

Reader: Wisdom 7:15–22

Response: Psalm 136:1–9, 23–26

Side 1: O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of gods, for his
steadfast love endures forever.

Side 2: O give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his
steadfast love endures forever;

who alone does great wonders, for his
steadfast love endures forever.

Side 1: Who by understanding made the
heavens, for his steadfast love endures
forever;

who spread out the earth on the waters,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

Side 2: Who made the great lights, for his
steadfast love endures forever;

the sun to rule over the day, for his steadfast
love endures forever;

Side 1: The moon and the stars to rule over the
night;

for his steadfast love endures forever

Side 2: It is he who remembered us in our low
estate, for his steadfast love endures
forever,

and rescued us from our foes, for his
steadfast love endures forever.

Side 1: Who gives food to all flesh, for his
steadfast love endures forever.

Side 2: O give thanks to the God of heaven, for
his steadfast love endures forever.

Prayer: God of wonder and mystery, you gave us
Jesus to go before us and to show us a way to
new life through our dying. As the season of
autumn reminds us that all living things must
die, so may our faith in the life Jesus promised
encourage us to embrace life's potential.
Rather than being saddened by life's endings,
may we find, in the wisdom of your creation,
the constantly renewing love that reassures us
of your presence. With our eyes on the tree of
life and its spectacular beauty, may we remain
always in Jesus. Amen.

Closing Song: "Now We Remain" by David Haas
(GIA)

A Prayer on Thanksgiving Day

(to remember and be grateful)

Suggestion for atmosphere: *symbols of the
Thanksgiving holiday and of harvest time: cornucopia,
stalks of grain, pumpkins, colored leaves, various fruits.*

Opening Song: "Come, Worship the Lord" by
John Michael Talbot (Birdwing Music and
BMG Songs, Inc./Cherry Lane Music
Publishing Co, Inc.)

Leader: Welcome to a celebration of thanksgiving.
Many times during the year we come to God
asking for things. This is good. God wants us
to express our needs and to trust that God will
provide. But today we come together to notice
how God has provided and to express exuberant
and abundant thanks for the bountiful
blessings.

Let us begin by reflecting on growth in the
kingdom of God.

Reader: Mark 4:26–29

Response: We praise you, God, for the harvest of
blessings!

PSALM 65:6–13

Side 1: By your strength you established the
mountains; you are girded with might. You
silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of
their waves, the tumult of the peoples.

All: We praise you, God, for the harvest of
blessings!

Side 2: Those who live at earth's farthest bounds
are awed by your signs; you make the
gateways of the morning and the evening
shout for joy.

All: We praise you, God, for the harvest of blessings!

Side 1: You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it.

All: We praise you, God, for the harvest of blessings!

Side 2: You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.

All: We praise you, God, for the harvest of blessings!

Side 1: You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy.

All: We praise you, God, for the harvest of blessings!

Side 2: The meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain; they shout and sing together for joy.

All: We praise you, God, for the harvest of blessings!

GUIDED MEDITATION

Leader: Let us now enter into the memories of our own personal blessings.

Pause after each phrase of the guided meditation.

Close your eyes, breathe deeply and relax. Imagine that you are walking slowly through a grain field. The crop is ready for harvest. A breeze blows gently and the stalks sway. The sun is shining. As you watch, the crop seems to fade away and you are turned back in time to when the field was empty. For as far as you can see there are rows and rows of waiting soil. In the distance there is a lone figure. This person is moving slowly up and down the rows, sowing seed. As the person continues, something remarkable is happening. The seeds are springing up and growing quickly, but they look nothing like grain. Rather, they

are the fruits of your labor during this past year. The figure in the distance turns around, and you realize this is you.

Watch yourself observing the field. What has grown the most? What is wilting a little bit? What accomplishment turned out to be your biggest surprise? How can you use what you are about to harvest from the year's work? How much can you share with others? What will the task of harvesting require in energy and resources?

As you watch the field, you are amazed at all that is growing there. A swell of gratitude fills your heart. While the thanksgiving is flowing, something else begins to happen in your field. The sower is not alone anymore. Other figures emerge from between the rows. They are smiling and nodding and moving toward you, carrying baskets. You recognize them as the people who have been significant in your life during this past year: family members, coworkers, neighbors, friends, spiritual companions, acquaintances who made lasting impressions—teachers, guides, children, prophets, challengers, angels. In their baskets they carry the fruits of their encounters with you. You join in their smiling and a warmth fills this place.

It is a sacred place, a holy space, a field of memories, a harvest of good will. These people form a circle, including you, and they set their baskets in the middle. In gratitude for the harvest and for the process that produced it, all of you bow your heads to pray.

Play meditation song: "There's a Place" by Liam Lawton (GIA).

Bring the people from the field with you in your heart, and when you feel ready, open your eyes.

Share with those around you some of the most significant blessings of your past year. What has given you joy and enriched your life? What has grown during the past year that you feel ready to harvest now?

Allow time for sharing.

Leader: Having reflected on and shared the blessings of this year for which we are grateful, let us listen to Saint Paul's exhortation to the community of Christians in Philippi.

Reader: Philippians 4:4-9

Leader: With song in our hearts, let us respond to the encouragement Saint Paul gives to the church.

Closing Song: "Deo Gratias" by Peter Rubalcava (OCP)

A Prayer in the Winter Cold (to value silence and darkness)

Suggestion for atmosphere: *a very dark room with a single candle burning.*

Opening Song: "God, Beyond All Names" by Bernadette Farrell (OCP)

Leader: In the stillness of this winter night (day), it is good to reflect on how we are bringing God to birth through our living and dying, our daily ups and downs, our joys and sorrows. God has promised to be with us through all our experiences and to be present to us in one another. Jesus prayed, on the night before he died, that all who believe in him would experience unity with one another in a bond of God's love. Let us listen to the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John, and then spend some time in quiet reflection.

Reader: John 17:1-4, 6-8, 13-24

Read slowly; music could be played quietly in the background. Follow the reading with a period of silence. Then the leader begins the psalm.

All: In your light we see light.

PSALM 36:5-10

Side 1: Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.

All: In your light we see light.

Side 2: Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgments are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.

All: In your light we see light.

Side 1: How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

All: In your light we see light.

Side 2: They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

All: In your light we see light.

Side 1: For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

All: In your light we see light.

Side 2: O continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your salvation to the upright of heart!

All: In your light we see light.

Leader: When God's commands were given, through Moses, to the people of Israel, the people received them out of darkness. It was as if they had needed a time away from the light to discover their need for God's guidance. Out of the darkness came directions for how to walk in the light. Let us listen to their experience as Moses describes it.

Reader: Deuteronomy 5:22-24

Leader: Out of the darkness of our winter, we too want guidance for living in the light. Let us pray when the day is dawning on a cold winter morning.

All: Let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Leader: When the last leaves have fallen and cold nips the air.

All: Let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Leader: When stillness descends like a blanket of snow.

All: Let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Leader: Because we are children who trust in our God.

All: We have faith to lead us on.

Leader: Because out of our nighttimes come the fruits of reflection.

All: We have hope to lead us on.

Leader: Because quiet times for renewal can open our hearts.

All: We have love to lead us on.

Leader: When darkness is present and we can't find our way.

All: Let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Leader: When a flickering warmth calls us in from the cold.

All: Let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Leader: When winter challenges us to face life's obstacles.

All: Let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Leader: Because we have seen that seasons change and life grows strong.

All: We have faith to lead us on.

Leader: Because good things happen in darkness and stillness.

All: We have hope to lead us on.

Leader: Because God is the eternal flame at the core of each being.

All: We have love to lead us on.

All: O God of our winter times, we celebrate the vibrancy of your Spirit. In you darkness is not dark, and the cold is only an invitation to fan the flames of renewal. We welcome a season of quiet dormancy, a time to look within for the light that never dims. We bless this season of hibernation and receive it as a gift. Slow our

pace that we might value the early arrival of nighttime and its reluctance to give way to morning. For the gifts of winter we praise and thank you. Amen.

Closing Song: "Lord of All Hopefulness" by Timothy R. Smith (OCP)

A Prayer on Presidents' Day (to request good leaders)

This prayer service could also be used at election time.

Suggestion for atmosphere: the flag; red, white and blue decor; any national symbols (eagle, etc.).

Opening Song: "Lord, Every Nation" by Jesse Manibusan (OCP)

Leader: We gather today to pray for our leaders. We are thankful for the good qualities in those who led our country in the past, and we are hopeful that good leaders will step forth to serve in the future. We rely on the Spirit of God who gives gifts for leadership.

Reader: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

PSALM:72:1-7, 12-15

Side 1: Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son.

May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice.

All: We pray for our leaders, O God.

Side 2: May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.

All: We pray for our leaders, O God.

Side 1: May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.

All: We pray for our leaders, O God.

Side 2: May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth.

All: We pray for our leaders, O God.

Side 1: In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

All: We pray for our leaders, O God.

Side 2: For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper.

All: We pray for our leaders, O God.

Side 1: He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy.

All: We pray for our leaders, O God.

Side 2: From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight.

All: We pray for our leaders, O God.

Side 1: Long may he live! May gold of Sheba be given to him. May prayer be made for him continually; and blessings invoked for him all day long.

All: We pray for our leaders, O God.

Leader: The Gospel tells us about the kind of servant leadership taught and modeled by Jesus. Let us listen and learn.

Reader: Mark 10:35–45

Leader: Jesus said, “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant.” Many people have served our country in its history. Some did it better than others, but each had gifts. Whatever each leader did best became a tapestry of talent that gave form and substance to the fabric of our country. Here are just a few descriptions of memorable contributions from our past presidents. As we pray for a continuance of the gifts they manifested, let us remember these leaders with grateful hearts.

Reader: Courage, stamina and leadership during the American Revolution made George Washington a natural choice for the country’s first president. He was elected unanimously. The honor embarrassed him, and he preferred to be a farmer at his Mount Vernon estate. But he could not refuse a call to serve. Always dignified, courteous, honest and above scandal, he was a gracious host with a strong personal moral code and a love for animals. He was the first millionaire in the country and, because of his wealth, he did not accept a salary as president.

All: We ask you, Lord, to continue to bless us with leaders who are honest and above reproach. Give us leaders who have a desire to serve without thought for personal gain. We thank you for the courageous and moral leadership our country had when it was beginning. May we nurture kindness, courtesy, moral standards and generosity among our citizens now so that good leaders will emerge for the future.

Reader: Our presidential history has given us blood relatives sometimes. Besides the George Bush family, second and sixth presidents, John Adams and John Quincy Adams, were father and son. Their wife and mother, Abigail Adams, was one of the best-educated women in the country. Through her frequent letters to her husband, she urged attention to women’s rights.

William Henry Harrison had the shortest term of office, dying of pneumonia one month after his inauguration, but he was the only president to have a grandson also elected to the office. Benjamin Harrison, serving from 1889 to 1893, installed the first electric lights in the White House.

All: We ask you, Lord, to give us practical and progressive leaders. Give us leaders with open minds and listening hearts and family values. We thank you for past leaders who looked at all sides of the issues, who weren’t afraid to make changes, who sought just solutions and

equality for citizens. May we nurture close ties in our families and provide support for innovative ideas, so that emerging leaders will be grounded and visionary.

Reader: Thomas Jefferson was interested in everything! From the study of literature, science and law to music, gardening and architectural design, he was an intelligent, gifted, curious person. He experimented with crops, invented versatile furniture and gave elaborate dinner parties. He doubled the size of the country with the Louisiana Purchase and wrote the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson died on the Fourth of July.

All: We ask you, Lord, to continue to bless us with leaders who are intelligent, creative and energetic. Give us leaders who have a variety of interests and abilities and a deep love for freedom and the individual's rights. We thank you for those who crafted the ideals of our democracy. May we nurture goodness in our young, acceptance toward our immigrants and loyalty to causes that are just.

Reader: Our smallest president, James Madison, was a very well-informed person. He delayed making decisions, could be very stubborn, married the legendary hostess Dolley Madison, and is known as the "Father of the Constitution." James Monroe, the first president to tour the country, warned Europe against expanding in America. His warning became the Monroe Doctrine. Jimmy Carter, who never wanted the presidency to be royalty, brought his homespun southern charm and family closeness to the White House. As ex-president, he has remained active in human rights causes and in peacemaking, teaching Sunday school and writing poetry, memoirs, books for young people and historical fiction.

All: We ask you, Lord, to continue to bless us with leaders who are gifted with words, written or spoken, who wisely choose good partners for their life's work, and who honor commitments. Give us leaders who come down from

their "thrones" and walk among us. We thank you for those who captured, in writing, the thoughts in the hearts of many. May we nurture respect for the written words and the selfless acts that have influenced our history and inspired our future leaders.

Reader: Our tallest president, Abraham Lincoln, stands tall in esteem too. This great man was compassionate, tolerant and a good listener. He had a passion for learning and a great skill for storytelling. As president during the Civil War, he issued the proclamation to abolish slavery. There were many who hated him for this, and five days after the war ended, he became the first president to be assassinated. He was fifty-six years old.

Other presidents assassinated in office include James Garfield, age forty-nine; William McKinley, age fifty-eight; John F. Kennedy, age forty-six. Assassination attempts were made against Andrew Jackson and Ronald Reagan.

All: We ask you, Lord, to bless us with leaders who have the courage of their convictions.

Give us leaders who know what they must do, and give them the protection to accomplish their goals safely. We thank you for lives spent working on behalf of others. May we nurture understanding, good mental health and peaceful resolutions of conflict so that citizens of our country will find healthy, safe ways to disagree. We pause now to bless all those who died or were killed while serving in the public forum.

Reader: Theodore Roosevelt greatly increased our national parks, and we continue to value the beauty of our environment and the riches of our resources. Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt carried the burdens of leadership during the two World Wars, and we continue to find ourselves embroiled in world conflicts for which we need wise, strong and principled leaders. Bill Clinton, known for his empathy and peacemaking skills, desperately wanted to make a difference with his presidency. We still yearn for leaders who set their sights on more than political ambition.

All: We ask you, Lord, to bless us with leaders who have high ideals and the health and stamina to pursue them. Give us leaders who protect our natural resources, who secure our defense and who make an effort to understand how other nations perceive us. We thank you for the way our past leaders helped our nation to cope and to survive when hardship was overwhelming. May we nurture efforts toward peacemaking and tolerance so that not only our country, but also the whole world, may have a future. Amen.

Closing Song: “America the Beautiful” by Katherine L. Bates and Samuel A. Ward

A Prayer When Spring Is Blooming

(to notice and rejoice in life)

Suggestion for atmosphere: Provide seeds and watering cans for a planting ritual to take place as part of the prayer. The prayer can begin indoors and move outside for the planting, or the whole service can take place outside.

Opening Song: “Morning Has Broken” by Eleanor Farjeon (GIA)

MEDITATION

Leader: There is a fresh excitement about the return of spring every year. Whether the winter climate was mild or bitterly cold, there was, in that season, a dormancy that is ending now. We see miracles of life all around us as bulbs push their gifts from the earth, buds puff out greenery on branches, birds build nests with great determination and bushes flower almost overnight.

All this is exciting because it affirms something we know deep inside but which we always seem to want to verify: that life *is* eternal; that what appears to be dead, *isn't*; that renewal is real and ongoing.

What we see all around us resonates in our being: *We* have emerging gifts to share; we are bursting with colorful ideas; we have great determination to make things happen; and we grow in surprising, unexpected ways. Springtime lives in us and is coaxed out of us by the mirrors of life reflecting back to us from our beautiful world.

How will we encourage and protect growth this spring in our fragile selves and in our fragile environment? What can we plant in this season of warmth that will produce fruit in our lives and in our gardens? When can we pause a little in each day to observe the beauty in our inner stirrings and right outside our windows? Where will we hear the sounds of spring if we allow our spirits to sing and the wind to whistle around us?

This is a time for rejoicing and for giving in to hope. This is a time for feeling fully alive. Give yourselves permission to catch spring fever. Become lazy enough to watch the flowers grow.

Pause for reflection.

Reader: Matthew 13:1–9

Response: Psalm 92:1–5, 10, 12–15

Side 1: It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night, to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre.

Side 2: For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy. How great are your works, O Lord! Your thoughts are very deep!

Side 1: But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox; you have poured over me fresh oil.

Side 2: The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

Side 1: They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God.