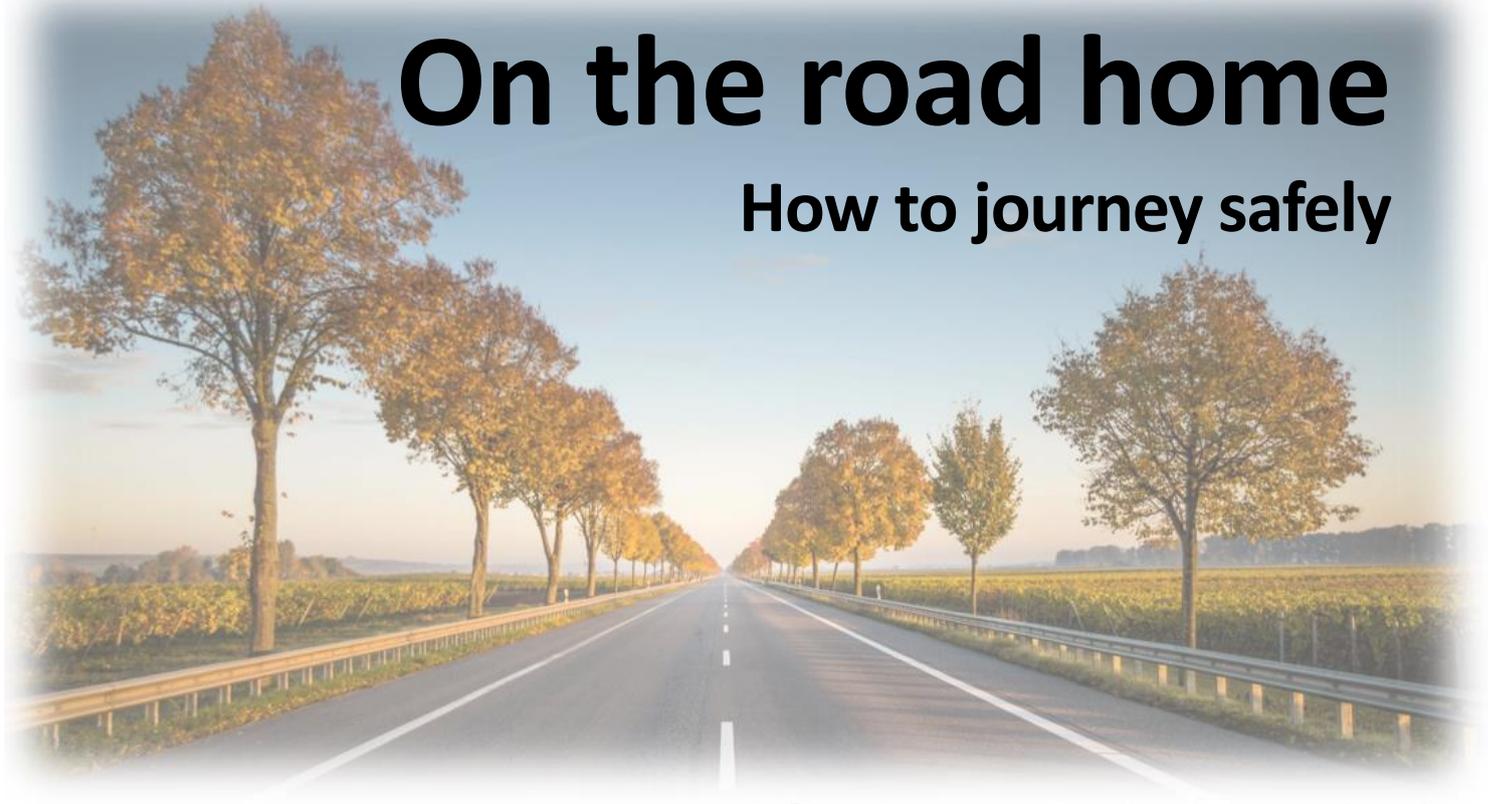




WEEK OF PRAYER
12-19 January 2020

On the road home

How to journey safely



This year's WOP materials are developed by:



Alianza Evangélica
Española

On the road home: How to journey safely

Dear praying Evangelical Alliance Brothers and Sisters,

Where is home for you? What comes to mind when you hear this word? A wonderful place full of ...? What makes a home a real home? For me it brings to mind first of all people, and only after that places.

I have been in places where many of my physical needs were plentifully met, but these places did not feel like home at all, because the atmosphere was heavy, loaded with sorrow, or anger, or tensions, or similar things.

At other times I have been in places where only the bare minimum was provided, but where the atmosphere was warm, welcoming, joyful, hospitable and loving. That's where I felt home immediately. It was relaxing, and I connected with people.

A wonderful setting is pleasant, but it is people and relationships that make me truly feel at home.

There are so many stories in the bible about HOME. You will come across some of them during this Week of Prayer. At this point I just want to add a few thoughts: Jesus calls the people who follow him his family. He tells his disciples that the world will know that we are his disciples when we love each other. What draws people HOME are relationships. We will feel at home in our physical and in our spiritual environments when this love which Jesus talks about is put in practice.

Here on earth we will have experiences of feeling at home, a sense of belonging. We are called to strive for this as much as possible, whether in our private homes or in a church community. Both are images of the heavenly HOME. That heavenly HOME will ultimately and fully fulfil all our longing.

Many local churches in Europe take this Week of Prayer as an opportunity to organise joint prayer meetings, which we would like to encourage. Here a few suggestions for you to keep in mind when you plan:

1. Please make sure that ALL Evangelical churches are invited and included in your prayer gatherings. Make an extra effort to also reach out to the migrant churches. Do you have Roma churches that you could invite?
Making this a common journey will make your unity richer and more diverse.
2. It's always a richer experience to have events in various places, don't forget about to the smaller ones?
Each place is different and adds colour to your unity and common journey.
3. How can you practically express the vast diversity in your country? Do you make room for that?
Opening up, making room adds surprising perspectives to unity.
4. Is your event relevant and appealing for youth as well? We encourage you to allow youth to participate and even help you plan and prepare. Unity and journeying across generations is really important for the church.

5. Plan a creative, relevant and appealing prayer meeting? Double check to make sure that prayer has the bulk of time?
6. We urge you to keep a gender balance. Have both men and women working together to create a program that will help express diversity?
God has made diversity and rejoices when his body expresses this in unity.
7. Consider the future. Imagine seeing this event grow throughout the years. How can you create this year's prayer events in ways that will draw people back and make them bring their friends with them?

God has blessed us with a wide range of ways to worship him! Let this Week of Prayer be the opportunity to celebrate this!

So, let us keep homeward bound, always keeping that final destiny in mind, as we pursue our Christian pilgrimage in this world



Thomas Bucher

General Secretary European Evangelical Alliance

P.S. Thanks to the Spanish Evangelical Alliance which prepared the texts for the Week of Prayer, for the third time in a row. And special thanks to Miriam Borham who translated it from Spanish to English.

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Day 1 – From the pigsty to the father’s house: The story of a man who got lost in life (Luke 15:11-32)

The youngster in this story experienced what we have experienced ourselves before we met the Lord; he started a journey without a destination. Here we see a young man to whom we can relate. Wishing to be happy by his own means. He was proud of himself. But in fact, he was blind and his relationship with his father was broken.

Later, we see this same young man in a pigsty, in the midst of the dirt of his disobedience, consumed by all the filth - a picture of what happens when we turn our back to God.

But then, the young man becomes aware of what he has lost, the communion with his father. This is exactly what humanity has lost as a consequence of Adam’s sin. He realises that it is not the place where he should be, that in this pigsty pen his life can only have one outcome: death. Having become aware of this reality, he decides to return to his father. He knows that he will find fulfilment there.

However, what a great surprise awaits him there! When he begs for forgiveness for his sins, his father, rich in mercy, not only forgives him but also acknowledges him as his beloved son. He dresses him in the best clothes, puts a ring on his finger, gives new sandals for his feet, covers him with glory and throws a great party.

We were that young man in the pigsty. By the grace of God, by the merits of Christ, and by the work of the Holy Spirit, our heart awoke, and we realised our need to beg our God for forgiveness. Far from rejecting us, He forgave us in his great mercy, changed our robes, and now regards us as his children. He has made us participants in his promise and prepared a home for us in heaven. This is not only the place to which we are going, but also the place to which we belong.

Our life has become a pilgrimage. Every step is one step closer to home. Thank God. When we are asked, “where are you going?” we can say: “we are going to our Father’s house.” We know where we are going! And Paul’s words resonate in our minds: “we are confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the Day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

Samuel Alonso

Thanksgiving

- Thank you, Father, for giving us a destiny, for restoring the fellowship with you, and for giving meaning to our life's journey.
- We are grateful for belonging to our heavenly home by the grace and the merits of Christ.
- Thank you, Father, for taking us out of the filth and trash filth and trash, for perfecting us while we walk, and for giving us hope that we will reach the finish line.

Confession

- We confess that sometimes we allow the mud to stain our view, and not fix our eyes on Jesus.
- Forgive us for our lack of courage and for not declaring to those around us where we are going and why.

Requests

- We ask that you continue to perfect us so that we will take more and more pleasure in the day when we arrive in the Father's house.
- Grant us that in the struggles we encounter in our journey, our self-sufficiency and our pride will become smaller, and that we never cease to realise from what you have delivered us.
- We humbly ask that our communion with you will grow, that you give us the strength for the steps to take and enable us to glorify you with excellence.

Day 2 – From prison to heaven: an apostle feels “homesick” (Philippians 1:21-24)

The gospel of Jesus Christ has an incomparable transformative capacity, since it is “the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes,” as the apostle Paul affirms (Romans 1: 16). Obviously, he had the right to make such a claim after his experience on the road to Damascus. His personal encounter with the resurrected Christ radically changed his convictions, his world-view, and the direction of his life. Before that, he had devoted himself to persecuting relentlessly all those who dared acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah and Lord. However, after he had come to know Jesus personally, his life philosophy could be summarised as follows: “To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1: 21). He was willing to leave everything aside – family, social status, religious credentials, goods and comfort – in order to know Christ and serve him as Lord (Phil. 3: 7-8).

The new path he took at his conversion led him to experience situations of extreme hardship and pain: shipwrecks, dangers, toils and exhaustion, hunger and thirst, cold and nudity, prisons and unjustified abuse. We have quoted his epistle to the Christians in Philippi. He wrote it while he was from jail, with all the discomforts that a Roman prison could entail. Nevertheless, this epistle radiates the joy that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Paul had learnt to be content in any circumstance. This is possible for every believer in Christ, because his vision of life goes beyond his earthly existence to his eternal stay in God’s presence. Physical death is only the entrance to that heavenly home.

The apostle underlines the importance of this perspective when he indicates his “desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better” (Phil. 1: 23). Indeed, although he was prepared to comply with God’s will in whatever circumstance on earth, he yearned to be with Christ, he wanted to arrive home.

What about us? How do we behold the future? Do we await “the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ?” (Titus 2: 13).

Timoteo Glasscock

Thanksgiving

- Our hearts are are grateful for the radical change of direction for our lives that you gave us when we encountered you.
- We thank you, Lord, because through Christ we may be joyful and happy in adversity.
- We give you thanks for granting us to live this earthly life with the enriching vision of eternal life.

Confession

- We confess that when adversities arrive, we do not always allow the Spirit to fill us with joy, and do not always rest assured in the power of God.
- We ask you to forgive us for the times that we do not await with hope the moment in which our great God will manifest himself.

Requests

- We ask you to give us spiritual strength in the moments of trial, when we might have to leave everything aside for Christ's sake. We also intercede for our brothers and sisters, who are going through such situations in this moment.
- Grant us, o God, that we do not lose your joy, and that our hope will increase all along the journey of our life.

Day 3 – From the verge of the abyss into the arms of the shepherd: the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7)

Lost sheep - two simple words with a deep theological meaning, that help us to understand why Jesus receives sinners and eats with them, the matter that prompted this brief parable.

A sheep is a sociable animal, that naturally lives in the context of a flock. The individual sheep is defined by the flock and the flock is defined by the sheep. It never lives in isolation, it is not a tracking scout, nor a survivor with great skills.

Each sheep belongs to a shepherd. Everybody knows that. Even so, Jesus begins his story by confirming the obvious fact that a shepherd 'owns' a hundred sheep. Of course, sheep do not own themselves. And you, to whom do you belong? To what voice do you listen? When sheep try to take possession of themselves and shape their own destiny, they take other directions than where the shepherd leads them. The common, sheep-like desire to be emancipated leads to being... lost. In other words: we end up like a sheep in trouble. The shepherd looks for it because he knows it will not survive long on its own. Jesus' audience is like the sheep in the metaphor. Publicans and sinners, pharisees and scribes, all are lost without him. They are in "need of repentance". Some admit this, others do not. Are you in need of repentance?

When we leave the flock, we put ourselves in danger. We are bound to get lost. This remains so until we allow the good shepherd to whom we belong and who knows the paths of life, to guide us. Whom do you follow? Which paths do you tread? We are lost because our heart is ignorant of its owner. Just walking next to the flock is no guarantee that we will not get lost, because the largest flock on earth is, after all, the flock of the lost. Next to whom do you walk?

The path of life is narrow. Walking this path requires the guidance of the good shepherd. The most worthwhile we can do is to let the shepherd take us up in his arms and bring us back in his flock. And then, follow him. Only then will you find the way to the green pastures where you can rest, and to the rivers of living water that quench your eternal thirst. There you can find more joy than you have ever dreamt of!

Oscar Pérez

Thanksgiving

- Thank you, Lord, for the identity that you gave us: a sheep of the good Shepherd.
- Our hearts are thankful to you, God, that you have come to find us when we were lost. We were heading for the abyss, but you took us and brought us to your fold.
- We are grateful for having you as our guide at all times, because we tend to stray from the path.
- Thank you also for giving us rest in Jesus Christ.

Confession

- We confess that when the path is narrow we tend to be like clumsy sheep who do not listen to the good Shepherd.
- Forgive us for the times when we went astray from you because we thought we could better manage on our own.

Requests

- Beloved God, help us listen to your voice at all times in order that we do not get lost in things that are not agreeable to you.
- We pray that you make us aware of the wonder of being your sheep, so that we might show true path of life to those who are not yet in your fold.
- We ask that we might wholeheartedly enjoy the blessing of walking towards green pastures, and that we might never lose sight of the goal of our life.

Day 4 – From wealth to happiness: a tax collector finds true richness (Luke 19.1-10)

There is a terrible expression: ‘to be filthy rich’. Do you understand what it really means? When you use it to show your disdain for the riches of the world, there may nevertheless be some kind of envy in your heart towards others who are so rich. Let me try and take that envy away by the modest testimony of something incredible that happened to me last week. I can barely believe the radical change that took place in my life. There is only one explanation: it was God who responded to a cry from my heart. I have been very rich. I still live comfortably, although not as much as before, since I paid so much back to others and since all the donations to the poor that I have recently made – half of my fortune, in fact. And you know what? All my attachment to money and all the harmful selfishness that was consuming me have completely disappeared. I now feel great, happier than ever before.

I am sure you have heard about the famous ancient city of Jericho. Well, the Romans had appointed me as the chief tax collector of the wide region of Jericho. My job was to control a large group of tax collectors. I used this position to heap up enormous wealth and if you knew how much I earned each year, it would certainly spark your envy. I acquired all these riches in part through dishonest means, which I have now given up, but which were tolerated by the Roman governor. He only cared about receiving the annual amount that I was required to pay, so he closed his eyes when we as tax collectors used abusive means to fill our own pockets.

Do you think I was happy with my beautiful mansion, my rich friends and the holidays I often spent on the wonderful Greek islands? Well, to be honest, one of the reasons I went there was to escape the suffocating atmosphere of my country, where my compatriots hated me for collaborating with the Romans. No, I was not happy. No, money is not everything. You know what it means to have a clean conscience, to be at peace with God? For a long time, I have struggled with a guilty conscience. I dream of a different life, of asking God to have mercy upon me and allow me to live honestly, without getting rich by deceiving other people.

This change has indeed taken place. It all started when I became very curious to see and hear this Galilean preacher of whom I had heard so much. Since I met him, I have found true and lasting richness, without a shadow of doubt: He is my Saviour! (see Luke 19.1-10, the story of Zacchaeus).

Oliver Py

Thanksgiving

- Thank you, God, that you had mercy upon us when we led our life far from you.
- We are grateful, Lord, that you allow us to have communion with you, and to share in your wealth.
- Thank you, God, for the transformation in our lives, like the transformation in the life of Zacchaeus. You are our Saviour.

Confession

- We regret the times when we attached more importance to material things and placed our trust in them. Even though we know that your promises and all that pertains to the Kingdom are more important.

Requests

- Grant us not to be governed by what we see and what we covet. Strengthen in us a the desire to seek the things of our heavenly Homeland.
- Help us to be honest in the way we live. Help us not to despair and long for other circumstances, but to be a light in the circumstances ones in which we are.
- Beloved Father, help us to become aware of everything you give us day after day.

Day 5 – From seeking water to finding a never-ending fountain: the discovery of the Samaritan woman (John 4: 1-26)

The Samaritan woman came from an ethnic group that was rejected by the Jews. She had no education, not much culture.

Jesus took the initiative to meet her and talk to her. He felt tired and asked for water. It was a like normal everyday encounter, but at the same time it was uncommon. The women knew that this man had travelled and was thirsty after his journey, so it was perfectly normal that he requested for water. However, his encounter broke all the protocol of that time. It was very unusual for a Jew to approach a Samaritan. Jesus identified with this woman. Like her, he also was rejected and judged negatively by others., So he approaches her. He had many opportunities to address big crowds, but this time he didn't miss the chance of talking with one single person, a poor and vulnerable foreign woman.

What a telling example for us today. Here we have a woman belonging to a people that had been migrants, displaced persons. She knows the value of water. Jesus comes close and asks to quench his thirst with water from the well. Water is essential to life, a vital element to our physical survival. We are not told whether Jesus drinks or not. What we do know is that he offers her 'living water', water that gives life. When you only drink the water you can see, touch and feel, it will never satisfy you. Drinking water is essential for human beings.

'Living water' in Hebrew means 'running water' (Jer. 2: 13), i.e. water from a well that constantly flows down into a river. This water is never stagnant and is constantly regenerated by oxygen, so it preserves its purity. The water that Jesus offers is not magical, it doesn't have a different chemical formula. It doesn't focus on a charismatic leader. This water does not spring from human words, it does not depend on a particular place where it can be found – the Western world, Asia, America, Africa or wherever. It is not made holy by some human person. This water flows from Jesus himself, from his Word, from the Holy Spirit that works in us today. When you drink this water, a fountain will spring up inside you. Jesus assures you: 'Whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst. The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life (verse 14). There are so many men and women like the Samaritan women at the well, waiting to meet Jesus or to encounter someone who can offer the living water of salvation.

Whoever seeks God nowadays, in the right way, by coming to Jesus, will find Him.

We should listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit asking us: Do you want to build a life of fear or a life of faith? Do you dare to choose the latter?

Jesus took the initiative to come close to the woman at the well. I hope that, at the present time, you can approach those who have never heard the message of salvation and that God uses you to embrace the refugee, the Muslim, the vulnerable woman, the unaccompanied migrant children scattered all over Europe, bring them into contact with Jesus. Then the same miracle will happen before our eyes; as they drink the water that quenches their thirst, it becomes a fountain of life.

Rosa Barrachina

Thanksgiving

- We give thanks for the example we have in Jesus, who came close to all kinds of people.
- Thank you, God, that you have come into our lives, that you offered us the water of eternal life that quenched our thirst.
- Thank you, Lord, because you enable us to overcome all sorts of prejudice and to approach people in order to tell them about you.

Confession

- We ask forgiveness for the times when we did not share the living water that you have given to us.
- We confess the times when we have discriminated against certain people, and not approached them.

Requests

- May we become like that tree described by the psalmist, that is planted by streams of living water and yields fruit.
- We request that you help us treat people in an impartial way, and to make known the Gospel to people of all languages, tribes and nations.

Day 6 – From fleeing to returning: Jacob finds his true home (Genesis 32:22-32)

At first sight, Jacob's life could be described as the story of rebellious, untrusting man, disobedient to God, full of deceit, quarrels, feuds, revenge and persecution by others. His determination to do things his way brought him in untenable situations. Two times he was forced to flee, first from his parents' house and later from the household of his father-in-law. All of this was just a consequence of a dysfunctional family pattern that was already present in previous generations.

A closer look reveals that behind a foolish Jacob there is a God. Not a distant God who does not know what Jacob is going through. Not someone who hinders him or makes life difficult for him. He is, above all, the God that assures blessings and who fulfils his promises (Gn. 28:13).

Like his relatives, Jacob makes his plans according to his own wisdom. His attitude is antagonistic, far from reflecting the character of God. However, God redirects these attitudes and circumstances to achieve His purposes.

Even when Jacob is still in his mother's womb, he is already fighting. Later he is fighting with God to show his faithfulness to him and in order to obtain his blessing. Before that, Jacob had stolen the rights of his older brother, but later he amply compensates him with countless presents. Earlier in his life Jacob had submitted to God in a limited way, but now his surrender is complete as he acknowledges God's immense goodness in his life. Jacob had not found his place in his parents' house or in his family-in-law. Now he returns to his own family in a triumphant way, because he has experienced forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration. During his life journey he has discovered that his true home is in the heart of his heavenly Father.

Reading Jacob's story at first sight can leave us with a bitter taste. A closer look reveals that even when the functional failures take their toll, they do not determine our real identity nor our future. When we face new circumstances, there is always hope, when we encounter God in that situation, and when we find our true home in him.

Edith Vilamajó

Thanksgiving

- We are grateful, Lord, because you gave stability to our life when we were fleeing situations that went out of control.
- Thank you, Heavenly Father, for redirecting our steps and filling our hearts with the assurance of our true home, your home.
- Thank you, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for your immense goodness in giving us a hopeful future.

Confession

- We repent before you for all those moments in which we fight against you, when our 'self' goes ways that are contrary to your plans.
- We acknowledge our tendency of wanting to achieve our proper goals by using resources that do not come from you.

Requests

- Give us that our pilgrimage on earth may be an example for others, as we long for the house of the Father.
- Oh God, we ask you that our sorrows do not take more space in our heart than the hope you gave us.
- Lord, help us to rest in your purposes and your plans.

Day 7 – The lesson of the oxen and the donkeys: even animals know to whom they belong (Isaiah 1:1-3)

Isaiah begins with an analysis of his people's situation. He brings to light the extremely serious conditions in which the people find themselves. And he explains that this is because people have completely ignored God's power and now they are even turning their back on Him.

Isaiah depicts a scene similar to that of a trial, in which God summons and delivers the charges (vv. 2-4). First, he presents his case and finds the nation guilty. Then he grants the accused an opportunity to repent and to receive forgiveness. The people were like rebellious children who didn't even have the minimum respect for God. In fact, they were worse than the animals who have respect for their owners. 'The ox knows his owner and the ass his master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not consider.' This comparison is satirical. Neither oxen nor donkeys have a high intelligence, but despite their cognitive limitations, these animals are capable of knowing who takes care of them and who feeds them. On the contrary, the people of Isaiah's days don't even show this scarce level of intelligence that is found among these animals.

God had fed them, he had taken care of them, but they didn't love him in return, nor do they care about him. All of this was the result of wilful ignorance. Even animals like oxen and donkeys show more gratitude towards us humans for what we give them, than we feel towards the God who created us and who cares for us. Of course, there were also people in Israel who, like Isaiah and the other prophets, who had a personal knowledge and experience of God (Gn 4: 1; Jer. 1:5), who realised that God gave them countless blessings and who loved and served him in return. This was the faithful minority, that inspires us, Christians, to recognise God as our heavenly Provider. However, even as in the people of Israel in the time of Isaiah, there are so many people among the nations – and even in the churches – who act as if God is not there.

As long as you don't know what God wants for your life, it will be difficult for you to get along with yourself and with others.

God inspires us to trust him, to be faithful to him. He invites us to repent, to ask forgiveness whenever we go astray, and to come close to him. This kind of repentance is a change of heart and the necessary requirement to walk in his ways, because when the heart is transformed, the road of sanctification opens up to us.

Manuel Díaz

Thanksgiving

- We are grateful to you, oh God, because we know that you have created us and that you are in control of all created things.
- Thank you for encouraging us to have faith, for being patient with us, and for allowing us to come to the throne of your grace.

Confession

- We ask forgiveness for all those times when we show our pride, when we do not admit our failures and repent.
- Forgive us, Lord, for all the times when we were not grateful for your attention and when we thought that you are not taking care of us.

Requests

- May we know more of you so that we can pass on your love, your salvation plan to others, showing them how you forgive all those who come to you with penitent heart.
- Beloved Creator, give us that we may rest in you when we are overwhelmed by the conditions of our life. Help us then to realise that you are our Creator and our heavenly Father who watches over us.

Day 8 – At home at last. Revelation 21:1-4

Revelation 21: 1-4 describes the future home of the believer. Something really beautiful. Not just a beautiful city, but a superb dwelling and a heavenly company. It speaks of the deepest consolations and the greatest tranquillity that we can imagine: no more death, no more tears, no more pain, no more groans. Hallelujah! What a joy to know that our final home is full of God and his goodness! What a relief to know that will be free at last, free from all evil!

Recently, I have discovered what it means to buy a house. My wife and I knew that we wanted to change our apartments for another one, but we did not agree on all the criteria of our new home. Finally, we bought an apartment. Although we are thankful to God for this opportunity, it is not our ideal house because that would cost more than we could afford.

This brings me what I like least about my house: I still have to pay a high mortgage for it. For 25 years the house will also belong to somebody outside the family: the bank! The house was bought from the previous owner with the money of the bank, now I have to return to them not only the price of the house but also the interests we agreed on, month after month.

Apart from the fact that this is not our ideal house and that we still have to pay for it, there is another problem. We are not exempt from bad things happening in it. We have been victim of burglary and of flooding. Our insurance company helps us out, but they cannot assure us that this will not happen again. The insurance was not sold with a no risk guarantee, nor did it include a total-happiness kit. Sometimes a house can be a difficult place to live in, with your family around you. Even when we follow God's plan, even when we try and take pleasure in the house and make it comfortable place for the whole family, we are not exempt from illness, injustice and terrible incidents.

Somebody might say that it seems impossible to live happily in this life! Are we condemned to always be exposed to some form of evil coming our way? When can we finally enjoy complete happiness? Is there an ideal place, all paid for, where bad things can never happen again? My answer to this question is: yes, my friend, there is. That place exists. It's called heaven. It's ideal, Jesus paid it for you, and nothing bad will ever happen there.

That is the true home humanity has always longed for, without even knowing it. Since I accepted Jesus, I know that the heavenly home awaits me. As long as I still live on earth, I know that this world of suffering is only temporal. I will pass through it and arrive in my true dwelling place, heaven. That is the place where I ultimately belong.

Israel Montes

Thanksgiving

- Thank you, Lord, for the home you have prepared for us when we arrive in heaven.
- Our hearts are filled with gratitude and expectation, knowing that we will contemplate your glory forever.
- We want to eternally thank you for the cross, for the sacrifice that Jesus made so that we might believe in Him, follow his steps, and finally arrive where he is sitting on the throne, waiting for us.

Confession

- We acknowledge with sadness that we easily despair when we are taken up by everyday struggles and do not value what you have given us. When we do not consider our true home where there will be no suffering
- We regret the opportunities we have wasted when we had the occasion to speak about this place that awaits those who accept God's offer of salvation – and we repent.

Requests

- Help us to courageously proclaim to men and women around us that there is an eternal dwelling place for all those who believe in Jesus.
- Oh Lord, may we be eager to shine like stars. Help us to show forth the hope that shines in our hearts ever since Jesus showed us the way which leads to that heavenly home.
- As a church, as a bride that awaits her husband, we pray. Come, Lord Jesus, return soon, Lord Jesus.