

No.24.

11th March 2021

Dear Friends,

This week we consider liturgical prayer - the public prayer of the Church to which we are all called to participate. We do this chiefly through the Mass, the Holy Eucharist, but there are other forms of public, liturgical prayer - here we have in mind the Prayer of the Church, or Divine Office as it is sometimes called. All ordained priests and deacons and members of religious orders say these prayers daily but so also do many lay people.

To help our Lenten practices of Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving I have included a short look at the Stations of the Cross - together with a an extra piece from Bishop Barron with meditations on the Stations - very helpful.

Bishop Barron's Sunday Sermon is based on the first reading from the Third Sunday of Lent - dealing with the Ten Commandments. He gives a thumbnail sketch of each commandment with thought-provoking comments on each.

Take care and God bless,

John de Waal.

A Symphony of Prayer by Ronald Rolheiser.

Theologians make an important distinction between what are called "devotional" and "liturgical" prayer. Devotional prayer, they tell us, is private in nature and is meant to help sustain us personally on our spiritual journey. Liturgical prayer, by

contrast, is public by nature, is the Church's prayer (not our own), is universal in scope, and is intended for the needs of the world.

Perhaps we might understand this better if we put different names to these. What helps clarify things for me are the terms "affective" and "priestly" prayer. "Affective" prayer refers to private prayer, prayer that's about us, focused precisely on bringing us and our feelings to God. "Priestly" prayer, on the other hand, is about the world and for the world.

Unfortunately, we often confuse these two kinds of prayer. For example, five hundred people might be sitting in meditation together in a church or praying the Rosary together at a shrine and this is still private or devotional prayer. Conversely, someone might be praying the Office of the Church alone at home in an armchair, or a priest might be celebrating the Eucharist alone, and this is still public, liturgical prayer. The distinction, as we see from these examples, is not dependent on the number of people participating, or whether the prayer is taking place in a church, or even whether the prayer is being prayed in a group or privately.

What is priestly prayer then? Priestly prayer is the prayer of Christ through the Church for the world. Our Christian belief is that Christ is still gathering us around his Word and is still offering an eternal act of love for the world. As an extension of that, we believe that whenever we meet together, in a church or elsewhere, to gather around the Scriptures or to celebrate the Eucharist, we are entering into a that prayer and sacrifice of Christ. This is liturgical prayer, and it is Christ's prayer, not ours. We also pray liturgically whenever we pray, in community or in private, something called the Office of the Church.

This kind of prayer is not restricted to the ordained clergy. We are all priests by virtue of our baptism, and part of the implicit covenant we make with the community at our baptism is the commitment, when we reach adulthood, to pray habitually for the world through the liturgical prayer of the Church.

What needs to be highlighted here, because we easily miss this aspect, is that the Church's liturgical prayer is for the world, not for itself. The Church does not exist for its own sake, but as an instrument of salvation for the world. Its function is to save the world, not itself. In liturgical prayer we pray with Christ, through the Church, but for the world.

An analogy might be helpful : Imagine you're part of a symphony orchestra, playing an instrument that contributes to an overall musical score. Night in, night out, you're playing the same piece in the same theatre, helping to create a beautiful symphony for the audience. The public prayer of the Church, priestly prayer, works exactly like that : it makes a symphony of prayer for the benefit of everyone.

(From : "Prayer : Our Deepest Longing, by Ronald Rolheiser).

The Stations of the Cross.

The Stations of the Cross follow the footsteps of Jesus along his journey to the Cross on Good Friday. Traditionally there are fourteen stations or events to ponder. In more recent times there is sometimes a fifteenth station - ending with the Resurrection, an appropriate way to finish.

In earlier centuries it became a custom to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. This began, I think, with St Helen - the mother of the first Christian emperor, Constantine. She travelled to the Holy Land in the 4th century and is said to have discovered the tomb of Jesus and the real cross. Tradition has it that she brought the relics of the true cross back to Rome - and many relics were shared around Christendom. How many are really "true" is a matter of conjecture! Her visit, however, started a custom of making pilgrimage to the Holy Places which has continued down to the present day - some of us were very fortunate enough to go with our parish in 2014 and even followed the Via Dolorosa (the Way of the Cross) in Jerusalem. Throughout the Medieval period people went on the same pilgrimage. Many could not afford either the time or the money - so the tradition of following the Way of the Cross by making the Stations of the Cross in your own parish church became a suitable alternative.

The Stations provide us with a very appropriate spiritual and prayerful exercise - especially during Lent. Like the Rosary, you may wish to split the Stations into parts and spread them over two or three sessions. Bishop Barron's meditations below are very helpful in doing this.

Bishop Robert Barron's Sunday Sermon.

This Sunday Sermon covers the first reading from the Third Sunday of Lent : The Book of Exodus, ch.20. This deals with the Ten Commandments - very basic, very good.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofCZtyDJ7Y4>

As an extra this week there is this you tube from Bishop Barron with meditations on the Stations of the Cross. You may like to spread this over a couple of half hour sessions. This would make a wonderful Lenten exercise.

<https://stations.wordonfire.org>

Final Prayer - taken from Compline (the Night Prayer of the Church).

Antiphon. Save us, Lord, while we are awake; protect us while we sleep; that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with him in peace.

Nunc Dimittis.

At last, all-powerful Master,
you give leave to your servant
to go in peace, according to your promise.

For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared for all nations, the light to enlighten the Gentiles and give glory to Israel, your people.

Antiphon. Save us, Lord, while we are awake; protect us while we sleep; that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with him in peace.

A short time for silent prayer.

Concluding prayer.

Lord our God,
restore us again by the repose of sleep after the fatigue of our daily work;
so that, continually renewed by your help, we may serve you in body and soul.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen

Blessing. Lord, grant us a quiet night and a perfect end. Amen.

A final thought.

Jesus “exhorts both his disciples that followed him and all that desire to follow him to bear the cross, saying : ‘If any one will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’ (Luke 9.23)

“So that when we have read and searched all let this be the final conclusion, that ‘through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.’”

(The Imitation of Christ, Book 2, ch.12).