

Keys of the Kingdom



I pray each day, "Your Kingdom Come!" and you too will pray these or similar words of the Lord's Prayer.

This prayer is an active engagement with God to bring wholeness and healing to our World.

How do we hold the "Keys of the Kingdom" for ourselves and for others, especially people who have no place of safety and for the imprisoned in body, mind or spirit by hatred, anger, and resentment?

Jesus begins his public ministry reading the prophet Isaiah "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, to proclaim release to the captives, to let the oppressed go free" (Lk.4: 18-21) Jesus spoke to Peter (Matt.16:19) and to the disciples (Lk24:46-48) "I give you the Keys of the Kingdom." Teaching his disciples to pray, Jesus spoke of the need of forgiveness in our lives, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us" (Matt 6:12; Lk11:4) The Greek word for forgiveness (aphiemi) means cancelling the debt or letting loose. In the Aramaic version of the Lord's Prayer, the one closest to Jesus' own language, the translation is again challenging: "Loose the cords of mistakes binding us, as we realise the strands we hold of others' guilt."

On the cross, in the midst of pain and agony Jesus cried, "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing"(Lk 23.34) and the first servant disciple, Stephen, spoke the same words as he was stoned to death, praying for his executioners to be forgiven.(Acts 7: 60) Saul was a witness to his death and heard Stephen's prayer. Following his conversion, as he contemplated a new beginning, Paul will have pondered Stephen's words of forgiveness after his long violent persecution of the early disciples.

Generations of Christians have found strength and new life in Jesus' selfless act of forgiveness. In the power of his outflowing of love for his friends and his persecutors, we too can open the Kingdom of heaven to others.

In *"The Book of Joy"* Archbishop Tutu, following the years of apartheid and oppression, recalls seeing remarkable instances of forgiveness during the Truth

and Reconciliation Commission. "One mother had seen on television the body of her son being dragged through the streets like the carcass of an animal. There was anguish at his death but a deep anger for how he had been treated. Mothers came to the Commission to meet the man responsible for the death of their sons. Now he was asking for forgiveness. At one point the mother threw her shoe at the man and for a time the session was adjourned. During the break came a totally fantastic moment, the Archbishop closed his eyes as he remembered, the unbelievable power of the woman's words," My child." She said "My child" to the one responsible for the death of her son. Speaking for all the mothers, she said, "My Child, we forgive you." She crossed the room, embraced him, and said, "My child." At their request amnesty was granted to the man."

"So, it is totally wrong, the Dalai Lama said emphatically, to say that the practice of tolerance and the practice of forgiveness are signs of weakness. Totally wrong.....Forgiveness is a sign of strength!"

"Absolutely, yes" said the Archbishop...." I was just going to say that those who say forgiving is a sign of weakness haven't tried it."

To hold resentment and anger towards a person or people is a cycle that goes on and on, it is like a prison but if we **choose** forgiveness, we can bring healing for ourselves and others springing up into new life possibilities. We are called to follow Jesus, **choose** forgiveness and "be" the Keys of the Kingdom.

Supporting families in adversity can find us being alongside other prisoners of social, political, and personal circumstances, sometimes less visible but none the less real.

These are the Keys of the Kingdom of God: to imitate the prayer life, the teaching and actions of Jesus Christ, opening in yourself and others channels of God's grace and forgiveness.



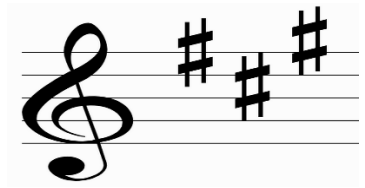
Intercessions

Physical symbols in the world open our thoughts to reflection and prayer. This month, in Prison week, we think of **The Cell key**. This key speaks of confinement, people in prison for recompense, re-order, and amendment of life but in contrast this place can also be a place of fear and intimidation, without or within. Other keys provide "Locked-in people" with dementia and mental

disorder secured boundaries for personal safety, whilst in every community, behind locked doors, there are those experiencing domestic abuse, slavery, and gender violence.

We pray for:

- the confined in body, mind, or spirit
- for chaplains with oversight giving spiritual support, hope, and guidance.
- for families separated and for those who provide places of contact
- for all people and organisations who seek to provide places of safety when people return to their communities.
- For the MU “Rise up” campaign working with professional groups to provide refuge and hope for families and individuals experiencing domestic abuse, and gender violence.



The Safe key, the “code” to the treasure within. Of my own heart, letting God’s grace open my life to sacrificial giving (Stewardship of time, talents, and resources) and sharing of who I am, who I am called out to be.



- We give thanks for the key to generosity, enabling the transformation of individuals and communities.
- We give thanks for the many local and international Projects enabled by Mothers Union.

Key texts which we treasure: memorable, heart- warming and life challenging words in the Scriptures, devotional reading, and other writings.

- We give thanks for the Living Word to be pondered; lived out day by day.
- for the vocational calling to share talents and lives open to service in local communities and in the wider World; for reconcilers releasing lives to new hope and new relationships in the future.

- for the prophetic people, invoking change and seeking justice for the weak, the rejected and oppressed.

Finally, we give thanks for the gifting of the Holy Spirit,

- opening the Kingdom of God in the creating and evolution of our World.
- the spiritual gifts of joy, love, hope, generosity, love, and peace opening our hearts and minds to the rich possibilities of prayer and the outworking of God's purpose for us today and every day.



During this month, notice other “keys” to prompt prayer and witness around the corner and around the World. I have scattered a few ideas around to get you started.

*A series of conversations between Desmond Tutu and Dalai Lama give some personal insights into the acts of forgiveness post-apartheid and after their long years of exile from oppressive regimes.