ¹⁶ I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." ¹⁷ So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul^[b] and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptised, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Song

God of Second Chances (David Haas)

All sing:

Come now, O God, of second chances; open our lives to heal.
Remove our hate, and melt our rage. Save us from ourselves.
Come now, O God, release our demons; open our eyes to see
the shame within, our guilt and pain. Mend us; make us whole.
Come now, O God, shake our resentment; open our way to
choose the way of love over revenge. Show us a new way.
Come now, O God, and grant compassion,
open our hearts to love.
May we let go of all our hurt. Help us to move on.

Reflection

St. Josemaria Escriva (1902-1975)

No one is more aware of the passage of time than a convert. There is a clear *before* and *after* whose threshold is a life-changing encounter with Christ. Looking at conversion in hindsight, as an isolated moment in time, might make all of the *before* time seem wasted. But considering the past in the light of grace, connections emerge that reveal the hand of God steadily at work even in the midst of our worst mistakes. A string of unlikely events and providential encounters that bring a soul to the point where they are prepared to meet the Lord and say *yes* to Him is a *divine* work that grace alone can accomplish.

Song

Come Home (Paul Tate)

All sing:

Come home! come home!
You who are weary, come home!
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling, O sinner, come home!

Reflection

Saint Josemaria Escriva (1903-1975)

Time is only wasted if it fails to bring us to the point where we can see that *all time* exists to prepare us to love and be loved by Christ. Time is only squandered if the *fullness of time* passes us by and we never recognize the extent that we are loved by Him—because Christ’s love is the only thing that can change us.

It is nothing but the love of Jesus for us—the love about which we hear so much every day. Our eyes see it, our ears brim over with it, our very mouths are filled with it. It is nothing but that age-old love that once threw Saul to the ground and then brought him through shipwrecks, beatings, imprisonments—all because in the fullness of time Jesus came to him and told him: *Saul, you are loved. Forget about the past, embrace the present. Approach the future confidently with me.*

Song

Blinded by Your Grace (Stormzy)

Prayer

Saint Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938)

All say:

“O Lord, I want to be completely transformed into Your mercy and to be Your living reflection. May the greatest of all divine attributes, that of Your unfathomable mercy, pass through my heart and soul to my neighbour.

Help me, O Lord, that my eyes may be merciful, so that I may never suspect or judge from appearances, but look for what is beautiful in my neighbours’ souls and come to their rescue.

Help me, O Lord, that my ears may be merciful, so that I may give heed to my neighbours’ needs and not be indifferent to their pains and moaning.

Help me, O Lord, that my tongue may be merciful, so that I should never speak negatively of my neighbour, but have a word of comfort and forgiveness for all.

Help me, O Lord, that my hands may be merciful and filled with good deeds, so that I may do only good to my neighbours and take upon myself the most difficult and toilsome tasks.

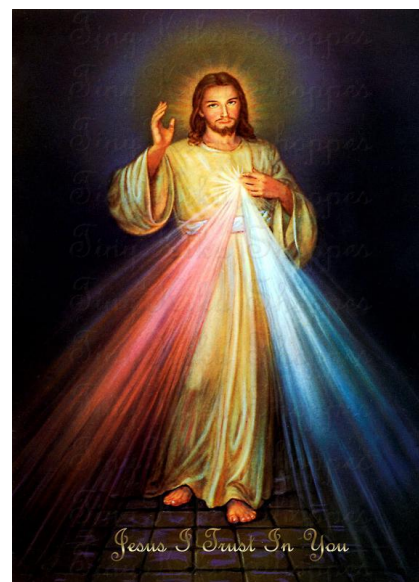
Help me, O Lord, that my feet may be merciful, so that I may hurry to assist my neighbour, overcoming my own fatigue and weariness (...)

Help me, O Lord, that my heart may be merciful so that I myself may feel all the sufferings of my neighbour.

May Your mercy, O Lord, rest upon me” (Diary, 163).

Song

Kyrie (William Byrd)



Song **Grace to Grace (Joel Houston/Chris Davenport)**

Poem **Last Night As I Was Sleeping (Antonio Machado, 1875-1939)**

Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvellous error!—
that a spring was breaking
out in my heart.
I said: Along which secret aqueduct,
Oh water, are you coming to me,
water of a new life
that I have never drunk?

Song **Let Your Mercy Wash Over Us (Trevor Thomson)**

All sing: Let your mercy wash over us, like the rainfall refreshing the earth. Let your mercy wash over us.
We your people are thirsting for you.

Poem ctd.

Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvellous error!—
that I had a beehive
here inside my heart.
And the golden bees
were making white combs
and sweet honey
from my old failures.



Reflection **Saint Josemaria Escriva (1903-1975)**

But whether we have little or much to make up for, the assurance that God can ultimately make right what we have done wrong relieves the soul of a sense of irreparable harm caused by sin. It also tells us that God is not simply a great “mastermind” who knows how to make beautiful artwork out of rubbish, or to assemble a complicated puzzle blindfolded. Instead, God does these things because He loves us. There is no need to complicate that.

Concluding Prayer

Song **You Are My All In All (Denis Jernigan)**

All sing: Jesus, Lamb of God,
Worthy is your name
Jesus, Lamb of God,
Worthy is your name

