

Worship Service

BY AMBER C. INSCORE ESSICK

Call to Worship

Creator God,

as we unite our voices in prayer and worship,

gather us to yourself.

As we contemplate the virtue of chastity,

gather us to one another.

As we learn how to live lives of commitment to you,

take us deeper into the life of Christ, our beloved.

As we speak about desire and commitment to one another,

take us deeper into the life of the world, your creation.

Chiming of the Hour

Silent Meditation

Sexual love is the heart of community life. Sexual love is the force that in our bodily life connects us most intimately to the Creation, to the fertility of the world, to farming and to the care of animals. It brings us into the dance that holds the community together and joins it to its place.

*Wendell Berry*¹

One of the main goals of chastity is to love as many people as possible as deeply as possible.

*James Martin, S. J.*²

Introit Hymn

“All Creatures of Our God and King”

All creatures of our God and King
lift up your voice and with us sing,
Alleluia, alleluia!

Thou burning sun with golden beam,
thou silver moon with softer gleam,
 O praise Him, O praise Him,
 Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Thou mother earth, who day by day
unfolds God's blessings on our way,
 O praise Him, alleluia!
The flowers and fruits that in thee grow,
let them His glory also show:
 O praise Him, O praise Him,
 Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

All you who are of tender heart,
forgiving others, take your part,
 O praise Him, alleluia!
All who long pain and sorrow bear,
praise God and on Him cast your care:
 O praise Him, O praise Him,
 Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Let all things their creator bless
and worship Him in humbleness,
 O praise Him, alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
and praise the Spirit, Three in One!
 O praise Him, O praise Him,
 Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

St. Francis of Assisi (1225); paraphrased by William H. Draper (c. 1910), alt.
Tune: LASST UNS ERFREUEN

The First Reading: Genesis 2:18-25

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken.”

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

Litany of Thanksgiving

For the image of God borne into every human creature,
thanks be to God.

For the unity of God reflected in the desire of humans for one another,
thanks be to God.

For the cultivation of desire with selfless patience,
thanks be to God.

For the love of God communicated through human touch and union,
and the same love given in affectionate celibacy,
thanks be to God.

For friendship, for its intimacy, and for its safety in chastity,
thanks be to God.

For the gift of this mystery –
in expressing the fullness of commitment for one another,
couples may join God, their creator, in the creative act –
thanks be to God.

For the blessing of covenantal commitment,
which grants the freedom of full expression,
thanks be to God.

**For all those everywhere who nurture love
by honoring their commitments,
thanks be to God.**

The Second Reading: Song of Solomon 7:10-13 and Psalm 63:1-8

In praise of marital desire:

I am my beloved's
and his desire is for me.
Come, my beloved,
let us go forth into the fields,
and lodge in the villages;

let us go out early to the vineyards,
and see whether the vines have budded,
whether the grape blossoms have opened
and the pomegranates are in bloom.
There I will give you my love.
The mandrakes give forth fragrance,
and over our doors are all choice fruits,
new as well as old,
which I have laid up for you, O my beloved.

In praise of desire for God:

O God, you are my God, I seek you,
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.
Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.
So I will bless you as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.
My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips
when I think of you on my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;
for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.
My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.

Hymn of Response

“He Hideth My Soul”

A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord,
a wonderful Savior to me;
He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock,
where rivers of pleasure I see.

*He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock
that shadows a dry, thirsty land;
He hideth my life with the depths of His love,
and covers me there with His hand,
and covers me there with His hand.*

A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord,
He taketh my burden away;
He holdeth me up, and I shall not be moved,
He giveth me strength as my day.

Refrain

With numberless blessings each moment He crowns,
and filled with His fullness divine,
I sing in my rapture, oh, glory to God
for such a Redeemer as mine!

Refrain

When clothed in His brightness, transported I rise
to meet Him in clouds of the sky,
His perfect salvation, His wonderful love
I'll shout with the millions on high.

Refrain

Fanny J. Crosby (1890)

Tune: KIRKPATRICK

The Third Reading: Matthew 19:3-12

Some Pharisees came to Jesus, and to test him they asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." They said to him, "Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?" He said to them, "It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery."

His disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." But he said to them, "Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can."

Communal Confession

Living God,
by whom all things were created
and by whom all creatures on earth receive care,
we offer our confessions to you.

Too often our conversations about chastity have focused
on inactivity,
on some future commitment, or
on sterile restraint.

Lord, have mercy.

The weakness of our flesh,
rather than the strength of our love,
has determined our rules and our actions.

Lord, have mercy.

Our rhetoric about chastity has been theologically unimaginative,
helping neither single nor coupled persons
learn to love fully and deeply.

Lord, have mercy.

We have objectified humans, especially women,
in our analogies and lessons on purity and chastity.

Lord, have mercy.

We have asked others to bear the burden
of our own uncontrolled desires.

Lord, have mercy.

We have been sexually perverse,
seeking to gain rather than to give,
to be caught up in passion rather than to offer care for one another.

Lord, have mercy.

As a church, we have been too shy about sex,
failing to contribute to the growth of our cultural understandings
about human bodies and their relationship to one another and to you.

Lord, have mercy.

We are truly sorry, and we humbly repent.

Help us to turn to one another in love,
even as your Trinitarian life of giving, loving, and deep connection—
out of which all human life flows and is nourished—
teaches us about the blessedness of committed living. **Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

Having confessed our sins and our need for our Creator's redemption,
we now accept and trust in God's free and full pardon.

Let us participate in fellowship
with one another and with God
at the Lord's table.

*Celebration of Holy Communion**Sermon**Silent Meditation*

When you have loved [Christ], you shall be chaste; when you have
touched [him], you shall become pure; when you have accepted [him],
you shall be a virgin.

Whose power is stronger,
whose generosity is more abundant,
whose appearance is more beautiful,
whose love more tender,
whose courtesy more gracious.

*Saint Clare of Assisi (1194-1253)*³

Hymn of Reflection and Commitment

"Intense the Love God Molded"

Intense the love God molded
into the lump of clay;
the dust and mud God shaped and formed
on that first human day.

How shall the flesh Creator made
respond when love is breathed to life?

The Holy Spirit is that Breath
and guides the love to God.

The clay, God's breath inhaling,
exhales its love in praise;
in marriage, friendship, deepest prayer,
love breathed in many ways.

Now shall the flesh Creator made
respond in worship breathed to life.

The Holy Spirit is that Breath
and guides the love to God.

In Christ, we see God's loving,
both chaste and freely shared.
God's love is shaped by sacrifice
and with compassion paired
until the flesh Creator made
responds to death and breathes no life.
Then shall we in new bodies rise
to breathe not air, but Love.

Terry W. York, ASCAP (2016)

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Tune: ANNIVERSARY, Kurt Kaiser (2016)

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Benediction: 1 John 4:11-12

Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Amen. Go in peace.

NOTES

1 Wendell Berry, "Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community," in *Sex, Economy, Freedom, & Community: Eight Essays* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), 117-173, here citing 133.

2 James Martin, S. J., *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 220.

3 Saint Clare of Assisi, "First Letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague," *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, translated by Regis J. Armstrong, O. F. M. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982), 190-194, here citing 191.



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