



A Prayer Service for National Child Day
Theme: 'For Children Who Suffer'
November 20, 2022

OPENING SONG

Children's Rights Education Through Music - "Song for Rights"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3Cngo6z16o>

LYRICS

*We are the children of today, and our rights are here to stay
We are the children of today, and our rights are here to stay*

*Listen to our cry without delay and our voices we have something to say
Listen to our cry without delay and our voices we have something to say*

*Respect, respect the children's rights!
Respect, respect the children's rights!*

*We need security, healthcare and food
and also warmth and love to feel good,
creating a safe place for children is key,
No abuse! We want to feel free!*

*We are the children of today, and our rights are here to stay
We are the children of today, and our rights are here to stay*

*Listen to our cry without delay and our voices we have something to say
Listen to our cry without delay and our voices we have something to say*

*Respect, respect the children's rights!
Respect, respect the children's rights!*

*Every child must go to school,
learning is really cool,
children must be allowed to express themselves
and not be there like books on their shelves*

*I feel free, yeah that's what we wanna be,
to engage with society possibly,
education, expression, information, growth of a nation.*

*Respect, respect the children's rights !
Nye Buaa, Nye Buaa children's rights!
T'm gyirima, T'm gyirima children's rights!
Nye Buaa, Nye Buaa children's rights!
T'm gyirima, T'm gyirima children's rights*

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God,
Source of all life,
we gather to mark National Child Day
and to raise our prayers for all children who suffer.
We hold in our hearts all children who experience any form of abuse,
neglect, or exploitation, or who suffer in any way.
We remember, in particular,
First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children,
and reaffirm our commitment to make amends for
the harms of colonialism.

On this day to honour all children,
we thank you for the precious gift of the child,
created in your image and likeness,
imbued with dignity and grace.

We express our sorrow
for all the ways in which we harm children
rather than protect them,
we restrict children
rather than promote their agency and capacity.
We ask for your forgiveness
and for the grace to love, honour, and respect all children.
May we always remember that children are a blessing to us
and that we have a sacred duty
to help them flourish in body, mind, and spirit.

We make this prayer through your Son,
the model for all children,
our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit
now and forever.
Amen.

SCRIPTURE (Mark 9:14-29, NRSV)

Jesus Heals a Boy Possessed by an Impure Spirit

¹⁴ When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵ As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

¹⁶ “What are you arguing with them about?” he asked.

¹⁷ A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.”

¹⁹ “You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”

²⁰ So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

²¹ Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?”

“From childhood,” he answered. ²² “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

²³ “If you can’t?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.” ²⁴ Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.”

²⁶ The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.” ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

REFLECTION

Pope Francis sets his November 2022 prayer intention for ‘children who suffer’. In our prayer today, we join in his prayer and in the prayer of Catholics and all people of goodwill who strive for the end of human suffering. In his intention, Pope Francis acknowledges that millions of children suffer today and even live in conditions of slavery. He states,

They aren’t numbers: they are human beings with names, with a face of their own, with an identity that God has given them. Too often, we forget our responsibility and we close our eyes to the exploitation of these children who don’t have a right to play, to study, to dream. They don’t even enjoy the warmth of a family. Each marginalized child, abandoned by his or her family, without schooling, without healthcare, is a cry! A cry that rises up to God and shames the system that we adults have built.¹

In our gospel passage, Jesus recognizes the suffering of the boy possessed by an impure spirit and is moved to release him from his bondage. Many of the gospel accounts of children point to their vulnerability to suffering through the stories of Jesus’ healing miracles. In these stories, the child is often unable to assert him or herself and relies upon others for care. Unable to speak, another must speak for them. They are voiceless and powerless and yet they receive Jesus’ full attention and healing. Jesus’ response to the child who suffers is compassion and love exemplified by healing. The child who suffers is known and loved by Jesus.

Also apparent in our passage is Jesus’ frustration with the ‘unbelieving generation.’ He is frustrated by the lack of faith he encounters, a lack of faith which prevents the work of healing from being done. Jesus’ frustration reveals a presupposition: these adults of the ‘unbelieving generation,’ in fact, do have the capacity to heal and to alleviate the suffering of the child and yet they do not do so. Their lack of faith prevents them from responding to the cry of the one who suffers. Note, however, the posture of humility of the father. In the face of his son’s suffering, he recognizes his own wavering faith and cries out to Jesus: “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

We have gathered in prayer because we are marking National Child Day, a day to commemorate the adoption of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. As a country, we have made commitments to realize the rights of every child, to protect and provide for them, and to support their full participation in society. Through the Convention, we as individuals are also responsible for realizing the rights of every child. Grounded in the values of our faith tradition, and in particular, the preferential option for the poor, we have a special commitment to end the suffering of children. Nonetheless, like the ‘unbelieving generation,’ at times we, too, struggle to do what needs to be done because we do not believe in our capacity, perhaps, or whether we can be effective, or sometimes, we doubt that there is even anything we can do. At

¹ <https://thepopevideo.org/>

times like this, we are called to be like the father who loves his son and cries out, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

Let us take a moment now to pause and reflect:

- In what ways have I contributed to the suffering of children, by participating in unjust systems or by failing to act against individual or systemic injustice and evil?
- How will I commit myself to emulating the compassion of Jesus and reaching out in healing love to alleviate the suffering of children?

(Pause for reflection and sharing)

INTERCESSIONS

Let us offer our prayers before our God who always hears us when we cry out:

We pray for all children who suffer, especially for those who are homeless, who are living in poverty, who may be orphans or victims of war. May they be guaranteed access to what they need: good food and nutrition, education, health services, safe spaces to dream and play, and may they have the opportunity to experience the affection of family. Lord, in your mercy,

Response: Hear our prayer.

We continue to pray for the process of Truth and Reconciliation in this land, and especially for all who were harmed historically as children by being forced into residential schools or into the child welfare system, for those who are currently in care, and for the healing of the effects of these harms that are felt across generations. Lord, in your mercy,

Response: Hear our prayer.

We pray for the healing and resiliency of all children who have been harmed by violence, abuse, or neglect, especially children who have experienced sexual abuse by a member of the Catholic Church. We pray for forgiveness, healing, and transformation of pastoral relationships within the Church that they may fully honour and respect the dignity of the child. Lord, in your mercy,

Response: Hear our prayer.

We pray for the conviction to prioritize the voice of children in all settings where decisions are made – in our families, schools, communities, churches, and governments – that we listen to

their voice, respect their opinions, and humbly make decisions in their best interest. Lord, in your mercy,

Response: Hear our prayer.

We pray for a conversion of heart for ourselves, that we may recognize and transform our own prejudices, biases, and tendencies toward racism and discrimination, so that we may heal division in our society and give all children what they need to flourish. Lord, in your mercy,

Response: Hear our prayer.

We pray for the wisdom, integrity, and political will at all levels of government to realize the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, especially those that pertain to Jordan's Principle and reform of the child welfare system. May we do what is right for all children to realize their rights, and especially for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children. Lord, in your mercy,

Response: Hear our prayer.

We pray for the courage to cry out "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" when we struggle to act in the name of justice, mercy, and compassionate love to end the suffering of children. Lord, in your mercy.

Response: Hear our prayer.

PRAYER IN THE WORLD

You are invited now to make a commitment to take this prayer out into the world. You may wish to act in one or more of the following ways:

- Pray with the Child Labour Examen and commit to only purchasing products that are produced free of child labour.
- [Learn more](#) about children's rights in Canada.
- Talk to your local [Member of Parliament](#) or [Senator](#) about what can be done to address these [threats to childhood in Canada](#).
- Take time to talk to a child in your life. Listen deeply and with compassionate presence.

CLOSING PRAYER

God of compassionate love,
present with us today,
we ask your blessing on the lives of all children,
especially those who suffer.
Nourish in them a sacred vitality that can never be diminished.
Embolden us to honour the lives and dignity of all children,
to know, respect, and realize their rights,
to support their capacity and giftedness.
Fill us with energy, wisdom, and commitment
to act in the best interests of all children,
to alleviate their suffering and to help them to flourish.
We ask this in your most Holy Name.
Amen.

CLOSING SONG

N'we Jinan Artists – “We are Medicine” // Bella Coola, British Columbia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VeWqgLLCef0&list=PLgJRuWAvyqeFymdlog19VfwjCMoZJgnyM&index=4>

Artists: Bronson Friesen, Angelica Edgar, Cody Sandy, Serena Gabriel, Davina Kashay Reya Hans, Joan, Mack-Yang, Jaidn Elkins, Faa'vae Vaa, Derrick Draney, Victoria Moody & Delilah Webber

LYRICS

Chorus:
Smaw ti slq'ilh
one heart & one mind
lixsatimutilh
one voice & one life
we're medicine, let's heal our souls
with song and dance
SMAYUSTA, these are the stories
of our home and our land

I was all alone
got away from a place that I knew was not safe

I felt like I was on my own
stayed strong in my culture, it was my escape

I'm a young Nuxalk girl
I'm proud of who we are
there's so much I could say
I feel like we are in a world
that brings me down
but my hope will not fade

I flew in on arrival, named me the foundation
I grew to know my people, the experience is sacred
connected to my roots through gatherings and dances
inspired to be active, celebrate through potlatches

I've been bored for a while, some people think I'm a pain
I just wanna feel included, maybe then I will change
I know there's something more in the future that's ahead of me
I wanna be successful and unity's the remedy

Chorus

are you aware of my life?
there's not much here to do
one day I'll grow up
and want my dreams to come true

but we can break the cycle
our future is in our hands
we won't throw our life away
we'll do what we can

Bella Coola's home to me, a place of the thunderbird
fresh glacier waters and sage from the earth
there's life from the mountains, and medicines from the hand
the stories that the elders share connect us to the land
not everybody speaks their mind, some afraid of being judged
help and learn from one another, my people believe in love
this is our moment, so let us work together
we are Nuxalk strong, we are Nuxalk forever

Chorus

there is a balance, life is fair I swear
wanna aim for the mountains, see the air up there
need to gain something new to overcome my battles
give me light, I will improve, won't disappear into the shadows

a wild soul, but deep in my blood, I am leader
voices of the hunters followed them into the cedar
here's some thunder for your heart and a rainbow for the youth
our home is what it used to be, it's up to you choose

Chorus