

The Jesus Prayer

The coronavirus pandemic continues to cause, not only sickness and death, but also economic chaos and social disruption across our world. This virus is indiscriminate but those most vulnerable are individuals and communities which are already fragile. People with an underlying health issue are those most at risk but this is also true of communities and countries. Places like Yemen and Lebanon, which were already facing huge medical, social, and political challenges, have had these problems compounded. We know that even here in the UK, which has a strong economy and a stable democracy, people have lost livelihoods, jobs and income and we have all faced considerable disruption and inconvenience.

Covid 19 attacks airways – it stifles breath both physically but also socially. It is not just social distancing: people have not been able to travel and to be with those they love, even for funerals. If you are struggling or are caring for someone who is unwell. If you, or someone you know, or love are fearful or anxious, or even struggling now for breath because of the virus, the following method of prayer, which is called the 'Jesus Prayer' may help you breathe.

The Jesus prayer is believed to have originated among the Desert Fathers of the 5th century and it combines a number of important biblical texts. These include the cry of blind Bartimaeus to Jesus in Mark 10: 46-52; St. Paul's Christological hymn of Philippians 2:6–11 where Jesus is proclaimed as divine; the Annunciation of the Angel to Mary where Jesus is called 'Son of God' (Luke 1:31–35); and the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican of Luke 18:9–14 in which the Publican cries out: 'be merciful to me a sinner'. The Jesus Prayer is: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me a sinner'.

The Jesus prayer is not just said it can be 'breathed'. There is a strong connection in the Bible between breath and Spirit. The word for 'Spirit' in the Hebrew Bible is Ruach, the word is a feminine noun and means the life force of God or the breath of God. In John 20: 21–22 we read: 'Again Jesus said to them, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, so also I am sending you. When He had said this He breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit"'.

Please breathe the Jesus prayer and don't just pray it: Breathe in the breath of God as you inhale and inwardly say the first line of the prayer: '*Lord Jesus Christ*'. Then hold your breath, as you think of our Lord Christ and his great love for you and our world and inwardly say the second line: '*Son of the Living God*'. Then breathe out as you think of the fear and suffering of our world and perhaps you are experiencing and say the final line of the prayer: '*have mercy on me a sinner*'.

Breathe in: *Lord Jesus Christ*, hold your breath: *Son of the living God*, breathe out: *have mercy on me a sinner*. Breathe the prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner*.

We should pray, not only for ourselves, for our loved ones, and our friends and neighbours but also and for our suffering world which is struggling to breathe. We can pray: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner*.

We should pray for those countries and communities which have been most affected by the pandemic. For places such as Mexico, Yemen, for other countries and communities, and for

Belarus which is struggling for the breath of liberty. And we can pray: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner.*

We can come to the Lord in our fear and for the fearful. We can come to Him with our doubts and for those who despair. And we can pray: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner.*

We can come to the Lord for those who are struggling *to* breathe. For who have lost livelihood, employment and income. And we can pray: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner.*

We can come to the Lord for those who are struggling *for* breath. For those with poor health, with difficult relationships or who are isolated. And we can pray: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner.*

Watch, O Lord, with those who wake, or watch, or weep this day, and give Your angels and saints charge over those who sleep. Tend Your sick ones, O Lord Christ. Rest Your weary ones. Soothe Your suffering ones. Pity Your afflicted ones. Bless Your dying ones. Welcome those who have died into Your Eternal Home. And all for Your love's sake. And so we pray: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner.*

A Litany to Our Blessed Mother

Our Lady, Queen of Peace, pray for us.

Our Lady, Comforter of the Afflicted, pray for us.

Our Lady, Help of Christians, pray for us.

Our Lady, Health of the Sick, pray for us.

Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, pray for us.

Our Lady, Queen of Heaven and Earth, pray for us. Amen.

May all the Saints and Angels and St. Corona, patroness of epidemic victims, pray for us.

Breathe and pray the Jesus prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner.

Amen.