

Lamenting and *dreaming*

The monthly prayer intentions in which Pope Francis invites us to join him draw our attention to the people and places in our troubled world in need of God's grace and mercy, writes **David Stewart SJ**.

The shock of loss has become a reality for too many of us, while all of us have lived for over a year with so much change and the disappearance of what we thought was fixed and certain. Bereavement has become a universal reality, yet each loss has been personal and awful. We talk of when we might return to normal while fearing that we never will; the future will be unlike what we imagined.

Circumstances ranging from enforced loneliness to the sadness of locked churches have borne down on us. A lot of what we have known has passed away; it will take time and prayer to come to terms with such loss. The People of God have long known the importance of lamenting, not least in the great Jewish-Christian Psalms. There is a need to lament what was lost as much as to imagine the future. But Pope Francis continues to encourage us to dream of what might be.



Reconciliation, the topic of the pope's intention in March, is such a rich subject; when we celebrate this sacrament, we bless what we hope is reconciled, repaired, most commonly in our relationships with each other. But we learn also to let go, especially of hurts and loss, drawing down the grace to move forward brightly. This is the renewed depth of God's mercy, for which we pray this month.

April's intention reflects on how fundamental rights are threatened everywhere. Some brave people risk all to protect them. At times during the pandemic, some of us felt our rights were threatened by restrictions. Lest we slip into selfishness, we need always to remember that human solidarity and concern for the common good are core principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

In May, the pope stays with the common good theme; he wants to highlight the place of regulation in the world of finance. Left uncontrolled, it will cause some to suffer as others grow rich. Those already poor are always the first to suffer.

June has been, for many couples, the month of their wedding. Joyous celebration with friends and family has not been possible for a whole year. Christian marriage, a

INTENTIONS FOR THIS PERIOD

MARCH *Sacrament of reconciliation:* Let us pray that we may experience the sacrament of reconciliation with renewed depth, to taste the infinite mercy of God.

APRIL *Fundamental rights:* We pray for those who risk their lives while fighting for fundamental rights under dictatorships, authoritarian regimes and even in democracies in crisis.

MAY *The world of finance:* Let us pray that those in charge of finance will work with governments to regulate the financial sphere and protect citizens from its dangers.

JUNE *The beauty of marriage:* Let us pray for young people who are preparing for marriage with the support of a Christian community: may they grow in love, with generosity, faithfulness and patience.

sacrament in our faith, has become unfashionable. Our prayer this month reminds us of the need to support young people who want to follow this sacramental pathway.

FIND OUT MORE

The Pope's Prayer Network (Apostleship of Prayer) has a new website for England, Wales and Scotland. There's a new mailing list that you can join (but we won't bombard you with emails!). Find many ways to become an Apostle of Prayer and order some of our prayer cards and materials at praywiththepope.net