

Christ the King Sunday
November 26, 2006

“The Lord’s Prayer”

Good Morning!

Two guys were talking - as guys do - and one of them made a comment about prayer. The other one scoffed, “If you are so religious, let’s hear you quote the Lord’s Prayer. I bet you ten dollars you don’t know it.”

His friend responded, “Yes I do. ‘Now I lay me down to sleep; I pray the Lord my soul to keep.’” (Pause....)

The other friend said, “Wow! I didn’t think you knew it!” and handed him a ten dollar bill.

Barna Research Group did a survey on prayer. What they found is quite interesting. Nationally, 82% of adults pray at least once a week. But, in the northeast, only 76% pray at least once a week. Could this be the reason that we in the northeast are always last to reap any political or economic benefits the rest of the country enjoys? Just asking...

Jesus stated that we are to be persistent in prayer. St. Paul states the degree of persistence with which we ought to pray. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul writes in chapter 5, verses 16 -18:

“Rejoice always;
Pray without ceasing;
In everything, give thanks;
For this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Paul stated that we are to pray how often? “Without ceasing!” Why?

Prayer is more than just words we say to God our Father. Prayer is the totality of all the things we do and say in our relationship with God. In fact, our relationship with God lies in prayer.

Fr. Ward is in the midst of a series of sermons on the Beatitudes as found in Mathew’s Gospel. And in this same section of Matthew’s gospel dealing with the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses the topic of prayer. In a section of scripture we hear only on Ash

Wednesday, Matthew records in chapter six, verse five and following, Jesus teaching concerning prayer.

6:5 "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

6 But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

7 "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.

What is meant by *empty phrases*? To me, empty phrases are those said by rote and without meaning of the true intention of the words said. So how are we to pray?

8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

9 "Pray then in this way..."

What follows is the greatest form of prayer ever revealed to mankind, "The Lord's Prayer." And how we pray this awesome prayer of Jesus reveals what our relationship with God truly is.

This morning, I am privileged to show you a video tape, the title and contents of which are quite evident.

(Tape)

The Christian woman in our tape came into to church to pray (*pause*) or to recite the Lord's prayer? She stated that she came to recite the prayer. To recite is to give a speech. Is this what prayer is?

The \$64,000 question for us, "When we pray, do we really, honestly and truly, expect God to be listening?" At the end of the tape, we heard "God" say that if we wished to truly give him glory, we are to do what: "*Keep talking with Him.*" For it is only through our "talking" with God that we can develop a true and loving relationship with him. Try never talking with your friends and see how long your relationship with them lasts. Well, the same applies to our developing a relationship with God.

Why are we in a hurry in our talk with God? We live in a society of instant gratification. Many expect the fruits of the Christian life – *joy, peace, trust, courage, patience, and all the rest* – without the disciplines of the Christian life. Many believe they can get the

Christian faith in an hour or so on an occasional Sunday attending church. This is not what Jesus commanded in the fourth Commandment, nor expects of those who profess to follow him. What Jesus does expect is persistence; “Thou shalt keep holy, not an occasional Sabbath Day, but each and every Sabbath Day,” and to pray without ceasing.

A four year-old prayed, “And forgive us our trash baskets, as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets.” For a four year-old, this is a fairly decent understanding of forgiveness. If I may paraphrase, “Forgive us our garbage as we forgive those who give us garbage. The bottom line teaching is that if we seek forgiveness of our sins from God the Father, then we are expected to forgive those who have sinned against us. It’s a packaged deal; can’t have one without the other.

I have seen that video tape at least 50 times now, and each time I watch it, I continue to be moved by its teaching. For many, the Lord’s Prayer is prayed in such a way that not much thought is given to the words. We can recite it while thinking about what to have for lunch or counting the cobwebs hanging from the light fixtures. This is far from what Jesus intended His prayer to be.

The Lord’s Prayer was never intended to be used as a prayer in and of itself, but rather as an outline for daily meditation. Distributed with your bulletins this morning is a paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer authored by St. Francis of Assisi. What is presented in this paraphrase amounts to be merely suggestions, prayer starters, if you will. As you continue in your prayer life, you will be able to add many, many more.

If you look at the opening phrase, “Our Father,” St. Francis offers three suggestions as to what “Father” means in this prayer. The second line states, “Our Creator.”

I invite you to turn with me in our prayer books to page 47. On page 47, we find Canticle I for use in the Daily Office. This canticle offers a modest beginning of how and for what we are to praise God as our Creator. This is the Old English version I enjoy for its poetic flow.

Time does not permit the reading of nor meditation on this canticle. But, if we were to prayerfully meditate on each blessing of creation as listed, it would take some time just to move through this one canticle alone. And we still are praying and meditating only on the opening two words of the Lord’s Prayer, “Our Father,” a prayer I hope you understand is not designed to be said in ten seconds or less.

Remember, Jesus said, “When you pray ...” not “If you pray...” Considering the critical and spiritual conflicting times in which we live, we cannot give up on prayer; we cannot give up developing a talking relationship with God. I offer to you St. Francis’ expanded paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer with the hope that you will use it in your meditations; that you will use it in your prayer time; and in so doing, develop a closer and deeper relationship with God. To quote the video tape, “If you want to give God glory, then keep talking with Him.” And that talking is called prayer.

And now to God, who forever is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And the people of God said, “Amen!”