

Ely Cathedral. St Mary the Less, Cambridge. All Saints, St Ives.

MOTHERS' UNION PRAYERS

APRIL 15 2021

The Joy of Easter

+

OPENING PRAYERS.

O Lord our Heavenly Father, Almighty and Everlasting God, we remember before you the late Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, in thankfulness for the blessings which you bestowed on him; for the loyalty and service to our Sovereign lady Queen Elizabeth and to our nation; for his desire to give young people greater opportunities through the award scheme in his name.

Have mercy, we pray, on Elizabeth our Queen and all the Royal family; be gentle with them in their grief, show them the depths of your love and show them a glimpse of heaven; and we pray that you will give us grace that, having these mercies in remembrance, we may with one heart and mind set forward the welfare of this land and Commonwealth, and hasten the coming of your kingdom of peace and goodwill among all people through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

O Lord, open our eyes to your presence. Lord, open our minds to your grace; open our lips to your praise; open our hearts to your love; open our lives to your healing and be found among us. Amen.

In our prayers today we pray for our Diocese of Ely and the work and ministries of our bishops, Stephen and Dagmar. We pray for all our members, for their lives and witness in our parishes.

Lord hear us: **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy.

**Sustain and support the anxious,
be with those who care for the sick,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort**

**knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

We offer the work of our diocesan President Hazel Williams and all who hold positions of responsibility at Diocesan, Deanery and Branch levels as we live in this Eastertide. We pray for all committees preparing for the coming year, and for the coming elections for our Office Holders.

Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

For the Provincial Conference in May as we prepare for the future. For our Provincial President Kathryn and all she does for the Mothers' Union in this Province of Canterbury.

Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

For the Wisbech Mission Project and all those involved in organising, encouraging, worshipping and working in our church and community schools, communities and churches, where there is need to spread and make known the love of God.

Lord in your mercy: **hear our prayer.**

*

Bible Reading: John 20 verses 1 - 18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, * 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." ' Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Reflection

Don't you just love the Easter accounts, all different, but all contributing to the total picture. Much running to and fro, some weeping, some apparently trivial asides, one, the Walk to Emmaus, the longest continuous account in the gospels of Jesus and two disciples. And then Thomas doesn't believe the others, and lives with that doubt for a whole week until Jesus appears again to them all and invites Thomas to put his hands in the site of the nails in his hands and his side. And Thomas believes. That early morning, with the disciples fishing on the Sea of Galilee and the "stranger", Jesus, cooking their breakfast. And so much more, so that the writer of John's Gospel adds, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. If everyone of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."

Our family was very blessed when I was appointed as Deputy Head of one of the UK Ministry of Defence, Service Children's Schools in Cyprus. It was a very small secondary school of some 220 mixed pupils, with a tiny sixth form of some 6 students, and staff for a full UK National Curriculum. School. The children and staff were in school from 7.30 am to 1.15 pm, including two short breaks and a half hour lunch break, because it was very hot for much of the year and there was no air

conditioning. There were seven service schools in Cyprus, including two secondaries, one where we lived, at Dhekelia near Larnaca, and the other at the HQ in Episkopi. The UK had maintained two sovereign base areas at Cypriot independence in 1960, totalling some 99 square miles. By the time we arrived in January 1985, Cyprus was split in two, with a UN demarcation and a UN Force separating Greek from Turk.

We lived on the Eastern Sovereign Base area, surrounded by Cypriot communities, and on the border with the Turkish sector, our nearest village being Xylotymbou. The school was built on a bluff above the deep blue waters of the Mediterranean, and in the far distance, some ninety miles away we could, occasionally, see the snow covered mountains of Troodos. We had Greek and Turkish Cypriot workers at the school and Armenians too, so a very multi-cultural experience for us, our young family and all the students. Cyprus is just eight hours by car ferry from Israel and the Holy Land and we were very blessed with two visits there.

I used to visit the Cypriot Orthodox Church, an independent Greek Orthodox church, in our nearby village. The services were lengthy, and gradually, during Sunday morning, the congregation would build up, the men at the front, women at the back of the church, with much singing and veneration of the icons. It was fascinatingly different. Easter ceremonies were especially delightful, and I soon learned that the greeting during Easter tide was not Good morning, how are you, but "Christos Anesti", followed by the reply "Allithos Anesti". Christ is risen, He is risen indeed! Alleluia! I have even managed to teach the children in some of our church schools in the diocese this greeting too.

So Easter is very special as we all know. After the reflective and sombre time of Lent, followed by Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, the day finally dawns and we can celebrate Christ's rising from the dead. New hope for the world, perhaps even the universe too. We live in this certain knowledge, and become and are an Easter people, filled with this knowledge. It is a fantastic mystery, to be experienced between family, friends and the whole Christian community. When I was in the parishes, we used to meet at dawn on Easter Day, to light the new fire of Easter outside the church, light the Paschal Candle from the fire, and then process into the dark church, gradually lighting it up as all had candles. We would sing and then renew baptismal promises before having breakfast together either in the Vicarage or someone else's house nearby. By the end of this service of course, the sun had risen and the world was filled with the light of Christ. It was a wonderful, powerful and uplifting start to our Easter celebrations.

I do hope that in spite of lockdown you managed to have a great Easter, and will deepen your own faith in the risen Christ.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

A short time of silence to reflect on. All join together in today's prayer.

*

Lord Jesus Christ, in dying you conquered death and rose again in glory. Through your great love and abiding grace, we will one day be with you in your heavenly kingdom. Lord, we pray that we may make each day of our earthly life worthy of your great sacrifice on the cross. Thank you that we can find sanctuary in your love because you have chosen to love us just as we are, with all our faults and failings and that, if we truly repent, you will forgive our sins. Amen.

*

Page 4 Intercessions

The MU Prayer.

Loving Lord, we thank you for your love so freely given to us all. We pray for families around the world. Bless the work of the Mothers' Union as we seek to share your love through the encouragement, strengthening and support of marriage and family life. Empowered by your Spirit, may we be united in prayer and worship. And in love and service reach out as your hands across the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The Thursday Prayer

Heavenly Father, you have called us apart to share in a world wide fellowship of Christians united in prayer. Take our prayers we humbly ask, fill them with your love and power, and use them in the cause of your glorious kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn: Jesus Christ is risen today

**Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia,
our triumphant holy day; alleluia,
who did once upon the cross; alleluia,
suffer to redeem our loss; alleluia!**

**Hymns of praise then let us sing; Alleluia,
unto Christ our heavenly king; alleluia,
who endured the cross and grave; alleluia,
sinners to redeem and save: alleluia!**

**But the pains which he endured; Alleluia,
our salvation have procured; alleluia,
now above the sky he's King; alleluia,
where the angels ever sing: alleluia!**

The Grace