

THE LION

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Message from the Rector

“The Problem of Prayer”

Part Three – Conclusion

So far, in the first installment of this series we have discussed what might be called the “mechanical” problems of prayer (i.e., the fact that prayer is work, our sometimes coldness of heart, our wandering minds, etc.) as well as some of the remedies for these problems. In the second installment of this series I began to touch on the topic of the “ethical” problems of prayer. These problems generally fall into two categories: what I call the *vertical* problem of prayer (i.e., a disruption in our relationship with God) and the *horizontal* problem of prayer (i.e., a disruption in our relationship with one another). I also mentioned that these two categories are interrelated and inseparable: unresolved problems in one will most certainly lead to unresolved issues in the other, and the result will be that we will have problems in our prayer lives. In this final installment of the series, I would like to look at the horizontal problem of prayer: a disruption in our relationships with one another.

Once again we turn to Summary of the Law that we hear each and every week, and that is found on page 69 of the *Book of Common Prayer*: “Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ saith. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

The second commandment in the Summary is to love our neighbor as ourself. But what does this mean? Or, more specifically, in what way are we to love our neighbor as ourself? The answer to this question depends entirely upon how we understand the word “love”; and in order to better understand that, a short lesson in New Testament Greek might be helpful.

There are four Greek words that are generally translated into the English word “love,” and three of the four carry an element of emotion with them. The Greek word *eros*, from which we get our English word “erotic,” is generally the most intense form of emotional love (albeit not necessarily in a sexual context), best exemplified by the relationship of the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, and reflected in the love expressed between a husband and wife. This is the highest form of emotive love.

The Greek word *philo*, again often translated into the English word “love,” is specifically “brotherly love.” This is the closest form of friendship. *Storge* is the love that family members share for one another (brothers and sisters, children for parents and vice versa, etc.).

But the Greek word *agape*, the word most used in the Bible for how we are to “love” one another, isn’t a type of love that is founded on emotion, although neither does it exclude it, but is instead founded upon action. In other words, *agape* isn’t necessarily a love that “feels” but is instead a love that “does.” This is why Jesus can command us to “love our enemies” (cf. Mt 5:43-48). If he was commanding us to feel “warm fuzzies” for them, then he would be commanding us to do the humanly impossible. But he isn’t doing that. Instead, what Jesus is commanding us to do is look out for them, wish and do the best for them, try to live in harmony with them, and treat them as we ourselves would like to be treated. In this way, we are “loving our enemies – and our neighbors – as ourselves.”

Message from the Rector - Continued

But if we are not doing these things then we are not “loving our neighbor as ourselves,” and this has a direct impact on our prayer lives. In other words, we simply cannot be out of love and charity with our neighbors while at the same time seeking to be in love and charity with our Lord. It simply doesn't work that way; and the reason is simple: to be out of charity with others is in fact to be out of charity with the Christ in whose image they are made. And to be out of charity with Christ is to have the totality of our religious life impaired, including its most intimate aspect: our life of prayer.

The Scriptures are full of examples of this. In his Sermon on the Mount our Lord tells his disciples that if they remember that their relationship with someone isn't what it should be, they should leave their gift at the altar and be reconciled before even thinking about engaging in worship. And since our prayer is a very intimate act of worship, it follows that we cannot worship correctly – in spirit and in truth, and with a clear conscience – until we have first been reconciled to our brother or our sister (cf. Mt 5:23-24).

But our Lord takes this even one step further by actually identifying himself directly with those around us. Remember what he tells those who were righteous in their own eyes? They asked him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?” Jesus answered them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me” (cf. Mt 25:44-45). In other words, as far as our Lord is concerned, to be out of fellowship with others is to be out of fellowship with him. We cannot accept Christ in prayer but at the same time reject him in those around us. It doesn't work that way: to the extent that our horizontal relationship with others is disrupted or impaired – or ignored – so is our vertical relationship with God disrupted and impaired and ignored. And as I mentioned in my previous article, the result is that God moves away from us until such time as we repair that relationship on both levels: both on the horizontal level with those around us, and on the vertical level with him.

Perhaps we now have a better picture of why our Lord thought it so important to link these two commandments together: the commandment to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and our neighbor as ourself. These two things are interconnected and inseparable from one another, and they play a very important role in our spiritual growth, especially our life of prayer. Disruption in either is perhaps the primary ethical problem of prayer that most of us will encounter. Yet they are entirely within our power to control. May God ever grant us the foresight and the sensitivity to do so.

Well, there we have it: a summary of the problems of prayer as well as some of the steps we can take to help overcome them. There will, of course, be many other specific problems that have not been addressed here, but in one way or another almost all fall into either or both of these two main categories: the mechanical problems of prayer (wandering of mind, coldness of heart, and so forth), or one of the ethical problems of prayer (disruption in our relationship with God or with one another). Of course, there are also many other things that we may perceive as problems of prayer, but are not really problems at all, at least not in the normal sense of what constitutes a real problem. But these are topics for another time.

If, however, upon closer examination we find that our problems really are the result of things falling into either of these two categories – the mechanical problems or the ethical problems – then we should certainly make an honest attempt to reform whatever it is that is amiss, and ask God for a spirit of repentance and restoration so that we may once more be in full communion with him. After all, isn't that why we pray in the first place?

I hope this short series has been helpful to you as we travel along this path of Christian prayer and that, as St Paul encourages us, we will make it a point to “pray without ceasing.” May God grant this as the desire of our hearts, and by his grace may a spirit of prayer be with us always. Amen.

Music Notes

Kathleen Knott, Music Director/Organist

Veni Creator Spiritus

Come Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire.
Thou the anointing Spirit art,
Who dost thy sev'nfold gifts impart. Vs. 1

This ancient hymn has a long history of significance in the Christian church. The Latin text was written by Rabanus Maurus (c. 776-856) who became Archbishop of Mainz. The tune is normally sung as Gregorian Chant. The chant is sung most often when the Holy Spirit is solemnly invoked. Our choir sang the hymn for the Offertory on Pentecost Sunday. "In the Anglican Communion the hymn appears in the Ordering of Priests and in the Consecration of Bishops in the Book of Common Prayer, 1662." A variation on the chant will be sung during Rev. Russell's ordination on June 18th. In the Catholic liturgy, the hymn is used when the Bishop imposes his hands on those to be ordained and imprints the priestly character on their souls.

This famous hymn has also inspired many composers. Berlioz and Mahler set the Latin text to music. The French composer, Duruflé used the chant as a basis for his Organ Variations and Hindemith incorporated the tune in his Organ and Orchestra Concerto.

Calling All Women

At the most recent ACW meeting on Thursday, May 19th, Liz Hansen and Lisa Brenneman had a chance to visit with you about St. Mark's chapter of the Daughters of the Holy Cross. Did you know that all women of St. Mark's are eligible to participate and are invited to prayerfully consider serving in this order? The purpose of this order is to provide women of the Anglican tradition an opportunity to serve at the pleasure of the Priest. The time commitment is not significant; however, the call to serve is a privileged vocation. Please prayerfully consider this vocation.

Parishioner's Responsibility As Members Of St. Mark's

Cal Brown, Treasurer

In addition to receiving God's blessings to each of us and our willingness to give of our time and talents to Him and His church, there is an additional responsibility for each of us to bear.

Most of us give to St. Mark's regularly on a weekly, monthly, or annual basis. In addition, we give specific gifts to missions, Rectors Discretionary Funds, and special church needs. But are we fulfilling our responsibility as members to provide the funds to maintain the physical structures we own, i.e. our church, our parish hall, and our grounds? Are we providing funds to pay our Rectors' and other staff salaries?

Some of us recognize this as our responsibility and give freely. Many do not. Prayerfully consider whether you are giving according to the scriptures and your ability.

A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord. (Lev. 27:30)

Let's do a self-assessment using the scripture guidelines of 10% of your earnings under the table below. Where does your giving fit into the chart? Are you striving to give 6%, 7%, 8%, or even 10% of you annual income? Or are you simply giving a token amount in hopes that others will carry the burden?

Annual Income	10%	Weekly	Monthly	What Do You Give?
\$10,000	\$1,000	\$19	\$83	
\$20,000	\$2,000	\$38	\$167	
\$30,000	\$3,000	\$58	\$250	
\$50,000	\$5,000	\$96	\$417	
\$75,000	\$7,500	\$144	\$625	
\$90,000	\$9,000	\$173	\$750	
\$110,000	\$11,000	\$212	\$917	
\$125,000	\$12,500	\$240	\$1,042	
\$150,000	\$15,000	\$288	\$1,250	
\$200,000	\$20,000	\$385	\$1,667	

Without the committed support of each member, St. Mark's cannot function. We have an expense budget that defines the cost of operating the church, its staff, the diocese, and programs to help others. The revenue required to meet this budget cannot be obtained by only a few freely giving, according to their ability, with the remaining members only giving a token or small amount.

So, in closing, please prayerfully consider your stewardship responsibilities so we can maintain St. Mark's and continue our ministry for our members and others.

God bless all of you.

Upcoming Holy Days

June/July/August/September/October Holy Days

June 11 (10:00 a.m.) – Feast of St Barnabas the Apostle

June 24 (noon) – Feast of the Nativity of St John the Baptist

June 29 (noon) – Feast of St Peter the Apostle

July 4 (10:00 a.m.) – Independence Day

July 25 (noon) – Feast of St James the Apostle

August 6 (10:00 a.m.) – Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ

August 24 (noon) – Feast of St Bartholomew the Apostle

September 21 (noon) – Feast of St Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist

September 29 (noon) – Feast of St Michael and All Angels

October 18 (noon) – Feast of St Luke the Evangelist

October 28 (noon) – Feast of St Simon and St Jude, Apostles

St. Mark's Anglican Church

Rev. Canon Michael L. Ward, SSA

Rector

Rev. Mr. Randall Russell

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