



Bless the Lord: *A Youth Night in Response to Hurricane Harvey*

Goals of the Night

- Offer a time of pray and reflection for young people to process through the events of hurricane Harvey.
- Reflect on the meaning and roots of suffering and how joy can be found even in the midst of trial.
- Empower young people and families to action not just in the present but in the month to come.

Suggested Schedule for the Night

6:30 pm	Gather / Hospitality Time / Welcome
6:45 pm	Prayer Service – <i>Bless the Lord</i>
7:10 pm	Talk – <i>Joy in Suffering</i>
7:30 pm	Small Group Discussion / Processing
7:50 pm	Commitment to Action
7:55 pm	Closing Prayer

Scripture Verses

Daniel 3:52-90	Psalms 29	Romans 8:32-38	Mark 4:53-71
Revelation 21:3-4	2 Tim 2:3-4	Romans 5:3-5	Matthew 5:4

Church Documents

CCC #45	CCC # 272	CCC #310-311	CCC # 1368	CCC #1521
<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> , 1	<i>Verbum Domini</i> , 106	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i> , 78	<i>Spe Salvi</i> , 38	

Pre-Event

- Get the word out to the community and make sure that they know all young people are welcome regardless of their faith background.
- Make sure to encourage your youth to invite their friends and anyone they know who has been effected by Hurricane Harvey.
- Have a designated prayer ministry team available to pray with / care for the young people who need extra support. Make sure that these people are trained in how to listen to and pray with individuals who are seeking a direct prayer experience.

Environment/Set up Suggestions

- If possible have a projector/laptop set up for use with the included PowerPoint's for the prayer service and talk.
- Prayer Service Set up
 - Designate lectors for the various readings.
 - If possible have a music minister present, if not have a sound system set up with prerecorded music tracks.
 - Have a large cross in the center of the prayer space.
 - Precut pieces of twine/yarn/string into 2 foot pieces for each participant.



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Media Suggestions for the Night

- Song: “Bless the Lord” – Matt Redman
- Song: “Give Thanks to God” – Housefires
- Song: “Whatever Comes” – Rend Collective
- Song: “In Christ Alone” – Keith Getty
- Video: “The Meaning of Suffering – Fr. Mike Schmitz; Ascension Presents (YouTube)
- Video: “Why Does God let us Suffer?” – Chris Stefanick (YouTube)

Prayer Service – Bless the Lord

Opening	
Opening Song:	Use one of the songs from the “Media suggestions” of this night or select a different song of your choice: Recommended song: “Bless the Lord” By: Matthew West
Presider:	In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Response:	Amen
Presider:	May God, the source of all blessings and goodness be with you.
Response:	And with your spirit.
Presider:	<p>Brothers and Sisters, we come together in this time of grief and sadness for the people Houston, Rockport and throughout South-East Texas who have experience such loss and turmoil from the effects of this devastating Hurricane.</p> <p>We turn to You, our loving God, who is always present to comfort and strengthen Your children in our times of need.</p> <p>Even though we cannot understand fully now what has happened, we trust You Father with our hearts and minds, knowing that You work all things together for the good of those who love You.</p> <p>Let us turn and listen to the Word of God</p>



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Liturgy of the Word	
Reader #1:	A Reading from the Book of Daniel: <i>(Dn 3: selections 52-90)</i>
	<p>Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our ancestors, praiseworthy and exalted above all forever; and blessed is your holy and glorious name.</p> <p>Blessed are you in the firmament of heaven, praiseworthy and glorious forever. Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever.</p> <p>Angels of the Lord, bless the Lord, you heavens, bless the Lord, all you waters above the heavens bless the Lord, all you powers bless the Lord, praise and exalt Him above all forever.</p> <p>Sun and moon bless the Lord, stars of heaven bless the Lord, every shower and dew bless the Lord, all you winds bless the Lord, praise and exalt Him above all forever.</p> <p>Fire and heat bless the Lord, cold and chill bless the Lord, dew and rain bless the Lord, frost and snow bless the Lord, praise and exult Him above all forever.</p> <p>Nights and days bless the Lord, light and darkness bless the Lord, lightning and clouds bless the Lord, let the earth bless the Lord, praise and exult Him above all forever.</p> <p>O Israel bless the Lord, priest of the Lord bless the Lord, servants of the Lord bless the Lord, Spirits and souls of the just bless the Lord, holy and humble heart bless the Lord, praise and exult Him above all forever.</p> <p>Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, whose mercy endures forever. All you who fear the Lord praise and give thanks, for His mercy endures forever.</p> <p>The Word of the Lord.</p>
Response:	Thanks be to God.
Reader #2:	The Response will be: <i>(Ps 29)</i> <i>The Lord sits enthroned over the Flood; the Lord reigns as king forever.</i>
Response:	<i>The Lord sits enthroned over the Flood; the Lord reigns as king forever.</i>
Reader #2:	<p>Give to the Lord, you sons of God, give the Lord glory and might.</p> <p>Give the Lord the glory due His name; bow down before the Lord's holy splendor!</p>
Response:	<i>The Lord sits enthroned over the Flood; the Lord reigns as king forever.</i>
Reader #2:	<p>The voice of the Lord is over the waters; The God of glory thunders over the mighty waters.</p>



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	The voice of the Lord is power and splendor, it cracks the cedars of Lebanon.
Response:	<i>The Lord sits enthroned over the Flood; the Lord reigns as king forever.</i>
Reader #2:	The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare. And in His temple all sing "Glory!"
Response:	<i>The Lord sits enthroned over the Flood; the Lord reigns as king forever.</i>
Reader #2:	The Lord sits enthroned over the flood, the Lord reigns as king forever. May the Lord give strength to His people, May the Lord bless his people with peace!
Response:	<i>The Lord sits enthroned over the Flood; the Lord reigns as king forever.</i>
<i>Leader invites all to stand</i>	
Reader #3:	A Reading from the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans: <i>(Rm 8:32, 35, 37-39)</i>
	What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? What will separate us from the Love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, not present, nor future things, nor powers, nor heights, nor depths, nor any other thing. Will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. The Word of the Lord.
Response:	Thanks be to God.
<i>Leader invites all to stand</i>	
Reader #4:	A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark. <i>(Mk 4:53-71)</i>
	On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great storm of wind arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?"



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	<p>And he awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.</p> <p>He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" And they were filled with awe, and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?"</p> <p>The Gospel of the Lord.</p>
Response:	Praise to You Lord Jesus Christ.
<p><i>Have a brief moment of silent reflection, allowing the Word of God to speak to the heart of each person present.</i></p>	
Leader:	<p>Cardinal DiNardo, In the midst of Hurricane Harvey, spoke to our local church encouraging us in our prayer by telling us to: Wake Jesus up in the boat. It's in times like these when we call out to the Lord that He hears the cry of the suffering. As we knock at the door of His heart, we can know with confidence that He will open up and draw us in.</p> <p>Each of us comes to Christ today with different cares and concerns that are weighing heavy upon our hearts.</p>
	<p>For those who have lost family members, friends, or possessions in the flooding and devastation the pain is very real.</p> <p>You may have experienced the pain first hand in the flooding of your home, neighborhood, school, church or you may have just seen the destruction on the news or social media. Because of this, you may feel a great sense of loss, frustration and even anger.</p> <p>You may have been spared the loss but have a great sense of powerlessness and long to do anything to help all those who have been affected.</p> <p>Our friends and family who are far removed from the situation are often left speechless by the images they've seen, and the stories they've heard. They too long to reach out to help as we have seen from the countless pouring of manpower, boats, and donations which have come to the area.</p> <p>Whatever your situation is, and wherever you come from, we all gather today to offer to God our praise and thanksgiving.</p> <p>We also come to offer up our sufferings and those of all our brothers and sisters deeply affected by hurricane Harvey.</p>
<p><i>At this time have volunteers pass out the precut pieces of twine/yarn to each of the participant. If possible have soft instrumental music playing in the background.</i></p>	



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Leader:	<p>As you hold this string in your hand I invite you to think of the victims of Hurricane Harvey. As we meditate on those who have suffered loss I invite you to tie a knot in your string for each person you know who has suffered or can imagine who has suffered.</p> <p>Think of those who lost their homes... their possessions... their sense of security... their hope.</p> <p>Think of those who feel lost... those who feel alone... those who feel abandoned... those whose faith is shaken.</p> <p>Think of those who willingly put themselves at risk to help others who were in need; the firefighters... the police officers... the neighbors and good Samaritans.</p> <p>All of these people and all of these struggles matter to God our heavenly Father, because they matter to us, His children.</p> <p>Each of can offer up your own sufferings for those in our community who are suffering greater things.</p> <p>I invite you each of you to spend a few moments and recall each struggle or difficulty you are currently having in your life, and for each one tie another knot into your string.</p> <p>When you are done I invite you to take your string and tie it to the cross. For not only do we unite our sufferings with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we also unite them with the suffering of Christ himself, and thus make them redemptive.</p>
<p><i>During this time have one of the songs from the suggested song list playing in the background.</i></p>	
Leader:	Let now join together and offer our prayers and petitions to God our almighty and loving Father.
Reader #4:	The Response will be: <i>Lord, we trust in You.</i>
	<p>For the Church of Galveston-Houston, especially the parishes who have suffered damage and flooding, may they continue to be places of refuge for all those who are hurting, we pray to the Lord.</p> <p>For Cardinal DiNardo and all of our priest, as the people of God call out to Jesus to wake up in the boat, may they continue to be examples of love and service in this time of need; we pray to the Lord.</p>



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	<p>For all the elected officials and government agencies working to meet the needs of hurricane victims, may they always remember to place the dignity of individuals above their own political affiliations; we pray to the Lord.</p> <p>For the families, and individuals who have suffered loss and sorrow through this tragedy, fill them with Your Grace that they may continue to live with the joy of the gospel alive in their hearts; we pray to the Lord.</p> <p>For all those first responders and volunteers who came to our aid, may the Lord bless them for their merciful response to help those in need; we pray to the Lord.</p> <p>For all those who lost their lives as a result of Hurricane Harvey, may their souls, through the mercy of God rest in peace; we pray to the Lord.</p> <p>I know invite you to offer up any personal intentions which you hold in your heart....</p>
Leader:	Now let us all pray in the words our Savior gave us. Our Father.....
Leader:	<p>Father of all mercies, we trust in your goodness, knowing that You sit enthroned over the flood, that you indeed reign forever over all the works of Your hands. Watch over us, and protect us as we seek to be your hands, your feet and your heart to all those who you place in our path. We give to you all praise and honor as we say together:</p> <p>Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, a world without end, amen.</p>

Talk Outline

I. **The questions that come from suffering**

- a. When natural disasters hit, like Hurricane Harvey, many of us start asking big questions like:
 - i. Why did God do this?
 - ii. Why do bad things happen to good people?
 - iii. How could a good and loving God let this happen?
 - iv. Where is God in all this?
- b. With all the images of destruction and all of the suffering people are going through, it can become very easy to doubt whether God is present in all of this.
 - i. It is important that we remember, Jesus is not far from us when we suffer.
 - ii. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI once told us that: "Jesus' closeness to those who suffer is constant... Those who suffer should be helped to read the scriptures and to realize that their suffering enables them to share in a special way in Christ's own redemptive suffering" (*Verbum Domini*, 106).
 - iii. Christ is constantly present in our suffering. He also speaks to us through the words of Scripture and through the loving actions of the Church and its members.
- c. Author C.S. Lewis once said: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts to us in our pains" (*The Problem of Pain*, pg. 93).



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- i. When the noise of the world becomes so loud that everything seems to hurt our ears, God shouts in a voice that is louder than thunder, but gentler than a breeze. He says: “I am with you always, till the end of the age” (Mt. 28:20).

II. Who’s to blame for suffering?

- a. Alright you may be willing to admit that God is present amidst our suffering, but you may still feel that He is to blame for our suffering. The real question is, who is to blame for suffering?
 - i. When it comes to suffering, especially natural disasters like Hurricane Harvey, many ask the question: “Why would God allow this to happen?”
 - ii. Asking this question does not make you a bad Christian, it makes you human. How you answer this question, however, determines how you truly view God.
- b. If the Psalm from our opening prayer is true (Psalm 29) then “The Lord sits enthroned over the Flood; the Lord reigns as king forever.”
 - i. If God has control over the flood, for He is king and reigns over creation, doesn’t that mean that he had the power to stop it? And if He did have the power to stop it and didn’t, doesn’t that make it His fault?
 - ii. Essentially what this question is saying is: “Couldn’t God have created a better world? One where pain and suffering doesn’t exist?”
- c. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, quoting St. Thomas Aquinas, reminds us that:
 - i. “With infinite power God could always create something better. But with infinite wisdom and goodness God freely willed to create a world “in a state of journeying” toward its ultimate perfection... In God’s plan this process of becoming involves... the existence of the more perfect alongside the less perfect... With physical good there exists also *physical evil* as long as creation has not reached perfection” (CCC 310).
 - ii. God did create a perfect world, even before sin entered the world and disfigured it, God’s plan and His will was still such that we would need to journey towards Him.
 - iii. God does indeed reign over the storm, and He calls us to see Him in the storm, and even to wake Him up with our prayers and our petitions.
- d. The *Catechism* continues, still quoting St. Thomas Aquinas:
 - i. “For almighty God ..., because he is supremely good, would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist in his works if he were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself” (CCC 311).
 - ii. God would never allow evil to exist (the less perfect) if good could not come from it (the more perfect).
- e. To truly comprehend this we have to understand that God’s will exist on two different levels. There is God’s active will, and His permissive will.
 - i. God’s active will includes all that He has ever done to make himself known to us, and everything He has done to bring about our salvation. God’s active will works towards His and our ultimate end, union with each other for all eternity.
 - ii. St. Augustin once said: “When I am completely united to you [God], there will be no more sorrow or trials; entirely full of you, my life will be complete” (CCC 45).



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- iii. God's permissive will are the things that he allows to happen, not because they bring him joy, but because they are the result of a created, yet fallen world.
- iv. God does not desire suffering. He does not send hurricanes to flood homes, destroy property and kill people because He wants to. He permits them to occur even though it breaks His heart to see us in sadness.

III. Embracing joy in the midst of suffering

- a. Joy, as a result of Suffering and from the midst of Suffering, is made possible due to the three Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love (Charity).
 - i. "Faith is the virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us... By faith "man freely commits his entire self to God." For this reason the believer seeks to know and do God's will" (CCC 1814).
 - 1. As we grow in faith, and learn to commit ourselves to God not matter what, we will learn how to find joy in the midst of sorrow.
 - ii. "Hope is the virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises... "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful..." it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart" (CCC 1817-1818).
 - 1. The virtue of hope keeps us from becoming lost in a sea of sorrow. It reminds us that we are destined to dwell forever in the heart of God, and in the courts of the Eternal King."
 - iii. "Charity [love] is the virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God" (CCC 1822).
 - 1. We are called to love God not for what He does to us or what He gives to us, but we are called to love Him simply because of who he is.
 - 2. The virtue of love enables us to continue to love God even when sorrow comes.

IV. Reaching out in Love.

- a. As Christians we cannot turn a blind eye when people around us are suffering. The Second Vatican Council, in its document *Gaudium et Spes* opens up by saying:
 - i. "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ" (GS, 1).
 - ii. If you are not suffering, but your neighbor is, then you are suffering. Each of us is called to go out and to be the hands and feet of Christ to those in need. We are called to be the ears of Christ to those who mourn. We are called to be the heart of Christ to those who suffer.
 - iii. If you are one of the many who have lost homes, items, or a sense of safety through Hurricane Harvey know that your Church, your family, and Your God in heaven are here with you, to see you through, and to share in your griefs and anxiety's, but also to share in your joys.



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- iv. Think about all those “Good Samaritans who came from all over the country to help us in our time of need. Those who risked their own life to save others, whether it was a family member or a stranger they did not hesitate to show God’s love to those they served. Race, religion or social status didn’t matter for in their eyes we were one body in Christ.
- b. At the end of your small group time tonight, make a plan of how you personally will go out and be the light of Christ to those who are walking in darkness.

Small Group Discussion

1. What was your experience of Hurricane Harvey? How did your family prepare for & react to the storm?
2. What has been the hardest thing for you to deal with?
3. Have you lost anything or anyone? What have you seen destroyed?
4. What emotions have you been feeling and what are your honest reactions to everything?
5. How have you seen love appear in the midst of this tragedy?
6. How might God be calling you to share his love?

Action Plan

What are 3 concrete things that you can do to serve those in need?

Closing Prayer

Presider: God, our Creator, we raise our hearts, minds and souls, to you at this time of need. Many members of our human family have suffered severely as a result of Hurricane Harvey. We mourn for those who have perished, and share our compassion for those who remain. Send your Spirit, the author of life and the one who inspires us to go beyond ourselves. May we be the answer to Jesus’ prayer, “that they all may be one.”

All: Amen