

The first (1790) American Book of Common Prayer,  
Formatted as the original

This document was created in Adobe InDesign and then converted into Adobe Acrobat (PDF) files, which is what you are reading right now. It is intended to appear exactly as the original in every way. The original text was printed by Hall & Sellers of Philadelphia in 1790, and is the very first printing of the 1789 Book of Common Prayer.

The font used is HW Caslon's "Caslon 14", which seems to be a very good match to the original. The original was printed on pages about 6-1/2 by 4", or somewhat smaller than half of an 8-1/2 x 11" sheet of paper. You can enlarge it as desired for printing using the Adobe Acrobat Reader.

You may redistribute this document electronically provided no fee is charged and this header remains part of the document. While every attempt was made to ensure accuracy, certain errors may exist in the text. Please contact us if any errors are found.

This document was created as a service to the community by Satucket Software: Web Design & computer consulting for small business, churches, & non-profits.

Contact:

Charles Wohlers

P. O. Box 227

East Bridgewater, Mass. 02333 USA

[chadwohl@satucket.com](mailto:chadwohl@satucket.com)

<http://satucket.com>

# Visitation of PRISONERS.

looking for the resurrection of the Body (when the Sea shall give up her Dead) and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ; who at his coming shall change our vile Body, that it may be like his glorious Body, according to the mighty working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself.

A FORM of PRAYER for the

## VISITATION OF PRISONERS.

¶ *When Morning or Evening Prayer shall be read in any Prison, instead of the Psalm, "O come, let us sing," &c., or the Psalm, "My soul doth magnify," &c. shall be read the 130th Psalm; and the Minister shall insert, after the Collect for the day, the Collect in the following Service, "O God, who sparest," &c., and at such Times as the Litaney is not read, he shall add the Prayer, "O God, merciful Father, who despisest not," &c.*

¶ *And when Notice is given to the Minister, that a Prisoner is confined for some great or capital crime, he shall visit him; and when he cometh into the Place where the Prisoner is, he shall say, kneeling down,*

**R**emember not, Lord, our iniquities, nor the iniquities of our Forefathers; neither take thou vengeance of our Sins; Spare us, good Lord, spare thy people, whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious blood, and be not angry with us for ever.

*Ans<sup>w</sup>.* Spare us, good Lord.

Let us pray.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

*Christ, have mercy upon us.*

Lord, have mercy upon us.

**O**ur Father, who art in Heaven, &c.

*Minist.* O Lord, show thy mercy upon us;

*Ans<sup>w</sup>.* And grant us thy salvation.

*Minist.* Turn thy face from our Sins;

*Ans<sup>w</sup>.* And blot out all our iniquities.

*Minist.* Send us help from thy holy place;

*Ans<sup>w</sup>.* For thine indignation lieth hard upon us.

*Minist.* O Lord, hear our prayer;

*Ans<sup>w</sup>.* And let the sighing of the Prisoners come before thee.

*The Collect.*

**G**rant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

**O** God, who sparest when we deserve punishment, and in thy wrath rememberest mercy; we humbly beseech thee, of thy goodness to comfort and succour all those who are under reproach and misery in the house of bondage; correct them not in thine anger,

## Visitation of PRISONERS.

neither chasten them in thy fore displeasure. Give them a right understanding of themselves, and of thy threats and promises; that they may neither cast away their confidence in thee, nor place it any where but in thee. Relieve the Distressed, protect the Innocent, and awaken the Guilty: and forasmuch as thou alone bringest light out of darkness, and good out of evil, grant that the pains and punishments which these thy servants endure, through their bodily confinement, may tend to setting free their souls from the chains of sin; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

¶ *Here the Minister, as he shall see convenient, may read the Prayer for All Conditions of Men, the Collect for Ash-Wednesday, and the Collect after the Offertory, beginning "Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom," &c., or any other prayer of the Liturgy, which he shall judge proper.*

¶ *Then shall the Minister exhort the Prisoner or Prisoners after this Form, or other like.*

**D**EARLY beloved, know this, that Almighty God, whose never failing providence governeth all things both in heaven and earth, hath so wisely and mercifully ordered the course of this world, that his Judgments are often sent as fatherly corrections to us; and if with due submission and resignation to his holy will we receive the same, they will work together for our good.

It is your part and duty, therefore, to humble *yourself* under the mighty hand of God, to acknowledge the righteousnes of his judgments, and to endeavour that, by

his grace, this present Visitation may lead you to a sincere and hearty repentance.

The way and means thereto is, to examine your life and conversation by the rule of God's commandments; and whereinsoever *you* shall perceive *yourself* to have offended either by will, word, or deed, there to bewail your own sinfulness, and to confess *yourself* to Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life. And if *you* shall perceive your offences to be such as are not only against God, but also against your Neighbours; then to reconcile *yourself* to them, being ready to make restitution and satisfaction, according to the uttermost of your power, for all injuries and wrongs done by *you* to any other; and being likewise ready to forgive others who have offended *you*, as *you* would have forgiveness of your offences at God's hand. And to this true repentance and change of mind *you* must add a lively and steadfast faith, and dependence upon the merits of the death of Christ, with an entire resignation of *yourself* to the will of God. Except *you* repent, and believe, we can give you no hope of salvation: But if *you* do sincerely repent and believe, God hath declared, though your sins be as red as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow; though your wickednesses have gone over your head, yet shall they not be your destruction.

We exhort you therefore in the Name of God, and of his dear Son Jesus Christ our Saviour, and as *you* tender your own salvation, to take good heed of these things in time, while the day of salvation lasteth; for the night cometh, when

## Vifitation of PRISONERS.

no man can work. While *you* have the light, believe in the light, and walk as children of the light, that *you* be not caſt into outer darkneſs; that *you* may not knock, when the door ſhall be ſhut, and cry for mercy, when it is the time of juſtice. Now, *you* are the object of God's mercy, if by repentance and true faith *you* turn unto him; but if *you* neglect theſe things, *you* will be the object of his juſtice and vengeance: Now, *you* may claim the merits of Chriſt; but if *you* die in your ſins, his ſufferings will tend to your greater condemnation. O beloved, conſider in this your day, how fearful a thing it will be to fall into the hands of the living God, when *you* can neither fly to his mercy to protect you, nor to the merits of Chriſt to cover you in that terrible day.

¶ *Here the Miniſter ſhall examine him concerning his Faith, and rehearſe the Articles of the Creed, "Doſt thou believe in God," &c.*

*And the Priſoner ſhall answer,*  
All this I ſteadfaſtly believe.

¶ *Then ſhall the Miniſter examine whether he repent him truly of his ſins, and be in charity with all the world, and farther admoniſh him particularly concerning the crimes wherewith he is charged; and exhort him, if he have any ſcruples, that he would declare the ſame, and prepare himſelf for the holy Communion, againſt the time that it may be proper to adminiſter it to him.*

¶ *Then, all kneeling, the Miniſter ſhall ſay as follows, from the 51ſt Pſalm,*

**H**Ave mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodneſs; ac-

ording to the multitude of thy mercies do away mine offences.

Wash me thoroughly from my wickedneſs; and cleanſe me from my ſin.

For I acknowledge my faults; and my ſin is ever before me.

Againſt thee only have I finned, and done this evil in thy ſight; that thou mighteſt be juſtified in thy ſaying, and clear when thou art judged.

Behold, I was ſhapen in wickedneſs; and in ſin hath my mother conceived me.

But lo, thou requireſt truth in the inward parts; and ſhalt make me to underſtand wiſdom ſecretly.

Thou ſhalt purge me with hyſſop, and I ſhall be clean; thou ſhalt waſh me, and I ſhall be whiter than ſnow.

Thou ſhalt make me hear of joy and gladneſs; that the bones which thou haſt broken may rejoice.

Turn thy face from thy ſins; and put out all my miſdeeds.

Make me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right ſpirit within me.

Caſt me not away from thy preſence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.

O give me the comfort of thy help again; and ſtabliſh me with thy free Spirit.

Then ſhall I teach thy ways unto the wicked; and finners ſhall be converted unto thee.

Deliver me from blood-guiltineſs, O God, thou that art the God of my health; and my tongue ſhall ſing of thy righteouſneſs.

Thou ſhalt open my lips, O Lord; and my mouth ſhall ſhow thy praife.

For thou deſireſt no ſacrifice, elſe

## Visitation of PRISONERS.

else would I give it thee; but thou delightest not in burnt-offerings.

The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt thou not despise.

¶ *Then the Minister shall say,*

Let us pray.

**O** Lord, we beseech thee, mercifully hear our prayers, and spare all those who confess their sins unto thee; that they, whose consciences by sin are accused, by thy merciful pardon may be absolved, through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

**O** God, whose mercy is everlasting, and power infinite; Look down with pity and compassion upon the sufferings of *this thy servant*; and whether thou visitest for trial of *his* patience, or punishment of *his* offences, enable *him* by thy grace cheerfully to submit *himself* to thy holy Will and Pleasure. Go not far from those, O Lord, whom thou hast laid in a place of darkness, and in the deep; and so far as thou hast not cut *him* off suddenly, but chastenest *him* as a father, grant that *he*, duly considering thy great mercies, may be unfeignedly thankful, and turn unto thee with true repentance and sincerity of heart; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

¶ *Prayers for Persons under Sentence of Death.*

¶ *When a Criminal is under Sentence of death, the Minister shall proceed, immediately after the Collect, "O God, who sparest," &c. to exhort him after this Form, or other like.*

**D**early beloved, it hath pleased Almighty God, in his justice, to bring you under the sentence and condemnation of the law; you are shortly to suffer death in such a manner, that others, warned by your example, may be the more afraid to offend; and we pray God, that you may make such use of your punishments in this world, that your Soul may be saved in the world to come.

Wherefore we come to you in the bowels of compassion; and, being desirous that you should avoid presumption on the one hand, and despair on the other, shall plainly lay before you the wretchedness of your condition, and declare how far you ought to depend on the mercies of God, and the merits of our Saviour. Consider then seriously with yourself, in all appearance of the time of your dissolution draweth near; your sins have laid fast hold upon you; you are soon to be removed from among men by a violent death; and you shall fade away suddenly like the grass, which in the morning is green and groweth up, but in the evening is cut down, dried up, and withered. After you have thus finished the course of a sinful and miserable life, you shall appear before the Judge of all flesh; who, as he pronounces blessings on the righteous, shall likewise say, with a terrible voice of most just judgment, to the wicked, "Go, ye accursed, into the fire everlasting, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Your sins have brought you too near this dreadful sentence: It is therefore your part and duty, my brother, humbly to confess and bewail your great and manifold offences,

## Visitation of PRISONERS.

offences, and to repent you truly of your sins, as you tender the eternal salvation of your soul.

Be not deceived with a vain and presumptuous expectation of God's favour, nor say within yourself, Peace, Peace, where there is no Peace; for there is no Peace, saith my God, to the wicked: God is not mocked; he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and without holiness no man shall see the Lord. On the other hand, despair not of God's mercy, though trouble is on every side; for God shutteth not up his mercies for ever in displeasure; but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Do not either way abuse the goodness of God, who calleth us mercifully to amendment, and of his endless pity promiseth us forgiveness of that which is past; if with a perfect and a true heart we return unto him.

Since therefore you are soon to pass into an endless and unchangeable state, and your future happiness or misery depends upon the few moments which are left you; I require you strictly to examine yourself, and your estate both towards God and towards man; and let no worldly consideration hinder you from making a true and full confession of your sins, and giving all the satisfaction which is in your power to every one whom you have wronged or injured, that you may find mercy at your heavenly Father's hand, for Christ's sake, and not be condemned in the dreadful day of judgment.

Lastly, beloved; submit yourself with Christian resignation to the just judgment of God, which

your own crimes have brought upon you, and be in charity with all men; being ready sincerely to forgive all such as have offended you, not excepting those who have profecuted you even unto death: And, though this may seem a hard saying, yet know assuredly, that without it your charity is not yet perfect. And fail not earnestly to endeavour and pray for this blessed temper and composure of mind: So may you cast yourself with an entire dependence upon the mercies of God, through the merits of our Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ.

¶ *Here the Minister shall examine him concerning his Faith, and rehearse the Articles of the Creed, "Dost thou believe in God," &c.*

*And the Criminal shall answer,*

All this I stedfastly believe.

¶ *Then shall the Minister examine, whether he repent him truly of his sins, exhorting him to a particular Confession of the sin for which he is condemned; and upon Confession, he shall instruct him what Satisfaction ought to be made to those whom he has offended thereby; and if he knoweth any combinations in wickedness, or any evil practices designed against others, let him be admonished to the utmost of his power to discover and prevent them.*

¶ *After his confession, the Minister shall declare to him the pardoning Mercy of God, in the Form which is used in the Communion Service.*

¶ *After which shall be said the Collect following.*

O Holy

## Visitation of PRISONERS.

**O** Holy Jesus, who, of thine infinite goodness, didst accept the conversion of a sinner on the cross; open thine eye of mercy upon this thy servant, who desireth pardon and forgiveness, though in his latest hour he turneth unto thee. Renew in him whatsoever hath been decayed by the fraud and malice of the devil, or by his own carnal will and frailness. Consider his contrition; accept his repentance; and forasmuch as he putteth his full trust only in thy mercy, impute not unto him his former sins, but strengthen him with thy blessed Spirit; and when thou art pleased to take him hence, take him unto thy favour: This we beg through thy merits, O Lord, our Saviour and our Redeemer. *Amen.*

¶ *Then shall the Minister say,*

**O** Father of mercies, and God of all comfort; we fly unto thee for succour in behalf of this thy servant, who is now under the sentence of condemnation. The day of his calamity is at hand, and he is accounted as one of those who go down into the pit. Blessed Lord, remember thy mercies; look upon his infirmities; hear the voice of his complaint; give him, we beseech thee, patience in this his time of adversity, and support under the terrors which encompass him; set before his eyes the things he hath done in the body, which have justly provoked thee to anger; and forasmuch as his continuance appeareth to be short amongst us, quicken him so much the more by thy grace and holy Spirit; that he, being converted and reconciled unto thee, before thy judgments have cut him

off from the earth, may at the hour of his death depart in peace, and be received into thine everlasting kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

¶ *Adding this.*

**O** Saviour of the world; who by thy Cross and precious blood hast redeemed us, save us, and help us, we humbly beseech thee, O Lord.

¶ *Then the Minister, standing, shall say,*

**I**N the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succour, but of thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased?

Yet, O Lord God, most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.

Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts; shut not thy merciful ears to our prayer: but spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not, at our last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from thee.

¶ *Then the Minister shall say,*

**T**HE Almighty God, who is a most strong tower to all those who put their trust in him; to whom all things in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, do bow and obey; be now and evermore thy defence: and make thee know and feel that there is none other name under heaven given to man, in whom, and through whom thou mayest receive salvation, but only

## Visitation of PRISONERS.

only the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

¶ *And after that shall say,*

**U**NTO God's gracious mercy and protection we commit thee: The Lord bleſs thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face to ſhine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace, both now and evermore.

¶ *At the time of Execution, beſides all or ſuch parts of the foregoing Office as the Miniſter ſhall judge proper, ſhall be ſaid the Commendatory Prayer for a Perſon at the point of departure, as it is in The Viſitation of the Sick.*

*The Colleſt for the Communion Service.*

**O** God, who declareſt thy Almighty power chiefly in ſhowing mercy and pity; We beſeech thee to have mercy upon this thy ſervant, who for tranſgreſſions is appointed to die. Grant that he may take thy Judgments patiently, and repent him truly of his ſins; that he recovering thy favour, the fearful reward of his actions may end with this life, and whenſoever his ſoul ſhall depart from the body it may be without ſpot preſented unto thee, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. *Amen.*

*The Epiſtle. Heb. xii. 11.*

**N**O chaſtening for the preſent ſeemeth to be joyous; but

grievous: nevertheleſs, afterwards it yieldeth the peace-able fruit of righteouſneſs, unto them which are exerciſed thereby.

*The Goſpel. St. John v. 24.*

**V**erily, verily, I ſay unto you, he that heareth my word and believeth on Him that ſent me hath everlaſting life; and ſhall not come into condemnation, but is paſſed from death unto life.

¶ *A Prayer for imprisoned Debtors.*

**M**Oſt gracious God, look down in pity and compaſſion upon theſe thine afflicted ſervants, who are fallen under the miſery of a cloſe reſtraint. Give them always a deep ſenſe of their ſins, and of thy fatherly love and correction; and the more their confinement preſſeth hard upon them, the more let the comforts of thy Grace and mercy abound towards them. Give to their creditors tenderneſs and compaſſion, and to them a meek and forgiving ſpirit towards all thoſe who have confined them, and a full purpoſe to repair all the injuries and loſſes which others have ſuſtained by them. Raiſe them up friends to pity and relieve them; give them the continued comfort of thy countenance here; and ſo ſanctify their afflictions, that they may work for them an eternal weight of glory; through the merits and mediation of Jeſus Chriſt thy Son our Lord. *Amen.*