

A Form to be Used in
Common Prayer
during Plagues

A Form to be used in Common prayer twice a week, and also an order of public fast, to be used every Wednesday in the week, during this time of mortality, and other afflictions, wherewith the Realm at this present is visited.

Set forth by the Queens Majesties special commandment, expressed in her letters hereafter following in the next page. xxx. July 1563.

By the Queen

MOST REVEREND FATHER IN GOD, right trusty and right well beloved, we greet you well. Like as Almighty God hath of his mere grace committed to us, next under him, the chief government of this Realm and the people therein: So hath he of his like goodness, ordered under us sundry principal ministers, to serve and assist us in this burden. And therefore considering the state of this present time, wherein it hath pleased the most highest, for the amendment of us and our people, to visit certain places of our Realm with more contagious sickness than lately hath been: For remedy and mitigation thereof, we think it both necessary and our bounden duty, that universal prayer and fasting be more effectually used in this our Realm. And understanding that you have thought and considered upon some good order to be prescribed therein, for the which ye require the application of our authority, for the better observation thereof amongst our people, we do not only commend and allow your good zeal therein; But do also command all manner our Ministers Ecclesiastical or Civil, and all other our Subjects, to execute, follow, and obey such Godly and wholesome orders, as you, being Primate of all England, and Metropolitan of this province of Canterbury, upon Godly advise and consideration, shall uniformly devise, prescribe, and publish, for the universal usage of prayer, Fasting, and other good deeds, during the time of this visitation by sickness and other troubles.

Even under our Signet, at our Manor of Richmond, the first day of August the fifth year of our reign.

*To the most Reverend father in God our right trusty and right well-beloved,
Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of all England.*

The Preface

WE HAVE BEEN TAUGHT by many and sundry examples of holy Scriptures, that upon occasion of particular punishments, afflictions, and perils, which God of his most just judgment hath sometimes sent among his people, to show his wrath against sin, and to call his people to repentance and to the redress of their lives, the Godly have been provoked and stirred up to more urgency and diligence in prayer, fasting, and alms-giving, to a more deep consideration of their consciences, to ponder their unthankfulness and forgetfulness of God's merciful benefits towards them, with craving of pardon for the time past, and to ask his assistance for the time to come, to live more Godly, and so to be defended and delivered from all further perils and dangers.

So king David in the time of plague and pestilence, which ensued upon his vain numbering of the people, prayed unto God with wonderful fervency, confessing his fault, desiring God to spare the people, and rather to turn his ire to him, who had chiefly offended in that transgression. The like was done by the virtuous kings, Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah in their distress of wars and foreign invasions. So did Judith and Esther fall to humble prayers in like perils of their people. So did Daniel in his captivity, and many other more in their troubles.

Now therefore calling to mind, that God hath been provoked by us to visit us at this present with the plague and other grievous diseases, and partly also with trouble of wars: It hath been thought meet to set forth by public order some occasion to excite and stir up all godly people within this Realm, to pray earnestly and heartily to God, to turn away his deserved wrath from us, and to restore us as well to the health of our bodies by the wholesomeness of the air, as also to Godly and profitable peace and quietness. And although it is

every Christian man's duty, of his own devotion to pray at all times: yet for that the corrupt nature of man is so slothful and negligent in this his duty, he hath need by often and sundry means, to be stirred up and put in remembrance of his duty. For the effectual accomplishment whereof, it is ordered and appointed as followeth.

First, that all Curates and Pastors, shall exhort their Parishioners to endeavor them selves to come unto the Church, with so many of their families as may be spared from their necessary business, (having yet a prudent respect in such assemblies to keep the sick from the whole, in places where the plague reigneth) and they to resort, not only on Sundays and holy days: but also on Wednesdays and Fridays, during the time of these present afflictions, exhorting them, there reverently and Godly to behave themselves, and with penitent hearts to pray unto God to turn these plagues from us, which we through our unthankfulness and sinful life have deserved.

Secondly, that the said Curates shall then distinctly and plainly read the general confession appointed in the book of Service, with the residue of the Morning prayer, using for both the Lessons the Chapters hereafter following. That is to say:

For the first Lesson, one of these Chapters, out of the Old Testament.

The 2. Kings Chapter 24—Leviticus 26. Deuteronomy 28. Jeremiah 18 unto these words: *Let us &c.*, and 22:2. Para. Cap. 34. Isaiah 1. Ezekiel 18 and 19. Joel 2. 2 Esdras 9. Jonah the 2 and 3. Chapter together. Which Chapters would be read orderly on Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

And for the second Lesson, one of these Chapters, out of the New Testament.

Mathew. 3. 6. 7. 24. 25. Luke. 13. Acts 2. beginning at these words: *Ye men of Israel, hear these words.* To the end of the Chapter &c. Rom. 2. 6. 12. 13. Galatians. 5. Ephesians 4. 5. I. Tim. 2. Apoca. 2.

The order for the Wednesdays

ON WEDNESDAYS (which be the days appointed for general fast, in such Form as shall hereafter be declared) after the Morning prayer ended, as is aforesaid, the said Curates and Ministers shall exhort the people assembled, to give them selves to their private prayers and meditations. For which purpose a pause shall be made of one quarter of an hour and more, by the discretion of the said Curate, during which time, as good silence shall be kept as may be. That done, the Litany is to be read, in the midst of the people, with the additions of prayer hereafter mentioned.

Then shall follow the ministration of the Communion, so oft as a just number of Communicants shall be thereto disposed, with a Sermon, if it can be, to be made by such as is authorized by the Metropolitan or Bishop of the Diocese, and they to entreat of such matters especially as be meet for this cause of public prayer: or else, for want of such Preacher, to read one of the Homilies hereafter appointed, after the reading of the Gospel, as hath been accustomed. And so the Minister commending the people to God with the accustomed benediction, shall dismiss them.

If there be no Communion, then on every of the said Wednesdays after the Lectionary, the Ten Commandments, the Epistle, Gospel, the Sermon or Homily done: the general usual prayer for the state of the whole Church shall be read, as is set forth in the Book of Common Prayer. After which shall follow these two prayers:

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom. &c.

And, Almighty God, which hast promised. &c. With the accustomed benediction.

The Order for Fridays

On Fridays shall be only the Morning Prayer, and the Litany, with the prayers now appointed to be annexed to the same.

Homilies to be read in order on Wednesdays

1. First, an Homily entitled, *an Homily concerning the Justice of God in punishing of impenitent sinners. &c.* Newly now set forth for that purpose.
2. The Eighth Homily of the first Tome of Homilies, entitled, *Of the declining from God.*
3. The Ninth Homily of the same Tome, entitled: *An exhortation against the fear of death.*
4. The *Homily of Fasting*, in the second Tome of Homilies.
5. The *Homily of prayer*, in the same Tome.
6. The *Homily of Alms deeds*, in the same Tome.
7. The *Homily of repentance*, in the same Tome also.

When these Homilies are once read over, then to begin again, and so to continue them in order.

After the end of the Collect in the Litany, which beginneth with these words: *We humbly beseech thee, O Father.* &c. shall follow this Psalm, to be said of the Minister, with the answer of the people.

The Psalm to be said in the Litany, before one of the prayers newly appointed. Whereof one verse to be said of the Minister, and an other by the people, clerk, or clerks.

- Minister* **O** COME, let us humble ourselves, and fall down before the Lord, with reverence and fear.
- People* For he is the Lord our God: and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hands.
- Minister* Come therefore, let us turn again unto our Lord; for he hath smitten us, and he shall heal us.
- People* Let us repent, and turn from our wickedness: And our sins shall be forgiven us.
- Minister* Let us turn, and the Lord will turn from his heavy wrath, and will pardon us, and we shall not perish.
- People* For we acknowledge our faults: and our sins be ever before us.
- Minister* We have sore provoked thine anger, O Lord: thy wrath is waxed hot, and thy heavy displeasure is sore kindled against us.
- People* Thou hast made us hear of the noise of wars, and hast troubled us by the vexation of enemies.
- Minister* Thou hast in thine indignation stricken us with grievous sickness, and by and by we have fallen as leaves beaten down with a vehement wind.
- People* Indeed we acknowledge, that all punishments are less than our deservings: But yet of thy mercy, Lord correct us to amendment, and plague us not to our destruction.
- Minister* For thy hand is not shortened, that thou canst not help: nether is thy goodness abated, that thou wilt not hear.

- People* Thou hast promised, O Lord, that before we cry thou wilt hear us: whilst we yet speak thou wilt have mercy upon us.
- Minister* For none that trust in thee shall be confounded: neither any that call upon thee shall be despised.
- People* For thou art the only Lord, who woundest, and dost heal again, who killest, and revivest, bringest even to hell, and bringest back again.
- Minister* Our fathers hoped in thee, they trusted in thee, and thou didst deliver them.
- People* They called upon thee, and were helped: they put their trust in thee, and were not confounded.
- Minister* O Lord, rebuke not us in thine indignation: neither chasten us in thy heavy displeasure.
- People* O remember not the sins and offenses of our youth: but according to thy mercy think thou upon us, O Lord, for thy goodness.
- Minister* Have mercy upon us, O Lord, for we are weak: O Lord heal us for our bones are vexed.
- People* And now in the vexation of our spirits, and the anguish of our souls, we remember thee, and we cry unto thee: Hear Lord, and have mercy.
- Minister* For thine own sake, and for thy holy name's sake, incline thine ear, and hear, O merciful Lord.
- People* For we do not pour out our prayers before thy face, trusting in our own righteousness: but in thy great and manifold mercies.
- Minister* Wash us thoroughly from our wickedness: and cleanse us from our sins.

- People* Turn thy face from our sins, and put out all our misdeeds.
- Minister* Make us clean hearts, O God: and renew a right spirit within us.
- People* Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: O deliver us, and be merciful unto our sins for thy name's sake.
- Minister* So we that be thy people, and sheep of thy pasture, shall give thee thanks forever, and will always be showing forth thy praise, from generation to generation.
Glory be to the father etc.

After this Psalm, shall be said by the Curate or Minister openly and with an high voice, one of these three prayers following. And after that, orderly the rest of the Collects appointed in the Litany. At which time the people shall devoutly give ear, and shall both with mind and speech to themselves, assent to the same prayers.

A prayer, containing also a Confession of sins. Which is to be said after the Litany, as well upon Sundays, as Wednesdays and Fridays.

O ALMIGHTY, most just and merciful God, we here acknowledge our selves most unworthy to lift up our eyes unto heaven; for our conscience doth accuse us, and our sins do reprove us.

We know also that thou Lord, being a just judge, must needs punish the sins of them which transgress thy law. And when we consider and examine all our whole life, we find nothing in our sins, that deserveth any other thing but eternal damnation. But because thou, O Lord, of thy unspeakable mercy, hast commanded us in all our necessities to call only upon thee, and hast also promised, that thou wilt hear our prayers, not for any our desert (which is none) but for the merits of thy son our only Saviour Jesus Christ, whom thou hast ordained to be our only mediator and intercessor: we lay

away all confidence in man, and do flee to the throne of thy only mercy, by the intercession of thy only son our Saviour Jesus Christ.

And first of all, we do most lament and bewail, from the bottom of our hearts, our unkindness and unthankfulness towards thee our Lord, considering, that besides those thy benefits which we enjoy as thy creatures, common with all mankind, thou hast bestowed many and singular special benefits upon us, which we are not able in heart to conceive, much less in words worthily to express. Thou hast called us to the knowledge of thy Gospel. Thou hast released us from the hard servitude of Satan. Thou hast delivered us from all horrible and execrable Idolatry, wherein we were utterly drowned, and hast brought us into the most clear and comfortable light of thy blessed word, by the which we are taught how to serve and honor thee, and how to live orderly with our neighbors in truth and verity. But we, most unmindful in times of prosperity of these thy great benefits, have neglected thy commandments, have abused the knowledge of thy Gospel, and have followed our carnal liberty, and served our own lusts; and through our sinful life have not worshiped and honored thee as we ought to have done.

And now, O Lord, being even compelled with thy correction, we do most humbly confess that we have sinned, and have most grievously offended thee by many and sundry ways. And if thou, O Lord, wouldst now being provoked with our disobedience, so deal with us as thou might, and as we have deserved, there remaineth nothing else to be looked for, but universal and continual plagues in this world, and hereafter eternal death and damnation, both of our bodies and of our souls. For if we should excuse ourselves, our own consciences would accuse us before thee, and our own disobedience and wickedness would bear witness against us. Yea, even thy plagues and punishments, which thou dost now lay upon us in sundry places, do teach us to acknowledge our sins.

For seeing, O Lord, that thou art just, yea, even justice itself, thou punishest no people without desert. Yea, even at this present O Lord, we see thy hand terribly stretched out to plague us and punish

us. But although thou shouldest punish us more grievously than thou hast done, and for one plague send a hundred; if thou shouldest pour upon us all those the testimonies of thy most just wrath, which in times past thou poured on thy own chosen people of Israel: yet shouldest thou do us no wrong, neither could we deny but we had justly deserved the same.

But yet, O merciful lord, thou art our God, and we nothing but dust and ashes: Thou art our creator, and we the work of thy hands: Thou art our pastor, we are thy flock: Thou art our redeemer, and we thy people redeemed: Thou art our heavenly father, we are thy children. Wherefore punish us not, O Lord, in thine anger, but chasten us in thy mercy. Regard not the horror of our sins, but the repentance thereof. Perfect that work which thou hast begun in us, that the whole world may know, that thou art our God and merciful deliverer. Thy people of Israel often times offended thee, and thou most justly afflicted them: but as oft as they returned to thee, thou didst receive them to mercy. And though their sins were never so great, yet thou always turned away thy wrath from them, and the punishment prepared for them, and that for thy covenant's sake, which thou made with thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thou hast made the same covenant with us (O heavenly father), or rather a covenant of more excellency and efficacy, and that, namely, through the mediation of thy dear son Jesus Christ our Saviour, with whose most precious blood it pleased thee that this covenant should be, as it were, written, sealed, and confirmed.

Wherefore, O heavenly father, we, now casting away all confidence in ourselves, or any other creature, do flee to this most holy covenant and Testament, wherein our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, once offering himself a sacrifice for us on the cross, hath reconciled us to thee forever. Look therefore, O merciful God, not upon the sins which we continually commit: but upon our mediator and peace-maker, Jesus Christ, that by his intercession thy wrath may be pacified, and we again by thy fatherly countenance relieved and comforted. Receive us also into thy heavenly defense, and

govern us by thy holy spirit, to frame in us a newness of life, therein to laud and magnify thy blessed name for ever, and to live every of us according to the several states of life whereunto thou Lord, hast ordained us.

And although we are unworthy (O heavenly father), by means of our former foul life, to crave anything of thee: yet because thou hast commanded us to pray for all men, we most humbly here upon our knees beseech thee, save and defend thy holy Church, be merciful, O Lord, to all common weals, Countries, Princes, and Magistrates, and especially to this our Realm, and to our most gracious Queen and Governor Queen Elizabeth, increase the number of Godly Ministers, endue them with thy grace to be found faithful and prudent in their office, defend the Queen's Majesty's Council, and all that be in authority under her, or that serve in any place by her commandment for this Nation.

We commend also to thy fatherly mercy all those that be in poverty, exile, imprisonment, sickness, or any other kind of adversity, and namely those whom thy hand now hath touched with any contagious and dangerous sickness, which we beseech thee, O Lord, of thy mercy (when thy blessed will is) to remove from us, and in the meantime grant us grace and true repentance, steadfast faith, and constant patience, that whether we live or die, we may always continue thine, and ever praise thy holy name, and be brought to the fruition of thy Godhead. Grant us these, and all other our humble petitions (O merciful father) for thy dear son's sake, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Or else in the stead of the other, this prayer may be used, and so to use the one day and the other another.

O ETERNAL and everliving God, most merciful father, which of thy great long suffering and patience hast hitherto suffered and borne with us most miserable offenders, who have so long strayed out of thy way, and broken all thy laws and commandments, and

have, neither by thy manifold benefits bestowed upon us unworthy and unthankful sinners, nor by the voice of thy servants and preachers, by continual threatenings out of thy holy word, hitherto been moved, either as thy children, of love to return unto thee our most gracious father, either for fear of thy judgments, as humble and lowly servants to turn from our wickedness.

And therefore, most righteous judge, thy patience being (as it were) overcome at the last with our obstinate unrepentance, thou hast most justly executed those thy terrible threats now partly upon us, by plaguing us so (with most dreadful and deadly sickness) (with troubles of wars) (with penury and scarceness of food and vitals), whereby great multitudes of us are daily afflicted and consumed.

We beseech thee, O most merciful father, that in thy wrath thou wilt remember thy old great mercies, and to correct us in thy judgments, and not in thy just anger, lest we be all consumed and brought to naught. Look not so much upon us and upon our deservings, O most righteous judge, to take just vengeance on our sins: but rather remember thy infinite mercies, O most merciful father, promised to us by thy dearly beloved son our Saviour Jesus Christ, for whose sake, and in whose name, we do earnestly and humbly crave mercy and forgiveness of our sins, and deliverance from this horrible sickness, being thy just punishment and plague for the same. And as thy holy word doth testify, that thy people of all ages, being justly plagued for their sins, and yet in their distress unfeignedly turning unto thee, and suing for thy mercy, obtained the same: So likewise we, most worthily now afflicted with grievous and dreadful plagues for our iniquities, pray thee, O most merciful father, to grant us thy heavenly grace, that we may likewise both truly and unfeignedly repent, and obtain thy mercy, and deliverance from the same, which we beseech thee, O father of all mercies, and God of all consolation, to grant us, for the same Jesus Christ's sake, our only Saviour, mediator and advocate. Amen.

This prayer may be said every third day.

IT HAD been the best for us, O most righteous Judge, and our most merciful father, that in our wealth and quietness, and in the midst of thy manifold benefits continually bestowed upon us most unworthy sinners, we had of love hearkened to thy voice, and turned unto thee our most loving and gracious father: For in so doing, we had done the parts of good and obedient loving children, It had also been well, if at thy dreadful threats out of thy holy word continually pronounced unto us by thy servants our preachers, we had of fear, as corrigible servants, turned from our wickedness. But alas we have shewed hitherto our selves towards thee, neither as loving children (O most merciful father) neither as tolerable servants, O Lord most mighty.

Wherefore now we feel thy heavy wrath, O most righteous Judge, justly punishing us with grievous and deadly sickness and plagues; we do now confess and acknowledge, and to our most just punishment do find indeed, that to be most true, which we have so often hard threatened to us out of thy holy scriptures, the word of thy eternal verity: that thou art the same unchangeable God, of the same justice that thou wilt, and of the same power that thou canst punish the like wickedness and obstinacy of us impenitent sinners in these days, as thou hast done in all ages heretofore. But the same thy holy Scriptures, the word of thy truth, do also testify, that thy strength is not shortened but that thou canst: neither thy goodness abated but that thou wilt, help those that in their distress do flee unto thy mercies, and that thou art the same God of all, rich in mercy towards all that call upon thy name, and that thou dost not intend to destroy us utterly, but fatherly to correct us; who hast pity upon us, even when thou dost scourge us, as by thy said holy word thy gracious promises, and the examples of thy saints in thy holy Scriptures expressed for our comfort, thou hast assured us.

Grant us, O most merciful father, that we fall not into the uttermost of all mischiefs, to become worse under thy scourge, but

that this thy rod may by thy heavenly grace speedily work in us the fruit and effect of true repentance, unfeigned turning and converting unto thee, and perfect amendment of our whole lives, that, as we through our impenitence do now most worthily feel thy justice punishing us, so by this thy correction we may also feel the sweet comfort of thy mercies, graciously pardoning our sins, and pitifully releasing these grievous punishments and dreadful plagues. This we crave at thy hand, O most merciful father, for thy dear son our Savior Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

A short meditation to be said of such as be touched in affliction.

O FATHER, doubtless our own wickednesses do reward us: but do thou, O Lord, according to thy name. Our oft transgressions and sins be many. Against thee have we sinned, yet art thou the comforter and helper of thy humble subjects in the time of their trouble. For thou O Lord art in the midst of us, and thy name is called upon us. Forsake us not, O God, forsake us not for the merits of thy only son our Savior Jesus Christ, to whom, with thee and the holy ghost, be all honor and glory. Amen.

Psalms which may be sung or said before the beginning, or after the ending of Public Prayer.

I	2	3	4	5	6
13	15	25	26	30	32
46	51	67	79	84	91
102	103	107	123	130	143
147					

The Order for the general Fast

IT IS MOST EVIDENT to them that read the Scriptures, that both in the old Church under the law, and in the Primitive Church under the Gospel, the people of God hath always used general Fasting, both in times of common calamities, as War, Famine, Pestilence &c. and also when any weighty matter, touching the estate of the Church or the commonwealth, was began or intended. And it can not be denied, but that in this our time, wherein many things have been reformed according to the doctrine and examples of God's word, and the Primitive Church, this part for fasting and abstinence, being always in the Scripture, as a necessary companion, joined to fervent prayer, hath been too much neglected.

Wherefore, for some beginning of redress herein, it hath been thought meet to the Queen's Majesty that in this contagious time of sickness, and other troubles, and unquietness, according to the examples of the Godly king Jehoshaphat, and the king of Nineveh, with others, a general Fast should be joined with general prayer, throughout her whole Realm, and to be observed of all her godly Subjects, in manner and form following.

First, it is ordained, that the Wednesday of every week shall be the day appointed for this general Fast,

Secondly, all persons between the age of 16 years and 60 (sick folks and laborers in harvest or other great labors, only excepted) shall eat but one only competent and moderate meal upon every Wednesday. In which said meal shall be used very sober and spare diet, without variety of kinds of meat, dishes, spices, confections, or wines, but only such as may serve for necessity, comeliness, and health.

Item, in that meal it shall be indifferent to eat flesh or fish, so that the quantity be small, and no variety or delicacy be sought. Wherein every man hath to answer to God, if he in such Godly exercises

either contempt public order, or dissemble with God, pretending abstinence, and doing nothing less.

Item, those that be of wealth and ability, ought that day to abate, and diminish the costliness and variety of their fare, and therewith their liberality and alms towards the poor, that the same poor, which either in deed lack food, or else that which they have is unseasonable and cause of sickness, may thereby be relieved and charitably succored, to be maintained in health.

Last of all, this day, being in this manner appointed for a day of general prayer and Fasting, ought to be bestowed by them, which may forbear from bodily labor, in Prayer, study, reading or hearing of the Scriptures, or good exhortations. &c. And when any dullness or weariness shall arise, then to be occupied in other godly exercises: But no part thereof to be spent in plays, pastimes, or idleness, much less in Lewd, wicked, or wanton behavior.

When there is a Sermon, or other just occasion, one of the Lessons may be omitted, and the shortest of the three prayers appointed in the Litany by this order may be said, and the longest left off.

Forasmuch as divers Homilies, appointed before to be read in this Form of Common prayer, are contained in the second Tome of Homilies now lately set forth by the Queens Majesties authority: Therefore it is ordered, that the Churchwardens of every parish shall provide the same second Tome or book of Homilies with all speed at the charges of the Parish.

