

A Mercy Prayer Ritual for a local Blessing of the Rivers Ceremony

**In solidarity with those who gather at the junction of the Murray-Darling Rivers on
Saturday February 16th at 3.00pm**

1. **Call to gather** (Music suggestions below: Resources 1)

2. **Acknowledgement of Country** (according to local custom)

3. **Intention of the group – a statement of our purpose in gathering.**

This action of gathering here today was sparked by South West Victorian farmer, Rob Rowley.

Rob's very simple but profound idea was for action by communities and individuals around Australia in regard to the current crisis facing our struggling river systems, in particular, the Murray-Darling river system.

All denominations, all faith groups, community groups and individuals, across Australia, were invited to participate in prayer and symbolic action, that is to send, or bring, a small bottle or container of water, to a Blessing of the Rivers ceremony, at the junction of the Murray-Darling rivers.

As faith groups, community groups and individuals, in conjunction with local Aboriginal people, this 'Blessing of the Rivers' ceremony is being held at Wentworth, near Mildura, while at the same time many other groups, such as this one, who could not be present, are having similar prayer rituals near their local water ways.

This action is in solidarity with all the groups gathering in good faith and in the knowledge that we have a responsibility to respect and protect the gift of 'living water for all'.

4. **Look at Our Land** – a statement is read or facts shared about the reality of the situation of the Murray-Darling River System and/or your local river.
(**Resource No 2** - suggestions below)

5. **Response: A Prayer for Healing** – a common prayer by the group:

*'All-powerful Creator Spirit,
you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.*

Help us to better protect the waters of these once mighty rivers which are the life-giving source for this land and its peoples, for the myriad fish, the birds of the air, the animals that drink from their waters and the food that is grown from the nourishment of the soils of the country they traverse.

*Fill us with courage and peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one,
Help us to identify with the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in
your eyes.*

*Bring healing to our lives and our environment,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.'*

(Adaptation of Laudato Si' Prayer for the Earth)

6. Scripture Readings.

First Reading: Isaiah Chapter 32: 1- 8

'From the thirsty they withhold water'

'See, a Leader will reign in righteousness
and rulers will rule with justice.

² Each one will be like a shelter from the wind
and a refuge from the storm,
like streams of water in the desert
and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.

³ Then the eyes of those who see will no longer be closed,
and the ears of those who hear will listen.

⁴ The fearful heart will know and understand,
and the stammering tongue will be fluent and clear.

⁵ No longer will the fool be called noble
nor the scoundrel be highly respected.

⁶ For fools speak folly,
their hearts are bent on evil:

They practice ungodliness
and spread error concerning the Creator;
the hungry they leave empty
and from the thirsty they withhold water.

⁷ Scoundrels use wicked methods,
they make up evil schemes
to destroy the poor with lies,
even when the plea of the needy is just.

⁸ But the noble make noble plans, and by noble deeds they stand.

OR

Second Reading: John Chapter 4:4-15

'Living Water'

⁴ Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John— ² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. ³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you **living water.**"

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "**Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.**"

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

7. Reflection on the Readings: Words shared and/or song

8. Prayer of Lament and Repentance:

'The earth is crying. There is so much sorrow. Country is crying. We are coming country. We are building. We love you. We will look after you. We will fight the ones who won't, we will make them look after you because we have to because we love you. We will join together and fight together because the system that is hurting you is not right, it's not working. We will join together to change it and to create a system that looks after you, that values country above individuals, above money, that protects you for our future. We cry with you too but it is time for us to stand up and be the new system, based on the old system of the ancestors who understood this. Who lived with country as the basis for everything. Whose first responsibility was to look after country. We will join the best that our modern world has – communication, technology, connection to a global community – with the knowledge and wisdom of the ancestors, and we will do this to look after you. Because we love you.' by *Deborah Bogenhuber*

9. Ritual Blessing of Waters where you are gathered –

Expressing Unity in a symbolic action – such as holding outstretched hands towards your local river, creek, lake, water source - accompanied by music/songs

'In Praise of Water'

Let us bless the grace of water...
The courage of a river to continue belief
In the slow fall of ground
Always falling further
Towards the unseen ocean.

The river does what words would love,
Keeping its appearance
By insisting on disappearance;
Its only life surrendered
To the event of pilgrimage,
Carrying the origin to the end...
Sounding out its journey
Raising up a buried music
Where the silence of time
Becomes almost audible.

Let us bless the humility of water,
Always willing to take the shape
Of whatever otherness holds it,
The buoyancy of water,
Stronger than the deadening,
Downward drag of gravity,

The innocence of water,
Flowing forth without thought
Of what awaits it,
The refreshment of water,
Dissolving the crystals of thirst.
Water: voice of grief,
Cry of love,
In the flowing tear.

Water: vehicle and idiom
Of all the inner voyaging
That keeps us alive.

Blessed be water,
Our first mother.

by John O'Donohue, *Benedictus*, 'In Praise of Water'

10. Prayers of the People. Sharing of individual prayers

Response: Creator God, hear our prayer

- 11. A Call to Change and Act** – a sign of our intention to change, calling all Australians to a new awareness of the importance of respect for our Rivers and water-ways as a most significant gift of the natural world with which we have been blessed and called to care for and respect.

‘As we work together for solutions to this issue, let us never forget that water is gift. As the Book of Revelation puts it, “Then [the one seated on the throne] said to me, ‘It is done!...To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life’” (Revelation 21:6). In Revelation 22:6 we read, “Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift”. Water is God’s gift to the whole Earth community. As gift, it is to be received graciously and respectfully. It is indeed the water of life since there is no life on Earth without water. Let us take the water of life, but let us not take more than our share, for that would be to forget that it is gift. Let us take it but let us not take it for granted.’ by Veronica Lawson rsm ‘Living Water’

- 12. Final Prayer of Blessing** by the group, of the trees, plants, birds, animals, fish and the waters and all gathered and with us in spirit.

Concluding Song: (See Resources 1 - suggestions below)

Suggested resources:

Resources 1: Songs and Music.

- *‘Living Water’* by Suzanne Toolan rsm
- *‘Come to the Water’* by John Foley sj
- *‘Come To The Feast’* by Marty Haugen
- *‘Heart of My Country’* by Shane Howard

Suggestions for imagery and song for the Murray and Darling Rivers by Merylyn Air.

- *‘Cool Water’*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39H3ikZVpHY>
- *‘Save the River’*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iAHv2tt8Z0>
- *‘The Confluence’*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6cdbby9RIps>

Resources 2: Background reading or presentation ideas

- *Laudato Si'* - On Care For our Common Home
- *'The Gift of Water'* – A statement endorsed by Bishops of the Murray-Darling Basin, c. 2014 Catholic Earthcare Australia
- 'The Guardian' links to recent information about the Murray Darling River System:
 - [We can help save the Murray-Darling, Indigenous nations say](#)
 - [Murray-Darling basin royal commission report finds gross maladministration](#)
- CSIRO explains the fish kills in the Darling River at <https://blog.csiro.au/mass-fish-deaths/>
- www.mercyworld.org (Degradation of Earth section and News section - resources)



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