



THY KINGDOM COME
NOVENA

GOD WITH US

The Archbishop of Canterbury
Sarah Mullally



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Thy Kingdom Come: Novena
(Written by Archbishop of Canterbury Sarah Mullally)
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Introduction

Acts 1:14

They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

Since the very beginning of the Church, these nine days between Ascension and Pentecost – the Novena – have been a time of prayer. And not just prayer as individuals, but as a community, like those first members of the Church.

And that is the purpose behind Thy Kingdom Come, as it unites us together in prayer – over one million Christians across 172 countries and more than 85 denominations and traditions.

This year's theme is 'God with Us', and how the Holy Spirit has been at work in the world. And at its heart, as always, is the Prayer for Five, as we pray on behalf of five of our friends, family members, neighbours, or colleagues who do not yet follow Christ, that they may come to know Him as we do.

That first Novena, the Apostles did not pray for God to take the gospel into the world. They prayed for the coming of the Holy Spirit, that it would change them and

give them the power to go out and share the good news.

And that is what this year's Novena will be about too.

Because prayer is not simply about asking God to change the world. I've come to realise that it's as much about asking God to change us.

Prayer shapes the pray-er. God reshapes us, as the potter reshapes clay, moulding us into a truer reflection of his image. *'Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand,'* (Jeremiah 18:6).

And, as we will see in the readings to come, God wants to transform us into people who make the changes we want to see in the world.

Because, if we truly mean them, our prayers have to be accompanied by action, just as the Apostles burst into action after



Pentecost, empowered by the Holy Spirit.
If we truly long for our Five to encounter God,
why should it not be through us?

With God's help, we hold the possibility of
being the answer to our own prayer.

It's as Teresa of Avila wrote:

*'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.
Christ has no body now on earth
but yours.'*

We can be the hands of Christ to those who
need them.

And so, this Novena, we will be praying that
we may be that point of encounter between
our Five and God's love, and that they may
come to know him through us.

But we will also find, in the process, that we
too will be transformed by the Holy Spirit,
and moulded into a truer reflection of the
image of God.

***The Archbishop of Canterbury,
Sarah Mullally***

Pray For Five

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.



Ascension Day

The Spirit of Promise

Acts 1:6-11

⁶Then they gathered around Him and asked Him, *‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’*

⁷He said to them: *‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’*

⁹After He said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight.



I think we can all feel powerless sometimes. Powerless to change the world, perhaps powerless even to make changes in our own lives, let alone share the life-changing gospel with others. And so we ask God, ‘What are You going to do about it? Are You finally going to restore the Kingdom?’

And we receive the dispiriting answer, ‘It is not for you to know.’

But no matter how powerless we may feel – being left in the dark with so many unknowns – we can take comfort in the final words of Christ on earth. When the Spirit comes on you, ‘you will receive power’.

And not just any power, but the power to spread the good news to the very ends of the earth.

You may be thinking, ‘I still feel powerless, so how can I know that this promise was true?’

Well, we need look no further than you. You, and all the readers of this Novena, who come from every corner of the world, across more than 172 countries. In you, in the Anglican Communion, in the church universal, we can see that His promise was true, and that the good news has gone to the ends of the earth. Our forebears were indeed granted the power of the Holy Spirit to be Christ’s witnesses to the world. And – therefore – so have we.

And if we have been given the power to reach the ends of the earth, we have certainly been given the power to reach our Five.

So let us pray that we may recognise the power of the Holy Spirit within us, and, no matter how much God may leave unknown, use that power to share the good news with our Five.



The Spirit Broods over Creation

Genesis 1:1-5

¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³And God said, *‘Let there be light,’* and there was light. ⁴God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light ‘day,’ and the darkness he called ‘night.’ And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day.



I magine, in your mind's eye, the most profound darkness.

A darkness which is not just untouched by light, but one where light has never even existed.

But even in that darkness – the most complete that could ever, or has ever, existed, when things literally could not get any darker – there was hope. The Spirit was present, hovering over the waters.

Whenever I find myself in darkness, I find this a real comfort, that God was there at the beginning, and his Spirit is with us today, whatever our situation.

But sometimes it can be hard to feel this presence. At these times, the presence of the Spirit can best be felt through others.

When I was a nurse, working in palliative

care, I saw people experiencing the deepest darkness, coming to terms with the shock and grief of their life being cut short.

What I found was that people didn't always ask for a solution that no one could provide – they simply asked for someone to be there, to be present with them. Not just in person, but in spirit.

God works through us – His Spirit can be felt through us – and He calls on us to be present with all those who find themselves in darkness.

As Isaiah proclaimed, *'the Spirit of the Lord has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to comfort those who mourn, and to release the prisoners from darkness.'* (Isaiah 61:1-2)

And so let us pray that, if any of our Five find themselves in darkness, we may be present with them through it, sharing the presence of the Holy Spirit.



The Spirit of Grace

Ruth 1:16-18

¹⁶ But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.' ¹⁸ When Naomi realised that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

It was not easy, I imagine, for Ruth to say these words. It meant leaving her home in Moab, her extended family, everything she had known in her life so far.

Not to mention that it's not always easy to

dedicate ourselves fully to another person, even on our best days – and it's even harder to do so when we're being pushed away. Because that was how Ruth was being treated.

Naomi was clearly suffering from profound loss.



She'd lost her husband and both her sons. She was too old to marry again, let alone bear any more children. And she believed that God had turned against her. She even changed her name from Naomi (meaning pleasant) to Mara (meaning bitter): *'Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. [...] Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.'* (Ruth 1:20-21)

She pushed away those closest to her, as we all can do when in the depths of despair – but Ruth saw through it, and refused to abandon her. Ruth was full of the Spirit of grace.

In her love for Naomi, we can see something of God's unconditional love for us. Through Jesus Christ, God demonstrated His commitment to humankind, telling us, *'Where you go, I will go; where you die, I will die'*. And He is with us today, wherever we go, from the

beginning to the end of our lives, through His Holy Spirit.

Yet day by day, we continue to turn away from Him, through what we think and say, what we do and fail to do – far surpassing Naomi's turning away from Ruth – but every day He commits Himself to us through the Holy Spirit. And that is what grace is: unmerited, unconditional favour.

Grace was what Naomi needed. It's what humankind needs. And it's what our Five need too.

And so let us pray that the Spirit of grace would show us – even when (or especially when) it's difficult – how to be graceful to our Five, how to commit ourselves to their wellbeing, and bear witness to God's unconditional love for us all.



The Spirit of Listening

1 Samuel 3:1-11

[...] ³ Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the Lord called Samuel. [...]

⁸ A third time the Lord called, '*Samuel!*' And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, '*Here I am; you called me.*'

Then Eli realised that the Lord was calling the boy. ⁹ So Eli told Samuel, '*Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."*' So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, '*Samuel! Samuel!*'

Then Samuel said, '*Speak, for your servant is listening.*' [...]



Where do you find you pray best?

Is it when you're in church, or when you're out walking in nature, or perhaps when you're at home, in bed, in perfect silence?

We all have our ways of tuning in to that radio frequency that works for us, and allows us to hear God's word.

For me, it's a place in my house where I go every morning to pray, to study the Bible, say Morning Prayer, or just be still. But more than that, it's all about rhythm – having a regular routine that gives God space and time to speak, and my soul the chance to listen.

For Samuel, it seems he needed to be lying down, perhaps it needed to be night, and – unsurprisingly – being in the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant stood, it worked quite well too.

But when Samuel heard the voice of the Spirit, he didn't understand what was happening, or why he was responding in the

wrong way – it was as if he was using a walkie-talkie that received and transmitted on different frequencies – and he might have felt like the victim of a practical joke. But he received some important advice.

Eli doesn't come out particularly well in this book of the Bible, but in this story he plays an invaluable role. He taught Samuel how to listen to the Spirit: to lie back down, in his original place – tuning in to the right radio frequency – and to respond in the right way. In effect, he helped him realise how to pray.

I wonder, if our Five were to hear a voice as Samuel did, would they know who or what it was, or how to respond to it?

Because God may be calling out to them today – in fact, I'm sure he is – and it is for us to play the role of Eli.

And so let us pray that we might help our Five to hear that call for what it is, and encourage them to listen to it – because, like Samuel, listening to it will change their lives.



The Spirit of Confidence

Judges 6:11-14

[...] ¹²When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, *‘The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.’*

¹³ *‘Pardon me, my lord,’* Gideon replied, *‘but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, “Did not the Lord bring us up out of Egypt?” But now the Lord has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.’*

¹⁴The Lord turned to him and said, *‘Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?’*

I *f the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?’*

I suspect there will be people reading this who will be asking the same question as Gideon.

It is wholly understandable why Gideon would feel abandoned by God, why he felt so indignant towards Him, and why he would ask where all God’s wonders were and why He can’t perform them again today.



And it is understandable why we might sometimes feel the same today.

In situations where we feel hopeless and that there is nothing we can do to help, we want God to fix it for us. But what does God tell us instead (even when – or perhaps particularly when – we are indignant towards him)?

‘Go in the strength you have ... Am I not sending you?’

He sends us to do what we would have him do.

As a nurse on a cancer ward, I worked in a place where people often feel at their most helpless. Here there really is no earthly solution, and people often ask, ‘Why?’: why should a God of love allow such suffering, and, if Jesus healed the leper, why can’t He heal me?

But even though things might seem hopeless, it’s also a place where something extraordinary can happen.

It’s a place where, even if there is no physical cure, even if we do not have all the answers, we can walk alongside people as they overcome despair, and help them to live life in all its fullness. We can be with them in their suffering, just as God is.

Today, we might feel short on hope for our Five, feeling that there is nothing we can do to bring them closer to God – but the Spirit bids us not to despair. He tells us not to wait for God to act, but sends us out in the strength we have, telling us to do what we can – because, whether we recognise it or not, ‘the Lord is with you.’

So let us pray that we do not fail to act, but respond with confidence to the call of the Spirit sending us to our Five. For God will work through us, in the strength that we have.



The Spirit and the Whisper

1 Kings 19:9b-13

⁹The word of the Lord came to him: *‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’*

¹⁰He replied, *‘I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.’*

¹¹The Lord said, *‘Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.’*

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ¹²After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, *‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’*



I don't know about you; but, to me, Elijah's answer seems quite reasonable!

God had asked him why he was there, and he gives an honest, and very sensible, answer. I wouldn't be surprised if someone didn't go into hiding in that kind of situation.

But clearly God wanted Elijah to think again.

So Elijah is told to go outside – he experiences mountains being torn apart, the earth shaking beneath him, and a blazing inferno – all that, and the Spirit returns to whisper nothing other than the exact same question.

This isn't like the story of Samuel and Eli. Elijah has no problem communicating with God – he can hear Him loud and clear, understand Him, respond to Him – and God is using that to reshape him.

Because God was not asking for information – He already knew why Elijah was there.

This was a rhetorical question, telling Elijah to leave excuses behind, get out of hiding, and to act.

Eventually Elijah gets the hint.

I wonder – what's the question that each of us is having to answer over and over again?

For me, it's always been whether I'm doing the best I can with the gifts God has given me.

Perhaps it's the same for you, or just maybe there's a nagging question relating to your Five – why haven't I asked them about faith? Why haven't I invited them to church? – because, if the question keeps returning, we know God will have a reason!

So let us pray that, whatever question the Spirit is whispering to us – especially if it relates to our Five – we may respond to it as God wants us to: not ignoring it, not suppressing it, not with excuses – but with action.



The Spirit and Leadership

Judges 4:3b-5

³They cried to the Lord for help.

⁴Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. ⁵She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided.



You may have noticed that, when we pray, the answers don't always arrive in the way we expect. We don't necessarily hear the voice of God like Samuel or Elijah – instead, we find the Spirit working through, speaking through, someone else, and it is from them that we find guidance.

In this story, the Israelites were crying to God for help, and they recognised that the Spirit was speaking to them through Deborah, and so they looked to her for leadership.

Deborah does not impose her leadership on Israel. She simply sets up camp, makes herself available to any Israelite who needs her, and she serves them. Just as the Father is always there for us, whenever we want to pray. And just as the Son came, not to be served, but to serve.

Like all ministers, I try to mirror this Spiritual

leadership, not forcing my own way, but seeking to bring out the best in others. To lead by serving others, enabling them, giving them confidence, and releasing their God-given gifts.

In our local churches, we all have leaders who have set up camp near us – priests and ministers, filled with the Holy Spirit, who are there to serve us, guide us, and bring out the best in us.

So let's seek them out, just as Deborah was sought out by the ancient Israelites, because, as we try to work out how to bring our Five to faith, we may find that we hear the Spirit speaking to us through them.

Let us pray for our church leaders, lay and ordained, that in listening to the voice of the Spirit themselves, they may help us share the love of God with our Five.



The Spirit of Sovereignty

Matthew 3:13-17

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter Him, saying, *‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’*

¹⁵ Jesus replied, *‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.’* Then John consented.

¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptised, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, *‘This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.’*

If there’s a word that defines this story, it’s this – humility.

At Christmas, the Creator humbled Himself, not just by becoming part of His creation,

but entering into it in utmost lowliness, born in a stable and laid in an animal feeding trough.

On Good Friday He not only humbled Himself by suffering death, like His creation,



but allowed Himself to be publicly humiliated, in the torture of the cross.

And here at His baptism, He allowed Himself to be baptised, to be spiritually washed clean, by His creation – as if He were sinful, like His creation.

It would be unbelievable if it weren't true.

And this isn't just a gesture – humility is at the very core of His sovereignty over creation.

For it is only after submitting Himself to baptism that the Spirit of sovereignty descends on Jesus, announcing Him to be the Son of God.

Christ shows us that, in God, sovereignty and humility are, paradoxically, one and the same.

As Christians, we need to bear witness to this same humility, because, like Christ, we are called to serve others.

As a nurse, as a priest, and simply as a Christian, I have been called to wash the feet of others. Jesus washed His disciples' feet, and He calls on us to do the same for others – and this includes our Five. Whether we wash feet literally or metaphorically, it is, at its heart, a symbol of service and care – but above all, humility.

It will be our humility that brings the Spirit to descend on us, for *'Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'* (Matthew 23:12)

And so let us pray that the Spirit of sovereignty would grant us true humility, and that we may serve our Five with a servant's heart, as Christ served us.



The Spirit of Evangelism

Acts 8:26-35

[...] ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, *‘Go to that chariot and stay near it.’*

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. *‘Do you understand what you are reading?’* Philip asked.

³¹ *‘How can I,’* he said, *‘unless someone explains it to me?’* So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him [...]

Every single day, we come across new people. We don’t say hello to all of them and start a conversation – if we did, it would be impossible to get anything done! But I wonder if that’s not the real reason we stay quiet.

I think it can be difficult to put ourselves out there with just one new person. Even more so when they seem different to us. If there is seemingly so little in common, it can be difficult just to say hello, let alone



run straight up to them and launch into questions about what they might be reading.

But that is exactly what Philip did. He might have thought, ‘how could someone like me, an ordinary man from a fishing village in Galilee, relate to a royal official, a eunuch, from far-off Ethiopia?’

But the Spirit had an answer: just head out there, and see how it goes. One thing led to another, and Philip got to teach this man the deeper meanings of the prophecy of Isaiah.

We speak a lot today about how to be more effective as ambassadors for Christ. But in this story, the Spirit reminds us of something seemingly too obvious to be worth saying: we can’t speak of God if we’re not in the conversation.

The Spirit doesn’t give Philip pointers about how to speak to this man (as much as Philip might have appreciated them). The Holy

Spirit doesn’t tell us the things we think we need to hear. Instead, there is just one clear instruction: ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it’. God trusts Philip to take it from there.

The Spirit is calling on us today to do likewise. Not to speak to everyone we come across – not everything rests on our shoulders, we’re part of a team after all, the Church – but God is calling on us at least to speak to our Five. He might not be telling us what to say, or how to say it – he just wants us to start the conversation. And since these are our friends and family, it will be easier for us than it was for Philip – even if we might not be lucky enough to come across them reading Isaiah!

And so let us pray for the confidence to listen and respond to the call of the Spirit – to put ourselves out there, and start a conversation with our Five, even if we don’t feel prepared. Because God trusts us to take it from there.



The Spirit for all Ages

2 Timothy 1:3-7

³I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. ⁴Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

⁶For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

A number of years ago, I was in hospital for an operation. Though I'd spent decades as a nurse, I'd never been a patient, and had never had general anaesthetic.

Far from feeling calm and confident, I was anxious and afraid. As I lay there, waiting to be put to sleep, all I wanted was for somebody to hold my hand.



It wouldn't have reduced the risk, it wouldn't have made me better, but it would have told me that I wasn't alone.

We all know what it means to be lonely. To feel isolated (even when we're surrounded by other people) and to long for personal connection.

Paul, it seems to me, was feeling the same way. He was writing this letter in prison – supposedly the last he wrote before his martyrdom – and his longing to see Timothy is palpable. I can imagine him yearning for an embrace, or, at the very least, a hand to hold.

We can't underestimate the importance of touch. Because touch is one of the ways that the Holy Spirit is at work in the world.

As Paul says, the Spirit – the gift of God – came to Timothy through Paul laying his hands upon him. And it came to all of us through touch at our baptism.

Through the wonder of touch, the Holy Spirit has been shared between us and down through the generations, through all ages, from Paul's time to this time, and continuing into the future.

The Spirit for all ages – formless, timeless – comes to us in a pinpoint of space and time, when we touch one another.

And we need to share its gift, if we can, with our Five – those who, like Paul, we have been constantly remembering in our prayers.

And so let us pray that, whenever our Five might feel alone, we are there for them with a held hand, a squeeze on the shoulder, or a hug, whatever is appropriate and appreciated, sharing with them the comfort of the Holy Spirit.



Pentecost

The Spirit of Promise

Acts 2:1-4

¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls
inspire and lighten with
celestial fire...?

This ancient hymn was sung at the coronation of King Charles III, just before

he was anointed with oil and with the Holy Spirit. Originally in Latin, it was sung in the native languages of the United Kingdom (English, Welsh, Scots Gaelic and Irish), harking back to the many languages spoken by the Apostles that first Pentecost – and it



called for a whole new Pentecost today.

In fact, the hymn has been sung at every British coronation since 1625, because it has been recognised that a monarch cannot bear the weight of their calling alone – they need the strength that can come only from the Spirit of power.

And we all need that help too for the tasks that are set before us – not least to share the love of God with our Five.

That is what we have been praying for these past eleven days – that our Five would encounter God, and do so through us.

Through our confidence in starting conversations, even when we feel unready. Through our humility, serving them with a servant’s heart. Through our comfort when they find themselves in darkness, or alone. Through our grace, committing ourselves

to their wellbeing, even when it might be difficult. Through our guidance, helping them to hear and listen to God’s call.

And above all through our action, responding to the Spirit’s whisper and sharing God’s love with our Five ourselves.

If we do all that we have prayed, our Five will not only encounter God through us.

We ourselves will encounter God more fully, and be transformed by His Spirit into people of grace, humility, comfort, listening, confidence and love – into people that reflect, ever more clearly, the true image of God.

And so let us pray that, like that very first Pentecost, we may be transformed by the Holy Spirit, and enabled to become ambassadors for Christ, sharing the love of God with our Five.

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