OPENING DEVOTION

*THE CANDLE IS LIT*

*OPENING RESPONSES*

Leader: Creator of the cosmos, of eternity and time:

ALL: BE WITH US IN *THIS* TIME.

Leader: Saviour of the world, healer of the nations:

ALL: BE WITH US IN THIS PLACE.

Leader: Breath of all that lives, of people near and far:

ALL: STIR WITHIN OUR LIVES.

Leader: Maker-Spirit-Son, God of here and now:

ALL: BE PRESENT IN OUR WORSHIP,

 THAT WE MAY FIND NEW WAYS

 TO BE PRESENT IN YOUR WORLD.

*PRAYER*

God in the midst, come close to us, and help us to come close to you, as, for a fraction of time, we step back from the activities of the day. May we treasure such moments with you. Moments when we can bring to you the things we are doing, and find new meaning for them, and new strength for doing them. And moments for recalling how we are meeting you already, in the stuff of daily living and engagement, when faith is tested and compassion is translated into action. Amen.

*BIBLE READING*

Matthew 22. 1-10 - The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

 1 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 2 “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

   4 “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

   5 “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. 6 The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

   8 “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. 9 So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ 10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

*REFLECTION*

“God is for all – Let us mean what we say” - by George MacLeod, the founder of the Iona Community, whose prayers we are using in our opening and closing devotions this evening.

‘I remember preaching individual salvation in the street in Govan one day – yes to 500 men on a weekday at 4’o clock. What else was there for them to do in the market place but listen to curate or Communist? An outspoken man in question time, speaking almost as God spoke to Isaiah, asked, “ Do you think all this religion stuff will save?” Very down at heel he was, but very clear of eye. Suddenly, as he was speaking, I realised he was preaching the gospel and not I. I asked him to come up on the platform, but he refused and left the meeting.

Some weeks later I received a message asking me to go to the hospital and see a man called Archie Gray. I had never heard the name before, but when I reached the hospital I found it was my questioner from the meeting and he was dying of starvation. The man was single, in a whole household of unemployed, which he left because he felt he was eating too much of the rations. Out of 21 shillings a week he was sending 7/6 a week to a ne’er-do-well brother in Australia. He said he was bitter about the Church, not because it was preaching falsehoods, but because it was speaking the truth and did not mean what it said... Archie Gray was the true founder of the Iona Community’. No Empty Phrases, NCEC,1999,99

*Silence*

*PRAYER*

ALL: CHRIST, YOU ARE BEFORE US,

 THIS IS WHAT GIVES US COURAGE TO GO ON.

 IT IS YOU WHO DIRECTS.

 IT IS YOU WHO BECKONS.

 SO WE DEDICATE OURSELVES .

 AND WE BLESS YOU NOW.

Leader: And now may the God of hope bring you such joy and peace in believing that you overflow with hope in the power of the Holy Spirit.

ALL: AMEN.

*THE CANDLE IS EXTINGUISHED*