

Open hands

A CMS Presence resource to assist in nurturing prayerful presence

For many years it's been my practice to pray the Lord's Prayer with open hands – something I learned from a joyful encounter with a Franciscan community. The practice seems both helpful and natural, enabling me in some way to embody the words that are being said, encouraging me to become more prayerfully present.

I suggest that the idea of praying with open hands – metaphorically or literally – may be of help to us all as we seek to become people of prayerful presence.

I want to reflect briefly on Luke's account of the disciples meeting the risen Jesus. And in Luke's telling of this episode Jesus' hands are a key element...

...Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

Luke 24:36b–40 NRSV

Look at my hands Jesus says, opening them up to the disciples.

These are the scarred hands which, just a few days earlier, had been open on the cross, there holding and transforming for all time all the world's sin and suffering, damage and loss.

These are the scarred hands which now gesture the disciples to go into the world to proclaim, to witness, filled with the Holy Spirit.

...and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Luke 24: 46–49 NRSV

And these are the scarred hands which will bless the disciples as Jesus ascends, enabling those disciples to be people of joyful and prayerful presence.

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Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Luke 24: 50-53 NRSV

I've been thinking a lot about how we might live with prayerful presence in an increasingly fractured, polarised world.

It's impossible to truly fix things – although there's a lot of good work that we can and must do. Friends, in God's grace, keep on!

But it is possible to pray – to seek our own transformation in the presence of God, and to pray for the transformation of the world, step by step. This is the vital work that undergirds all that we hope to be in God.

And I suggest that praying – literally and/or metaphorically – with open hands, may be really helpful in this endeavour.

Open hands don't seek to impose solutions, but open hands are ready to receive from God.

Open hands don't negate the challenges of our time, but they do enable us to carry some of the pain and suffering around us. To share in some small ways, as St Paul suggested, in Christ's sufferings.

Open hands don't protect us from harm, but they do encourage and enable us to be prayerfully present, and there to find ourselves held and beloved.

So, an encouragement to us to pray today with open hands...

Risen Jesus

As you opened your hands for us and for the world

help us to live and to pray with open hands

ready to receive from you.

Give us strength, by your Spirit, we pray

to hold open hands for those around us;

give us strength to share in their sufferings and in yours;

and so to enable your healing love to flow

in us, around us and through us.

Amen

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