



TOOLKIT INTERFAITH VIGIL INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA & TRANSPHOBIA (IDAHOT) 2014

Romans, 15:7 – Accept one another just as Christ accepted you

This year, we suggest the Christian LGBT groups to mark IDAHOT with services highlighting the journey from desolation and loneliness to the encounter with God's Love and mutual acceptance, as suggested by the official verse *Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you* (Romans, 15: 7). The Forum of LGBT Christian Groups and *Progetto Gionata* (Italy), in collaboration with *Progetto Ruah* (Trieste, Italy) have prepared this material for reading, praying and reflecting together.

We suggest you to divide the vigil into four parts depicting a symbolic path from the negative feelings affecting the society and the victims of homophobia and transphobia towards forgiveness, acceptance and cooperation with God. Therefore, we propose an itinerary on the story of David and Goliath from the first book of Samuel.

It is meant to portray homophobia/transphobia as a modern Goliath, a monster of fear and desolation, which David contrasts with his faith, his courage, and his spiritual gifts.

The last part concludes with the reading from the Letter to the Romans from which the official verse was taken. Groups addressing primarily women could alternatively use readings from the Book of Judith.

There is a strong parallel between Judith and David. Both stories describe the Israelites as besieged by the enemy and dominated by fear. Judith and David unveil the enemy's true nature. They face the enemy, which represents the fear itself, and uncover its real weakness, its emptiness, and its destiny to fail.

The four parts are:

- 1) Desolation, Suffering, Anxiety, Sorrow, and Death
- 2) Care, Compassion, Understanding, sense of Brotherhood/Sororhood
- 3) Discovery of God's Love and God's Compassion
- 4) Healing and Cooperation to God's Love

The prayers have been provided by people from different parts of the world. Groups are strongly encouraged to enrich the Vigil with their own prayers and songs.

You will also find four testimonies. They are the stories of a young gay boy, a lesbian couple, a public assault to a group of boys and men and a transgender person. If you want to add or to use personal stories from your communities, feel free to do so.

Other short comments, introductory remarks or quotations are added here and there just to encourage thoughts and feelings.

Gestures, like lighting candles, processions, or others, are very much appreciated and can mark each part. Feel free to add whatever you may think appropriate, including dancing, chanting, performing. You can project pictures and images on a board, depending on the space you have.



STRUCTURE OF THE VIGIL/SERVICE

Welcoming Remarks

Brief introduction on the story of 17 May

On May 17 1990, the World Health Organization decided to delete homosexuality from the classification of mental diseases.

The first International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia was celebrated in 2005 after strenuous efforts of thousands of persons around the world and of several organizations, including the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), the World Congress of LGBT Jew, and the Coalition of African Lesbians. Throughout the years, many organizations and individuals have joined in celebrating IDAHOT.

Today, churches, ministers, associations, people of good will all over the world are united in spirit to remember the victims of violence and hatred against homosexuality and transsexuality. With diverse backgrounds, diverse faiths, diverse cultures, we feel all united tonight in a path of prayer, healing, and intimate enjoyment of the Love of God and of our mutual bond as brother and sisters.

FIRST PART: DESOLATION, SUFFERING, ANXIETY, SORROW AND DEATH



FIRST TESTIMONY

Isa Shakhmarli was a 20 years old young boy with the wishes and the desires of every young boy of his age. He lived in Azerbaijan.

He had planned a future for himself with friends, family, a good job, and a good society to live in.

Very soon in his life, he realized that he was different in a way that his family, his country, and his culture would have not accepted.

Isa was brave. He did not want to live in the closet protected from the social pressure. Instead, he wanted to put all his energies to work openly to transform his society.

He wanted to affirm the freedom that girls and boys like him pursue: the freedom of being himself.

Maybe there was a time in our life when we understood that the dream of joy, of love, and of pleasure, yes, pleasure, inside us, so natural to us, would have also brought a seed for hate, fear, and anxiety.

We may have soon found that those dreams could have not become easily shared and open to the others; instead they had to be hidden out of fear of being ashamed and isolated. Isa played a leading role in Azerbaijan Free LGBT, a homosexual rights group based in Baku. Isa believed that all his youth, his strength, and his faith in a better world would have greatly helped transforming his country.

Facing obstacles much bigger than his youth and his purity of heart, he soon felt alone and discouraged, maybe worst.

He was found in his office hanged with a rainbow flag. He left in a message his last words "Am leaving. Forgive me for everything. This country and this world are not for me. You are all guilty for my death. This world cannot handle my true colours. Goodbye."

He found himself as young brave warrior in front of a monster. An old, dark, horrifying "monster" called Homophobia. Homophobia can make you feel like surrounded by enemies and then you end up with the impression that your enemies are also inside you.

You feel lost and alone against something much bigger and much stronger. It is maybe what the Israelites felt against Goliath.

Reading from the First Book of Samuel (1Sam 17: 4-11)

A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. His height was six cubits and a span. He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him.

Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us." Then the Philistine said, "This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other." On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

SECOND PART: CARE, COMPASSION, UNDERSTANDING

SECOND TESTIMONY

When the dark is surrounding us, you may find hope in your praying. Let us look for the face of God's mercy. You may meet a stranger showing solidarity or a neighbor tending his hands, or a person who suffered like you and is looking for a friend, for a confident, for a companion.

It could happen that that person becomes your partner and both share your personal stories together with a daily life of joy and plentitude. As every couple you may face challenges, but the unity makes you a bit stronger.

This is the story of Ali and Jacqueline a couple of female partners in Vancouver. They are both young and sweet. They had been dating each other for a few months. They were going back home on the bus one night.

During the journey, they kissed each other, shared some tenderness moments and some laughs. After they got off from the bus, they realized they were followed by a man who was sitting next to them. He grabbed one of them and repeatedly punched her in the head. He then punched the other. He yelled against them.

An ordinary evening ended up with violence and hate just because they manifested their feelings so naturally.

From the First Book of Samuel (1Sam 17: 16-24)

For forty days the Philistine came forward every morning and evening and took his stand. Now Jesse said to his son David, "Take this ephah of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread for your brothers and hurry to their camp. Take along these ten cheeses to the commander of their unit. See how your brothers are and bring back some assurance from them. They are with Saul and all the men of Israel in the Valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines."

Early in the morning David left the flock in the care of a shepherd, loaded up and set out, as Jesse had directed. He reached the camp as the army was going out to its battle positions, shouting the war cry. Israel and the Philistines were drawing up their lines facing each other.

David left his things with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle lines and asked his brothers how they were. As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. Whenever the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him in great fear.

Let us pray (Alberto Turlon, Italy)

Oh God, may your Spirit blow among us
May we feel your Spirit like a fresh sweet breeze caressing our bodies
May we feel loved by you forever and ever
May your hands open the hearts fallen amidst the dark desert
Let your souls fly through the eternal wisdom

Oh Lord, make us discover the true freedom you offered us
Make us find the truth within our inner secrets
That the enemies surrender
Then, may we let the peace blossom
Let solidarity prevail on selfishness
Let dialogue prevail on haughtiness
Let love always prevail

Dear Father, give us the understanding of the true essence of our fellowship
Teach us to heal our neighbor's wounds
Teach us not to forget the weakest and the excluded
May we see your beauty by remaining together
Instil your mind in our hearts
Makes us see the world through your eyes
And guide us towards the eternal life (Amen).

THIRD PART: DISCOVER THE LOVE OF GOD

Violence and contempt could strike you so hardly that you feel desperate. However, you may realize you are still alive. God has suffered like you. God has accompanied you in your journey since the beginning of your life.

Jesus Christ suffered as a man, as the most humble victim in the History. He carried in his body the wounds of the latest, of the marginalized, of the diverse, of the persecuted. He is risen and accompanies us in our path.

The way of the cross marks the passage from a world without hope to a world where hatred never has the last word and the love reveals the truth.

THIRD TESTIMONY

After the Parliament of Nigeria passed a law prohibiting any LGBT expression and advocacy, including same sex marriage, violence against homosexuals spread around the country. A similar situation has happened in Uganda.

In Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, 14 young boys were assaulted by an enraged crowd of nearly 50 men because they were reported as homosexuals. They were taken from their homes and trailed to the streets.

The walls of their houses were covered by doodles like “Homosexuals, pack and leave”. Some were stripped and their bodies were repeatedly hit by iron bars. For the pain, someone loosed consciousness or fainted. Four of them were brought to a local police station, where policemen punched and kicked them.

One officer attacked them and said “You guys are the ones spreading HIV”. The attackers openly called the raid “cleansing the community”. Similar episodes of violence regularly occur throughout the country but their intensity has been increasing after the new homophobic law has entered into force. In some Northern regions, where Sharia applies, persons caught while engaging in same sex intercourse could be punishable of death by stoning.

Some brave activists are working to provide refuge and assistance to the victims of the attack. Let them feel our prayers and our special thoughts tonight.

Let us pray (S.A. Rehman, Pakistan)

Merciful God, You made all of the people of the world in Your own image and placed before us the pathway of salvation through different Preachers who claimed to have been Your Saints and Prophets. But, the contradictions made by us in the interpretation of Your teachings have resulted in creating divisions, faith based hatreds and bloodshed in the world community. Millions of innocent men, women and children have so far been brutally killed by the militants of several religions who have been committing horrifying crimes against humanity and millions more would not be butchered by them in the future, if You guide and help us find ways to reunite peacefully.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,

look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the controversial teachings of arrogance, divisions and hatreds which have badly infected our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; reunite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish Your purposes on earth; that, in Your good time, all nations and races could jointly serve You in justice, peace and harmony. (Amen)

Reading

Yes, the purpose of Earth is not life, it is not man. Earth has existed without these, and it will live on without them.

They are but the ephemeral sparks of its violent whirling. Let us unite, let us hold each other tightly, let us merge our hearts, let us create - so long as the warmth of this earth endures, so long as no earthquakes, cataclysms, icebergs or comets come to destroy us - let us create for Earth a brain and a heart, let us give a human meaning to the superhuman struggle

(Ascesis: The Saviours of God, Nikos Kazantzakis).

From the First Book of Samuel (1Sam, 17: 25-29)

Now the Israelites had been saying, "Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his family from taxes in Israel."

David asked the men standing near him, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

They repeated to him what they had been saying and told him, "This is what will be done for the man who kills him." When Eliab, David's oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness?"

I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle." "Now what have I done?" said David. "Can't I even speak?"

FOURTH PART: HEALING, LOVE TO YOUR NEIGHBOR, UNION TO GOD AND SERVE HIS LOVE

FOURTH TESTIMONY

Violence against transgender people shows how societies are not yet open to accept those who do not feel confident within predetermined boundaries of masculinity and femininity. It might be the case of Owen Smith, an American transgender person.

He was in a grocery store in Baltimore, MD, when a group of teenagers mocked him and started following him. They fooled him for his walk and addressed to him aggressively.

Owen felt nervous and went directly to the counter to pay. He left the store and the boys followed him into the parking area. They surrounded and caught him.

They had confused him for another person, but when one guy realized that he was transgender, they started insulting him. The situation degenerated and Owen was physically assaulted.

Owen was punched and kicked. They knocked him against the car. They told him “If you wanna be a man, why don’t you fight like a man?”

They ran away. Though Owen reported to the police and the store camera filmed the group following him, there was no real follow up.

The boys were never found. Owen still lives with this shock and never went again to that grocery store because of the trauma.

Reading from the First Book of Samuel (1Sam, 17: 31-40)

What David said was overheard and reported to Saul, and Saul sent for him. David said to Saul, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.”

Saul replied, “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth.”

But David said to Saul, “Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Saul said to David, “Go, and the Lord be with you.”

Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them.

"I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off.⁴⁰ Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

Readings

How many times did we hear "You are not able to"? How many times did we say the same to ourselves? The young David invites us to follow his example and not to respond to violence and discrimination with fear, but with the confidence of being loved by God and with the strength of his Spirit.

"Tell me: God, when He looks at a homosexual person, does he approve his existence with affection or rejects it by condemning him? We need to consider the person. We enter the mystery of the human being. God accompanies people in their life, and we must accompany them according to their condition. We must accompany them with mercy. When this happens, the Holy Spirit will inspire the priest to say the rightest thing" **Pope Francis**

"Can you imagine me having said it's unjust to penalize something they cannot do anything about, their race or gender, and then to keep quiet when people are hounded, people are killed, because of their sexual orientation?"

"I think it's as utterly unjust as racism ever was. They are human beings. I don't know why we are so surprised. They have gifts, they can become judges. They can become all sorts of wonderful things."

"I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. No, I'd say sorry. I mean, I'd much rather go to that other place."

"We have to build a society that is accepting and it is not a free society until every single person knows they are acknowledged and accepted for who they are." **Desmond Tutu**

Final Reading. Accept one another just as Christ accepted you

Reading from the Letter to the Romans, 15: 1-7

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." For everything

that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Let us pray

The prayer and the presence of Jesus, this is the love that binds us and opens to the world.

Nothing can be built against this simple prayer of Jesus, because it is the foundation of God.

So no ethical or moral accusation can be built against the simplicity of this only commandment of Jesus.

The love of God is freedom that unites us. It unites our bodies in the love that we choose, in our confusions and in our narrations, but in love that is chosen.

Free, to love each other as Jesus loves us.

Conclusion

The Vigil may conclude with the most common universal prayer Our Father by holding each other hands

Final chanting could be from Isaiah 62 or other choice from the groups.