

11/03/2019 (20 Pentecost 2019)

Thank you, God, for the tremendous sacrifices made by those who have gone before us.

Bless the memories of your saints, God.

May we learn how to walk wisely from their examples of faith, dedication, worship, and love. Amen

One of the groups that I follow on Facebook is called; 'Episcopalians on Facebook'. Not a very inventive name for a group, but at least it's accurate. What I like about the group is that it seems to be a safe place where folks can share their troubles and difficulties and ask for prayers and blessings. One such request went this way: "I really need prayers for a friend of mine. He is in a bad situation with his family who believe his sexuality is a sin and use the Bible as ammunition against him for this. He has been told multiple times how he is going to hell and how he does not deserve the Kingdom of God. Please send prayers to him and his family and help his family please understand what unconditional love is, what God is as a Holy power, and that His grace and everlasting light showers us all in His favor, love and joyfulness."

Another posting read: "I feel bad asking for prayers for myself, especially when I should be rejoicing in the Resurrection. I had to reach out though because my heart, mind, & body are filled with pain, depression & loneliness. I thought that despite the negative circumstances in my life, that the anti-depression treatments were starting to help a little. Why does it take so little to bring back despair? I keep questioning if my faith is too weak & unsustainable. I've struggled with this most of my life. And with periods of anxiety & depression for a fair amount. I believe things have worsened the last 2 yrs. Now I'm

questioning whether impaired health, (emotional & physically limiting problems) are going to dominate the rest of my life. I don't want to live this way or die this way. I have some things I really want to do before I die. I'm 62 & always been an eternal optimist, idealist, who trusts people at face value. Some of these values have taken hard hits in the last 2 yrs., but I'm grateful they haven't been destroyed completely. I've always striven to be a good person, do what's right, have compassion, tolerance/acceptance. My desire is to live my life with Christ's Word a part of me all the time as much as possible. I also have a personal goal of trying to be a blessing to someone every day. It's not as big a thing as it sounds, it can be as small as making someone smile.

Please excuse the very long post. Now I can see just how confused & ungrounded I am & truly not sure what to do. If anyone has any words of wisdom, Bible verses/lessons, whatever, please don't hesitate to offer them. Thank you for listening & God bless you."

And there are many others with different prayer requests. I believe that people need a safe venue in which to ask for prayers and to seek God. I feel a little sad if this is the only way that folks have to reach out for love and support. We all know that the Internet is devoid of human physical contact. Another thing that I began to notice was the most common response on the part of others.

It seems that whenever someone experiences a profound loss or setback, people tend to say that they are "sending prayers your way," or "sending my prayers to you," etc. I know that the basic intention behind this is to show support for those who are in a tough situation, and I'm all for that. But, I wonder, does anyone actually send prayers to

someone? I am not sure what to make of that. What does that mean? Aren't prayers typically directed toward God?

I also see this whenever there's a tragedy in the world — a mass shooting or bombing. I will often hear that my friends are sending their “thoughts and prayers.” Politicians like to send a lot of “thoughts and prayers” these days. But here's my question: Can I actually send my thoughts to you? I assume they would be happy thoughts. Or maybe supportive, comforting thoughts. I don't recall that Jesus sent “thoughts and prayers” either.

As a priest, I find myself on a lot of prayer chains. People ask for prayers— for an upcoming surgery, for the biopsy report, for the job interview, for safe travel. This is something I like to do. And I do pray. I don't send anyone “thought and prayers,” but I do let God know what I'm thinking and feeling. One pastor said that a family member was taken to the hospital a couple of Saturday mornings ago, and you'd better believe he was praying for her; for the ambulance driver; for little or no traffic on the way to the hospital; for the doctors who would be waiting for her; even for the person who would take down the insurance information in the ER. He said; “I think God probably noticed the note of desperation in my voice. That was my hope”.

I am not trying to be cynical about this. I firmly believe that when someone says they are sending prayers or that there are **prayers ascending**, they truly mean it and they do pray. I hope though that is not something as superficial as telling someone Good Luck and Best wishes. Andrew Klavan, a widely published writer of crime and suspense novels, commented in his Daily Wire podcast that “When tragedy or atrocity strikes ... thoughts and prayers are not just an expression of compassion. They are ... an expression of humility and

helplessness. They are a way of saying: "There is nothing we can do in the face of this wickedness, but we stand in solidarity with the victims and ask God to comfort their families in their sorrow."

Sometimes, we simply do the best that we can.

We are celebrating All Saints today. I believe that almost all of the saints had deep and spiritual prayer lives. Prayer was a part of who they were.

St. Teresa of Avila said; "Prayer is being on terms of friendship with God, frequently conversing in secret with Him who, we know, loves us".

Mother Teresa said; "Love to pray. Prayer enlarges the heart until it is capable of containing God's gift of Himself".

JoseMaria Escriva said; "If you are not a man of prayer, I don't believe in the sincerity of your intentions when you say that you work for Christ".

From St. Theresa of Lisieux: "Prayer is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally, it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus".

"Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you."

--St. Augustine

"It is simply impossible to lead, without the aid of prayer, a virtuous life".

--Saint John Chrysostom

“Prayer ought to be humble, fervent, resigned, persevering, and accompanied with great reverence. One should consider that he stands in the presence of a God, and speaks with a Lord before whom the angels tremble from awe and fear”.

--Saint Mary Magdalen de Pazzi

Certainly, for many of the Saints, Prayer was something that came from the depths of their being. This was true for the apostle Paul also.

In our reading today from 2nd Thessalonians, Paul tells them that they are in his prayers. And Paul does say that they are in his thoughts as well. But he doesn't leave it at that. He is very specific in what he is praying for.

11”To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith, 12so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ”.

Paul shows us how to put meat on the bones of thoughts and prayers. No matter how helpless we may feel when expressing solidarity with someone who has suffered great loss, and no matter that we know words alone will not suffice, sincere thoughts and prayers are everything. Prayer is work. If you say your prayers are with someone, and you follow through by actually praying for them, you're putting yourself in a place to see beyond your own horizons and to walk in someone else's shoes. Prayer deepens our empathy and puts us in a place where God can change us and lead us to some action we can take. Though all good things come from God, praying for others assumes that God may allow our prayers to be a means by which God does good for others.

In times of tragedy, whether it affects many or only a few, thoughts and prayers will never be the whole answer, but often, they are all we have.

Writing about the difficulties of life, author Anne Lamott said, “It’s funny: I always imagined when I was a kid that adults had some kind of inner toolbox, full of shiny tools: the saw of discernment, the hammer of wisdom, the sandpaper of patience.

“But when I grew up, I found that life handed you these rusty bent old tools — friendships, prayer, conscience, honesty — and said, ‘Do the best you can with these, they will have to do.’ And mostly, against all odds, they’re enough.”

God has given us thoughts and prayers in that box of seemingly inadequate tools and told us to do our best with them. Thus, our thoughts and prayers, sincerely and genuinely offered and followed through on, are never nothing. They are ways the Lord has given us to love our neighbor.

I believe that sincere prayer comes from the source of our deepest love, to the almighty Source of Love, on behalf of those we hold in love and are loved by God. God loves us so very much, and we in turn, extend that love to others. Today we remember all of those saints that have come before us and are present with us today. We are part of that communion of saints.

In our Book of Common Prayer; it describes the communion of saints;

“The communion of saints is the whole family of God, the living and the dead, those whom we love and those whom we hurt, bound together in Christ, by sacrament, prayer, and praise”.

Those who knit will understand this analogy. It is a knitting together of all those who have come before us, all those who are now present, and those who will come after us. The communion of saints is all of this, with Christ at the center.

I think that at some level, we know that those we pray for, regardless of who they may be, are part of this Communion of Saints. It truly is a group held together by the love of Christ and this is the truth we celebrate today.

It is so important to know that as we live in the reality of God's love enfolding us, those that have gone before and those who come after, also live within this same reality. It is a blessing that we can only fully realize, once we are praising God with that community, when Jesus comes again. Until that time comes, we do the very best that we can with the rusty and bent tools that we have in our toolbox.

Amen!