

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen

These words, taken from our Gospel reading for today form the basis for our meditation.

- “One of His disciples said to Him, “Lord teach us to pray.”
- And Jesus said to them, “When you pray, say.....Father.”
- And from here Jesus gave to His disciples, and us, the Lord’s Prayer.

Collectively, today’s assigned Scripture readings are all about prayer.

- If you take a look at our assigned Gospel readings for the last 3 weeks, there has been a natural progression.
- We have been on a continuum of Jesus teaching us about mercy, worship, and now today prayer.

Three weeks ago we had the parable of the Good Samaritan.

- That is, mercy.

Last week we had the account of Martha and Mary.

- That is, worship.

And today, we have Jesus teaching us about prayer.

- We could talk many weeks about prayer.
- Given the vastness of the subject of prayer, today we will concentrate and focus in on only those chosen words just read to you a few moments ago.
- In summary fashion.....
- Jesus teaches us to pray.
- And Jesus began, “Our Father.”

So I begin by asking you.....how is your prayer life?

- In fact, in our electronic sign out in front of the church on Wabash Avenue, for a number of weeks one of the messages that has been rotating through asks the question, where are you in your prayer life?

So, how is your prayer life?

- Even those great men of the Bible struggled with their prayer life.

- Jesus' inner circle of disciples, in the Garden of Gethsemane, when they were asked by Jesus to pray.....fell asleep. Not once but 3 times.
- Prayer can be a struggle for us because we are constantly battling with the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh.

There are many pitfalls and challenges with our prayer life.

- Here are some of them we face or I have heard. You can probably add to the list.
- I'm too busy. There is not enough time for me to pray.
- I don't know what to say or what to pray for.
- I try to pray.....but I just face too many distractions. Life is too chaotic for me to find the peace and calm in prayer.

And perhaps the most key obstacle for prayer by some.....

- God just seems to be too distant.
- I'm not sure He is always listening or it will make a difference.
- Sometimes the here and now of what I face is more real than trusting in God and waiting for His answer to my prayers.

And yet while all that is true to one extent or another for each of us; I hope somewhere in all this we would say.....

- There is always room for improvement; but I cherish that I can go in prayer to my heavenly Father for all my needs of body and soul.
- And I am confident and trust that He will hear and answer my prayers as to what is best for me.

Wherever you are at in your prayer life.....

- My goal for this message is that when you leave church today.....
- You will be encouraged and strengthened to have a stronger prayer life than when you started your day.

Sometimes we think prayer begins with us. With you.

- It does not!
- Prayer begins with Jesus and His gift; and only then moves to ourselves who ask for gifts.

In our Gospel reading, a disciple, we are not told which one, asked Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray."

- It is interesting, it is the only occasion in the Bible in which we are told, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them something.

It is also interesting the setting for this.

- Our Gospel reading begins, “Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when He finished, the disciples asked to be taught.”

Jesus was constant in prayer.

- He often went off by Himself to pray.
- Even while dying on the cross for our sins, prayed for our forgiveness.
- “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Jesus, as with all things, has set and given us a very good example to be in prayer.

- And now that Jesus has risen and is ascended back into eternity, He certainly prays for us. For you.

But it does not end there. Or perhaps, a better way to say it.....it does not even start there.

- Jesus not only has taught us how to pray, He not only prays for us, He has also accomplished those things necessary so we can pray to God our Father.
- How did Jesus begin when He responded to the disciples request to teach them how to pray?
- How does the prayer begin that He taught us?

With these words, “Our Father.”

- In Old Testament times, that is, before the writing of the Gospels, God is called Father only about 15 times.

Why is that?

- Because of what Jesus has done for us.
- Calling upon God as Father can only happen when the Father first bestows sonship.

Jesus is able to address God as Father because of His eternal relationship as the Son.

- And by teaching us to call God our Father, Jesus is placing us in that same relationship.
- And we can call God our Father because Jesus has reconciled us to Him by His death on the cross.

- And you are free to enter into conversation with God at any time, in any place, and as often as you like because of what Christ has done on the cross for you.

Think about this.....

- Jesus has done everything necessary and invites us to believe that God is our true Father and we are His true children.....
- So that with all boldness and confidence we may ask God the Father as dear children ask their earthly fathers.

Do you comprehend and grasp what this all means?

- You have been adopted and you are invited, welcomed, and encouraged to go to the Almighty God, all powerful, maker of heaven and earth with any petition, anything on your heart at any time.
- And this Almighty God has promised to not only listen but respond to all your prayers.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 7:7-8, our Scripture for the week, “Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”

- There are many key points in these verses.
- First, it is a command to do these things.
- Second, go back to the original Greek and these are intended to be continuous actions.

And it involves all aspects of your life.

- Ask—verbal
- Seek—mindful.
- And knock—physical.
- And the promise is given that he who asks—receives; he who seeks—finds; and to him who knocks—it will be opened.

Prayer is speaking to God what is in your heart.

- In words.
- And silently in meditation.

It does not need to be in flowing or eloquent words.

- Jesus does not invite us to address God in vague and shadowy terms.

- Rather, He invites you to talk to God in the intimate language of family, as children speak to their father.
- It is not a show.
- It is not an evaluation that will be graded.
- You are a child of God. That tells you that God loves you.

Speaking to God might be uncomfortable at first.

- Sort of like speaking to a new acquaintance. But be assured that God is not uncomfortable with you.
- And the more you pray, the more natural you will find your conversation with Him will become.

So with all that said, lets now go back and briefly address those pitfalls and challenges to our prayer life that we mentioned earlier.

- I'm too busy. I don't have time to pray.
- Once again it all starts with God.
- It is God who has given you times as a gift to be used for His glory.
- Since it is God who has given us time, there is time to pray.

Each day, God deposits 86,400 seconds in your account.

- Calendars make excellent tools but terrible masters.
- Time was made for you. Not you for time.

Like our dear Lord, it is important for us to take time to pray.

- If you want to make prayer time the main part of your day, then just make prayer time the main part of your day.
- In fact, instead of merely adding prayer time to your schedule, why not center your schedule around prayer?
- Once that time is established and fixed, you can begin to set up the rest of your schedule.
- Luther said, "I'm too busy not to pray!"
- There is no greater way to use your time than in prayer with Christ.

Another pitfall we face is.....I don't know what to say or what to pray for.

- There are many sources to help you with this.

Our hymnals

- They both have prayers in them.....And reading the words of some of our treasured hymns makes for beautiful prayers.

The catechism.

- Again, here not only teaching in prayer but many beautiful prayers are given to us.

God's Word.

- Reading Scripture makes beautiful prayers.
- God's Word is full of prayers that we have been given to say to God.
- In particular the Psalms.
- Consider reading a Psalm each day as a portion of your prayers.

Devotion Books.

- Each devotion usually has a prayer at the end as well as more general prayers for specific occasions.

And, of course, Jesus not only commands us to pray, He gives us the words of the Lord's Prayer.

- It covers every aspect of life.
- It is a precious gift from heaven.

And then there are the free prayers that come from the heart.

- Just talk to God as your Savior, Friend, and Confidant.
- Just like an exercise routine will make you physically stronger, so it is with your prayer routine and your spirituality.

The next hurdle we identified.....life is too chaotic for me to find the peace and calm to pray. I try to pray but I face too many distractions.

- Dear Christian friends.....Scripture tells us in the Book of Genesis that the chaos was undone by God's creative work.
- Christ frees us from these things and gives us something worth focusing on—Himself.

Too often we use media as a means of escape.

- It is easier to invest in a fictional character's problems that we know will be resolved in 30 minutes than to work through our seemingly unsolvable problems.
- When the TV shuts off.....our problems are still there.

How much better than, to shut off the distractions and cry out to the God who overcame the world and promises to make all things right.

- You are free to turn off the TV. You are free to shut down the computer.
- You are free to open your Bible and pray to God.
- You are free to sit in silence and process your day with the Lord.

I invite you to keep a small notebook journal.

- Write in there the things from each day to give thanks for.
- Write in there your troubles and needs to organize and bring before the Lord.
- Something similar to the bulletin insert, prayer sheet we have each week which is to organize and help identify a portion of your prayers during the week.
- That list in your bulletin is much more than just something for Sunday morning.

Make prayer the priority by removing those things that are most distracting.

- Find a quiet place to pray. Create a quiet place to pray.

The final obstacle that we earlier identified.....

- God just seems to be too distant. I'm not always sure He is listening or it will make a difference.

Dear fellow redeemed.....

- God has not left us to figure out prayers on our own.
- God is not hiding from us.

God does what He say and He tells us He will listen and answer our prayers.

- God always answers prayer.
- God always answers with what is best and good for us.
- But God rarely answers our prayers the way we expect him to.
- Trust in Him. He is real and an ever present help to you.

The devil will whisper in your ear otherwise; but our God has already defeated the devil.

- When Jesus prayed for us on the cross, He also proclaimed, "It is finished."

The good news is that our confidence in prayer doesn't depend on the strength of our prayer.

- Your hope is secure, not in the power of the praying person but in the God who listens.

So to close, let me summarize a few key points.

- God has given us prayer as a gift and He wants us to use it.
- You can have a faithful and regular prayer life because God has given you prayer as a gift.
- Christ and the Holy Spirit are joining you in your prayers and interceding on your behalf.
- God answers your prayers because He is gracious, not because we deserve it or have to earn it.

The only way you can fail at having a faithful, regular prayer life is not to try.

- It is a cry for help to our victorious Lord from the spiritual battlefield.
- And He is listening.

As a regular attendee of worship service, you already have a faithful and regular prayer life.

- What we are talking about here today, no matter where you are at in your prayer life, is to extend it further.

So, how is your prayer life?

- Pray and give thanks to God for the gift of prayer.
- Make them a part of your life.
- Bring all your joys, your problems, your needs, your decisions to be made to Him.
- Just as the perfect Father that He is, He welcomes that.

Ask Him to guide you into a richer and deeper, faithful and regular prayer life.

- You can count on Him. He does what He says and He is already praying for you.
- Amen.

(Please stand) And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Having heard the Word of God we now prepare our hearts and minds to confess together the words of the Nicene Creed as found on page 158 in your hymnal.