

“Prayer Gives Life”

As I was thinking about today’s gospel lesson I was reminded of this prayer:

Dear Lord,  
So far I've done all right today.  
I haven't gossiped,  
I haven't lost my temper,  
I haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or overindulgent.  
But in a few minutes, God,  
I'm going to get out of bed.  
And from then on,  
I'm going to need a lot of help.

That is a rather clever prayer. I think that many of us can relate to the sentiment. I know I can.

When you pray to God how do you go about it? That is do you say a standard prayer you have memorized e.g. The Lord’s Prayer or “Now I lay me down to sleep?” Or do you say an extemporaneous prayer something you make up as you go along, perhaps being inspired by the thoughts and cares of the day? Perhaps you have a check list of topic areas that guide your daily prayers e.g. thanksgivings, desires, and petitions to name a few. Maybe you simply sit in silence and do not speak or think at all allowing God to speak to you?

One thing I think it is probably fair to say is that none of us pray in quite the convoluted way John has Jesus praying in today’s passage. Honestly, I think this prayer is more for the benefit of the object of the prayer than it is for God or Jesus. That is, Jesus is praying aloud to give the disciples a reminder of who they are, how they are to be, why that is, what is important, and how to maintain the relationship with God and each other once Jesus is off the scene.

Let’s take a quick look at what Jesus says in this prayer.

First Jesus addresses God saying he has made God’s name and teaching known to the disciples that God gave to him. He acknowledges that the disciples know that what Jesus taught was given to him by God the Father. Not only that, but that Jesus was sent by God and comes from God and the disciples believe this.

Jesus then says he will ask God for something on their behalf. He then reiterates that the disciples are God’s and were given to Jesus by God. He says, “All mine are yours, and yours are mine.”

While Jesus has been glorified in the disciples he is leaving the world, but they will remain. Therefore he wants God to protect them from the world. Jesus protects them while he is here, but now he is leaving to go to the Father. They need a protector because the world hates the disciples since they have believed in the word that Jesus has taught to them. Indeed, although they live in the world they do not belong to it. They need protection from the evil one and from the world. They need to be sanctified so they can go out into the world just as Jesus was sent.

Even trying to simplify the prayer the language seems tortured. But it is important for us to understand this prayer, because it is not only Jesus’ prayer for the

first disciples/apostles, but also for you and me as his disciples and apostles in the present time.

Had you thought of this prayer in that way before? If not, how does the idea that this prayer is for you make you feel? [Listen for words like special, humble, surprised, disbelieving, etc. Explore what those feelings mean in the context of the prayer.]

Do you pray for others? Do you think others pray for you? Perhaps it is a parent or a child, a friend, or an acquaintance who is praying for you. If you are on a prayer list it could be someone you do not know. Each week whoever is leading the Prayers of the People here adds my name to the prayers for clergy. The first time I heard it I was surprised. I find it a comfort that some of you are praying for me in ministry. I also find it a challenge to live up to what you are praying for in a rector. I am also humbled that you add me to your prayers, because we all have so many people and situations and concerns to lift up to God.

In my experience Episcopalians are somewhat reticent about speaking a prayer concern out loud in church. Perhaps there is shyness about making a scene. Perhaps it is out of respect for others as they pray in silence. But I urge you to speak aloud your concerns, especially the names of those for whom you are praying. To hear that someone is holding you in their heart by name is powerful. It has healing properties that we can only guess at.

John shows us Jesus praying aloud for the disciples in their presence. I imagine that must have been comforting, challenging and humbling. It may also have given them the strength to carry on their ministry in a world that hated them and wanted to destroy and nullify the message of Jesus. May his prayers encourage and comfort you. May your prayers be encouraging and comforting to others.

Pray as if lives depended on it, because Jesus showed us that they do.