Praying with Poetry

Poetry greatly enriches prayer, reflection, or dialogue. This document includes a collection of poems selected to fit the themes explored in GoodNewsPeople, as well as suggestions for using poetry in prayer. Using poetry as a companion for prayer can be a rich and engaging practice. Words can provide a bridge to experiences that are beyond words. You may want to incorporate some of the poems into your sessions or offer them as take-home reflections. These poems are not meant to replace other program elements.

Below are simple steps for using poetry to lead you into prayer:

1. Seek a quiet space. Take a few moments to quiet your body and mind. Invite God in.
2. Read the poem aloud. Pay attention to the words, the sounds, the punctuation, and the message you are receiving.
3. Now read the poem silently and slowly. As you read again notice which words or phrases catch your attention. Underline them.
4. Write your thoughts or impressions:
   - What parts of the poem call you to be present or to see in a new way?
   - What truth do you hear in the poem?
   - How does this poem resonate with your own experience?
   - What insights does it spark?
5. Compose your own short prayer as response.
Poems: Sessions One to Seven

Session One

Love

St. Augustine of Hippo

Love and do what you will.
If you keep silent, keep silent by love.
If you speak, speak by love.
If you correct, correct by love.
If you pardon, pardon by love.
Let love be rooted in you,
and from this root nothing but good can grow.


Session Two

God’s Grandeur

Gerard Manley Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
   It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
   It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
   And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
   And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
   There lives the dearest freshness deep down things,
And though the last lights off the black West went
   Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
   World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Session Three

Life-Altering Love

Hildegard of Bingen (11th century mystic)

Endless Strength!
Your love authored life
when you spoke that one Word.
You’re the One ordering
order, creating
creation, your own
way.
And your Word dressed himself
in flesh, embracing the disobedience-stained
form we inherited from Adam,
and that’s how Jesus removed the sadness from his clothes.
The Savior’s love liberates the world,
for what’s ever been kinder than his incarnation?
His sinlessness breathed life into compassion,
cleaning that sad smudge from the boney outfit every human wears.
Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit!
He erased the anguish from our flesh.


Session Four

Known

Charles K. Robinson

I know you. I created you. I have loved you from your mother’s womb.

You have fled, as you know, from my love, but I love you never the less,
and not the less, however far you flee. It is I who sustains your very power
to flee and I will never, finally, let you go. I accept you as you are.

You are forgiven. I know all your sufferings. I have always known them.
Far beyond your understanding, when you suffer, I suffer. I also know all
the little tricks by which you try to hide the ugliness you have made of
your life, from yourself and others.

But, you are beautiful. You are beautiful because you yourself in the
unique person that only you are, reflect already something of the beauty
of my holiness in a way which shall never end. You are beautiful also
because I and I alone, see the beauty you shall become.

Through the transforming power of my love which is made perfect in weakness, you shall become perfectly beautiful. You shall become perfectly beautiful in a uniquely irreplaceable way, which neither you nor I will work out alone, for we shall work it out together.


Session Five

*The Heart of Compassion*

Joyce Rupp

Compassionate God,
your generous presence
is always attuned to hurting ones.
Your listening ear is bent
toward the cries of the wounded
Your heart of love
fills with tears for the suffering.
Turn my inward eye to see
that I am not alone.
I am a part of all of life.
Each one’s joy and sorrow
is my joy and sorrow,
and mine is theirs.
May I draw strength
from this inner communion.
May it daily recommit me
to be a compassionate presence
for all who struggle with life’s pain.

Session Six

*Let Me See Again*

Ken Rookes

Let me see again
the blue sky gleaming gold day
when I saw the wonder of your grace.

Let me hear again
the words of love and hope
which make my spirit leap and shout.

Let me sing again
the song that soars beyond
the mean confinement of my thoughts.

Let me feel again
the cool wind of your Spirit,
causing me to shiver and stumble.

Let me dance again
the steps which ever surprise
as they rise towards the mystery.

Let me taste again
the cup of your discipleship
and weigh its bitter-sweet draught.

Let me reach again
to be embraced by love
and to share it with your friends.

Let me see again,
like at the first,
and let me follow with brother Bartimaeus
on the way.

Ken Rookes, “Let Me See Again.” *Poems in Season*,
https://poemsinseason.wordpress.com/2012/10/22/let-me-see-again.
Session Seven

Loaves and Fishes
David Whyte

This is not
the age of information.

This is not
the age of information.

Forget the news,
and the radio,
and the blurred screen.

This is the time
of loaves
and fishes.

People are hungry,
and one good word is bread
for a thousand.

Session Eight

*So Much Happiness*

Naomi Shihab Nye

It is difficult to know what to do with so much happiness. With sadness there is something to rub against, a wound to tend with lotion and cloth. When the world falls in around you, you have pieces to pick up, something to hold in your hands, like ticket stubs or change.

But happiness floats. It doesn’t need you to hold it down. It doesn’t need anything. Happiness lands on the roof of the next house, singing, and disappears when it wants to. You are happy either way.

Even the fact that you once lived in a peaceful tree house and now live over a quarry of noise and dust cannot make you unhappy. Everything has a life of its own, it too could wake up filled with possibilities of coffee cake and ripe peaches, and love even the floor which needs to be swept, the soiled linens and scratched records…..

Since there is no place large enough to contain so much happiness, you shrug, you raise your hands, and it flows out of you into everything you touch. You are not responsible. You take no credit, as the night sky takes no credit for the moon, but continues to hold it, and share it, and in that way, be known.

Session Nine

*Last Night As I Was Sleeping*

Antonio Machado

Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvelous 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?

Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvelous 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.

Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvelous error!—
that a fiery sun was giving
light inside my heart.
It was fiery because I felt
warmth as from a hearth,
and sun because it gave light
and brought tears to my eyes.

Last night as I slept,
I dreamt—marvelous error!—
that it was God I had
here inside my heart.

Session Ten

*My Morning Prayer (Psalm 118)*

John Predmore, S. J.

O God, for another day, for another morning, for another hour, for another minute, for another chance to live, I am truly grateful.

Today, Lord, free me...

...from all fear of the future,
...from all anxiety about tomorrow,
...from all bitterness towards anyone,
...from all cowardice in face of danger,
...from all laziness in the face of work,
...from all failure before opportunity,
...from all weakness before your power.

But fill me...

...with love that knows no barrier,
...with sympathy that reaches all,
...with courage that cannot be shaken,
...with faith strong enough for the darkness,
...with strength sufficient for my tasks,
...with loyalty to your kingdom’s goal,
...with wisdom to meet life’s complexities,
...with power to life me to you.

Amen

Session Eleven

Salutation
Lucy Shaw

Luke 1:39-45

Framed in light,
Mary sings through the doorway.
Elizabeth’s six-month joy
jumps, a palpable greeting,
a hidden first encounter
between son and Son.

And my heart turns over
when I meet Jesus
in you.


Session Twelve

You Start Dying Slowly
Martha Medeiros

You start dying slowly if you become a slave to habit, repeating the same paths every day, if you don’t change the mark you leave, if you don’t risk wearing a new color, if you don’t talk to people you don’t know.

You start dying slowly if you make television your guru.

You start dying slowly if you avoid passion, if you prefer black on white and dotted i’s over the turbulence of emotions, especially those that make your eyes glisten, turn yawns into smiles, and make your heart beat faster clumsy with feelings.

You start dying slowly if you don’t turn things on their head when you are unhappy at work, if you don’t risk a sure thing for the uncertainty behind a dream, if you don’t allow yourself at least once in your life, to flee from sensible advice.

You start dying slowly if you don’t travel, or read, or listen to music, or don’t laugh at yourself.

You start dying slowly if you destroy your self-esteem, or don’t let yourself be helped, if you spend your days complaining of your bad luck or of the never-ending rain.

You start dying slowly if you quit a project before starting it, or fail to ask questions on subjects you don’t know or if you don’t reply when asked about something you do know.
Let us avoid death by small doses, remembering always that being alive demands an effort much greater than the simple fact of breathing. Only fiery patience will allow you to reach a splendid happiness.


**Session Thirteen**

*Christ Has No Body*

Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

**Session Fourteen**

*Good News*

Fr. Carlo Maria Martini, S.J. (1927-2012)

Lord Jesus, we ask you now
to help us to remain with you always,
to be close to you with all the ardor of our hearts,
to take up joyfully the mission you entrust to us
and that is to continue your presence
and to spread the good news of your Resurrection.