

Reaching for God with St Simeon Stylites

Contemplative Prayer Service

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Introduction to Service

Simeon was born in Syria to a Cappadocian shepherding family in the 3rd Century. He came to faith as an early teen and was moved to Baptism by a reading of the Beatitudes. He joined a monastery, but it became apparent that his rigorous piety and hermetic practices meant that living separately to the community was better for him and his fellow monks. He lived close by to the town, but his holiness drew crowds of people to consult him which prevented him from observing the solitude he needed to be close to God.

He then built himself a pillar and lived atop it for 37 years. He was still in contact with the community with afternoons spent in conversation with those who climbed a ladder to speak with him. The young boys of the village were said to climb the pillar with provisions for Simeon and he refused to come down for medical treatment even when he was unwell.

Among his devotional routines was a physical cycle of prone and standing prayer positions, which is attributed to have enabled him to stay on top of the pillar for so long. He inspired many others to adopt a similar lifestyle or practice of retreating to high places in order to commune with God and become an example of prayerfulness for the surrounding community. He is celebrated as the first "pillar saint" and we celebrate him as a faithful holy hermit who inspires us to climb higher as we reach for God.



Postures in Prayer

Introduced by Julie

Why different prayer postures?

Our bodies are:

- ✓ means through we interact with our surroundings.
- ✓ essential for our communication both verbal and non-verbal.
- ✓ integrated into many faith practices in the form of postures, movements and gestures to help us create and express our faith in and relationship with God.

Postures represent different aspects of prayer.

The nature or, “heart,” of different prayers can be bolstered by certain postures such as;

- Standing
- Kneeling
- Sitting
- Lying & Prostration





Standing

In **2 Chronicles 20.5** Jehosaphat prayed for liberation with the people, “**standing** before the Lord.”

Hannah **stood** to pray **1Sam. 1.26** & Job prayed while **standing** **Job 30.209**.

Jesus' Transfiguration

Jesus was **standing** with Moses and Elijah whilst praying and the appearance of His face changed, and His clothes became dazzling white. The disciples awoke and when they saw they too **stood** up. **Luke 9. 29-32**

When we **stand** to pray, we are respectfully **acknowledging God as King** of the universe and that we have been **gifted with the honour or right** of addressing/communicating with God.

St Simeon often **stood** to pray on his pillar for hours adoring God.



Kneeling

Daniel 6.10 Daniel ... three times a day he got down on his knees, prayed and gave thanks to God.

Jesus knelt in the garden of Gethsemane. He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, Father if you are willing..." **Luke 22.41-42**

St Stephen when martyred: "...he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord do not charge them with this sin!" **Acts 7.60**





Kneeling

Expresses surrender,
submission, humility.

The worshipper voluntarily
goes down to the dust from
which they were created.

Sitting



In **2 Samuel 7.18** King David went in and **sat** in the Lord's presence and said, "Who am I, Lord God, and what is my house that You have brought me this far?"

Luke 10. 38-39 ...a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who **sat** at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

Sitting

In Jewish culture **sitting** represented a context for learning and gaining understanding. People sat before prophets to obtain spiritual understanding (2Kings 4.38, Ezek. 8.1; 33.31).

When **sitting** to pray we acknowledge that we are seeking understanding from God.



Lying/Prostration



In **Ps 4.4** Be angry and do not sin, **on your bed**,
reflect in your heart and be still.

In Gethsemane Jesus used the posture of prostration to assist Him in prayer. **Matt 26.39** Going a little farther He **fell facedown** and prayed, “My Father! If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Ps 63.6 When **on my bed**, I think of You,
I meditate on You during the night
watches.

Lying/Prostration

In the bible there are instances when reflection and meditation occurred during the night as people **lay on their beds**.

In Jewish culture **prostration** was a posture used to demonstrate submission to authority and pay homage to a superior or to beg for mercy or favour from a king.

When **lying** to pray we can rest in and meditate on the Lord. When **prostrating** ourselves to pray it may assist with facilitating our humility before God and acknowledging our deep need of His mercy and grace.



Gathering prayer

Open hands audio

<https://churchmissionsociety.org/resources/praying-body-1-open-hands/>

Through the centuries and around the world Christians from many different traditions have used their hands in prayer. As you begin to pray extend your hands in front of you. Find a comfortable position, perhaps with them resting on your lap or thighs if you are sitting. Let your hands rest open, palms upward, a sign of your desire to be open to God.

Hold this position in stillness, and then when you are ready, you might like to use this prayer:

Jesus the Christ, your open hands transform the pain of the world.
Hold and transform all in me that needs to be made good.

Jesus the Christ, your open hands bring generous life to all peoples.
Help me to be open-handed, sharing your life with those around me.

Jesus the Christ, your open hands carry the blessing of God the Father.
By your Holy Spirit help me to share your blessing with my hands today.

You may find it helpful, at some moment in the day, to quietly return to your 'open hands' position, a sign of your continuing desire to be open to God.



Song

This is the Air I Breathe

<https://youtu.be/mEDcKZB7r2A>

Collect Prayer

O God, who in your kindness called your servant blessed Simeon to the following of Christ, grant, we pray, through this intercession, that, denying ourselves, we may hold fast to you with all our heart. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Scripture

Isaiah 40. 28-31

- ²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.
- ²⁹ He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.
- ³⁰ Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;
- ³¹ but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church. Thanks Be to God.



Song

On Eagles' Wings

<https://youtu.be/MvpjxfWrjzY>

Lectio Divina

We begin our prayer: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Almighty ever-living God, by whose gift we venerate in one celebration the merits of all the Saints, bestow on us, we pray, through the prayers of so many intercessors, an abundance of the reconciliation with you for which we earnestly long. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Reading (Lectio) Read the following Scripture two or three times.

Colossians 3.1-4 The New Life in Christ

¹ So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³ for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church. Thanks Be to God.

Meditation (Meditatio)

After the reading, take some time to reflect in silence on one or more of the following questions:

- What word or words in this passage caught your attention?
- What in this passage comforted you?
- What in this passage challenged you?

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Prayer (Oratio) Read the Scripture passage one more time. Bring to the Lord the praise, petition, or thanksgiving that the Word inspires in you.

Contemplation (Contemplatio)

Read the Scripture again, followed by this reflection:

What conversion of mind, heart, and life is the Lord asking of me?

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Hand to Heart Body prayer

<https://churchmissionsociety.org/resources/praying-body-2-hand-heart/>

Here's an astonishing thing. To pray is to learn how to become present to God who is always present to us. And to discover that God is so close it is as if God is within us. This experience may be what St Paul referred to as "the inner nature", what Peter called "the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" and what the Orthodox call the 'Cave of the Heart'.

As you go into prayer today place a hand to your heart and let it rest there. Say whatever you sense you need to say, and then fall silent. As far as you can, allow yourself to be open to the possibility of God's presence. Let your hand to your heart be a physical sign of your desire to be present.

You may like to use this simple prayer with echoes from scripture:
Here I am...

2 Corinthians 4.16

Living by Faith

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

Here I am...

1 Peter 3.4

⁴ rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight.

Here I am...



Song

You Raise Me Up

<https://youtu.be/t7tGUNVrqPs>



Psalm 105

<https://youtu.be/AgCm675tKas>

Standing in prayer <https://churchmissionsociety.org/resources/praying-body-3-standing-prayer/>

This exercise can be both an accompaniment to our words of prayer, and a way of praying without words.

As you go into prayer speak out what you want to be heard - perhaps a mix of your thanks, your hopes, your yearnings, and your confession - and then become silent. When you are ready, move into a standing position, perhaps opening your hands as you do this.

There's a long tradition of standing to pray, and it is the traditional prayer position of the Orthodox churches and of the Jewish faith. The standing position carries an awareness of the wonder of God's presence. It also conveys a sense of quiet and persistent waiting for God to reveal God's self. And it implies that we are making ourselves ready to act, perhaps to become, in God's good care and surprising imagination, part of the answer to the prayers that we have made.

Remain standing in this way, then move into activity with this word-prayer:

God you are so close, yet beyond all containing.

With countless others around the world
and through the ages who pray this way:

I stand before you,

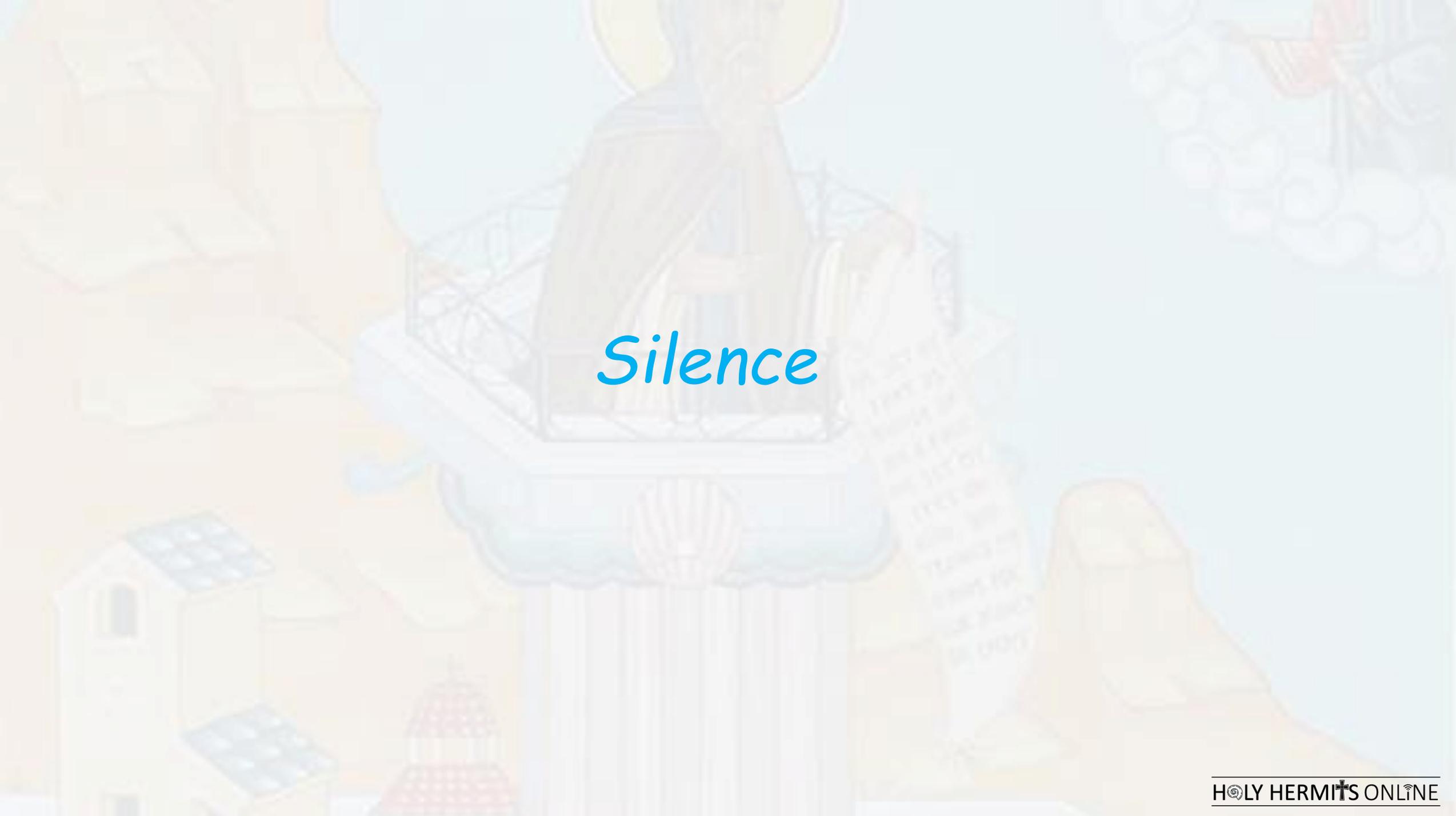
Help me to seek you always.

I wait for you,

Help me to be open to your presence.

I ready myself,

Help me to be an answer to the prayers I make.



Silence



Body Prayer Movement

<https://youtu.be/yevCgKJceQc>

Visio Divina

1. Examine the images slowly, noting the colours, people, places and things. Remain with the images for one to two minutes. If you would like, jot down a few words about the images in the chat.

2. Take a second, deeper, look. Where do you see movement in the images? What relationships do you see? Engage your imagination. Where are you in the artwork? What do you see from that perspective? What deeper meaning emerges?

3. Respond to the images with prayer. Did the images remind you of an experience, person or issue for which you'd like to offer thanksgiving or intercession? Offer that prayer to God.

4. Find your quiet center. Breathe deeply. Relax your shoulders, arms and legs. Rest in this quiet. Let God pray in you. God prays beyond words.





Lord's Prayer in Aramaic

https://youtu.be/_AdPiRWIam0

From Alfred Tennyson's St Simeon Stylites

Courage, St. Simeon! This dull chrysalis
Cracks into shining wings, and hope ere death
Spreads more and more and more, that God hath
now

Sponged and made blank of crimeful record all
My mortal archives...

O my sons, my sons,
I, Simeon of the pillar, by surname
Stylites, among men; I, Simeon,
The watcher on the column till the end;
I, Simeon, whose brain the sunshine bakes;
I, whose bald brows in silent hours become
Unnaturally hoar with rime, do now
From my high nest of penance here proclaim...

While I spake then, a sting of shrewdest pain
Ran shrivelling thro' me, and a cloudlike change,
In passing, with a grosser film made thick
These heavy, horny eyes. The end! the end!
Surely the end! What's here? a shape, a shade,

A flash of light. Is that the angel there
That holds a crown? Come, blessed brother, come.
I know thy glittering face. I waited long;
My brows are ready. What! deny it now?
Nay, draw, draw, draw nigh. So I clutch it. Christ!
'Tis gone: 'tis here again; the crown! the crown!
So now 'tis fitted on and grows to me,
And from it melt the dewes of Paradise,
Sweet! sweet! spikenard, and balm, and frankincense.
Ah! let me not be fool'd, sweet saints: I trust
That I am whole, and clean, and meet for Heaven.
Speak, if there be a priest, a man of God,
Among you there, and let him presently
Approach, and lean a ladder on the shaft,
And climbing up into my airy home,
Deliver me the blessed sacrament;
For by the warning of the Holy Ghost,
I prophesy that I shall die to-night,
A quarter before twelve.

But thou, O Lord,
Aid all this foolish people; let them take
Example, pattern: lead them to thy light.



Song

I'll Fly Away

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVfhs3tU3ng>

Benediction

As we end this time as a gathered community,
we prepare to serve in all the scattered places of our lives.
Go in the knowledge that God our Creator
sustains and supports you in this service.
Go with the assurance that Christ Jesus equips you
for service amongst the strangers
and the friends of your life.
Go with trusting reliance on the Spirit
who enables you to bear witness,
to care lovingly, and to work for justice.

And may God's peace go with you:
Deep peace of the running waves to you;
Deep peace of the flowing air to you;
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you;
Deep peace of the shining stars to you;
Deep peace of the Son of Peace, to you. **Amen.**

(Source: Rev Dr John Squires)

The background features a soft, pastel-colored illustration. In the center, a figure with a halo sits on a throne, holding a book. To the right, a dove is depicted within a cloud-like formation. The lower portion of the image shows a stylized cityscape with buildings and a dome. The overall aesthetic is gentle and spiritual.

Hymn

Higher Ground

<https://youtu.be/jYCKqCG933M>

Closing Prayers

All:

We have gathered, embraced by the love of God,
embraced by the love we share together this day.

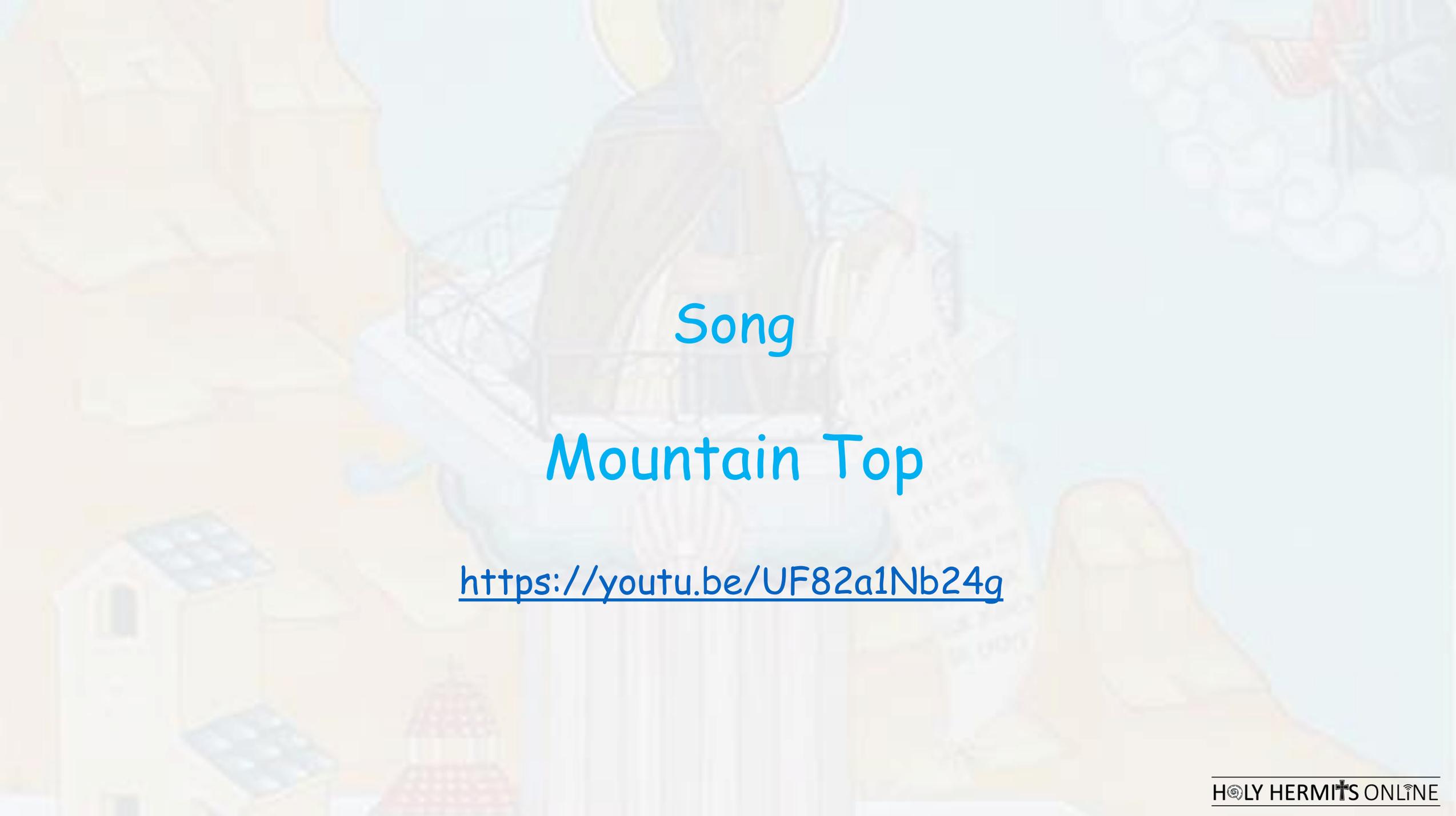
We have gathered, inspired by the life and witness of Jesus,
inspired by the life and witness we make together as we re-
member Jesus this day.

We have gathered, empowered, enlivened and encouraged by
God's Spirit,
empowered, enlivened and encouraged by the community we
make together.

And now, let us go, to be bearers of hope and light and love,
to be makers of peace, justice and joy.

We go in the name of God. Amen.

(Source: Sandy Boyce)



Song

Mountain Top

<https://youtu.be/UF82a1Nb24g>

Blessing and Sending

May God's joy be in our hearts and God's love surround our living.
Each day and night and wherever we roam, may we know God's presence.

In growing and learning, in joy and sorrow, in friendship, in solitude,
in beginnings and endings, may God keep us and bless us all the days of our lives.

May the blessing of God - the Beginning, the End, and the Everlasting,
be with us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

Go into the world in hope. Don't give in to either despair or fanciful thinking.
Commit yourself, in tough-minded love, To all the good that is growing in the world.
And discipline yourselves, always, to obtain that pearl of great price which is
Christ our Lord.

As you go, remember that the Spirit whispers in your ear all the day long. She
whispers her message of love and liberation; she beckons for you to follow her into
paths as yet unimagined. Go from this place as people of the Spirit, people unafraid
to dream and to vision, to lament and to protest, to work and to pray until the
Kingdom is come. **Amen.**



You can give online at
<https://holyhermits.com.au/give>

Next Contemplative Service
27th February, St Paul the first
Hermit

Closing music: <https://youtu.be/W-hrBhA4XkM>