

Prayers for the bees

Jesus Christ said, *“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly”* (John 10:10).

Bees are a part of that abundant life the Creator gives us – they are essential to flowers, honey, wine, wheat, fruit and all those signs of the abundance of life with which God has blessed us. God has provided other pollinators as well for which we should give thanks to God, and also work to protect in our concern for nature and the world which God has made.

Prayer for Bees

O God, the Creator of all, who blesses seed and makes it to increase and makes it profitable for our use: You instructed us to employ the fruits and works of the bees for our needs. Bless the bees and increase them for the profit of the human race, preserving them and making them abundant. Let everyone labouring in the care of these living things, be counted worthy to receive abundant fruits of their labours and to be filled with heavenly blessings in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom is due glory, honor and worship unto ages of ages. Amen.

The Blessing of the bees

Heavenly Father, may your holy blessing descend upon these bees and these hives; so that they may multiply, be fruitful and preserved from all ills and that the fruits coming forth from them may be distributed for your praise and that of your Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Telling the bees

The beekeeper (or beekeepers) taps three times on the roof of each hive and whispers:

‘Sweet bees, Clive, your master is dead, he has taken the journey we all must make, and his funeral is today. He loved and cared for you well.

Paul, your new master, will care for you now. Grieve not too long, but return to your chores, and gather the pollen and nectar in. Reward your new master with plenty of honey to spin.

All is well in God’s world. Be content, lovely ladies, you are in good hands.

We bring you fare of food and drink that you may share with us in showing our grateful thanks to your late master, Clive, our dear friend.’

The beekeeper (or beekeepers) ties a black sash round one (or all) of the hives, and leaves food and drink for the bees.



Telling the bees

The telling of the bees is a traditional English custom, in which bees would be told of important events in their keeper's lives, such as births, marriages, or departures and returns in the household. The bees were most commonly told of deaths in their master's family. The custom was prevalent all over England, as well as in a few places in Ireland and Wales but not in Scotland. If the custom was omitted or forgotten then it was believed a penalty would be paid, that the bees might leave their hive, stop producing honey, or die. A 1950 article in the Dundee Courier Scotland, describes the practice of inviting bees to the wedding.

To inform the bees of a death their hive might be hung with a black cloth, while a "doleful tune" is sung. Another method of "telling the bees" would be for their master to approach the hive and knock gently upon it. The house key might also be used to knock on the hive. When the master of the house had the attention of the bees they would tell the bees the name of the person that had died.

Food and drink from a beekeeper's funeral would also be left by the hive for the bees, including the funeral biscuits and wine. The hive would also be lifted a few inches and put down again at the same time as the coffin. The hive might also be rotated to face the funeral procession, and draped with mourning cloth. If a wedding occurred in the household, the hive might be decorated, and a slice of wedding cake left by their hive. The decoration of hives appears to date to the early 19th century.

The custom spread with European immigration to the United States in the 19th century. An 1890 article in The Courier-Journal newspaper also described the practice of inviting bees to the funeral.

