

Lord, teach us to pray.

You know, prayer is a funny thing. Well, maybe it's really *talking about* prayer that's a funny thing. Many people hesitate to talk about prayer, their prayer. Some of them seem to feel as though prayer should be left to the "professional pray-ers" clergy, religious, certain other "holy"-types. Others hesitate to pray aloud in the presence of others. I think people sometimes are afraid that I'll tell them that I think they are doing it all wrong.

Some years ago we had a young woman living alongside us; she had taken time off from her job to discern what was next. She wasn't interested in becoming a sister but she wanted to really take some time to focus on where her life was headed, a time of discernment. One afternoon we were talking and she said: "You know, I'm a terrible pray-er. There is all this need in the world and so many people need help and things and I just don't know where to start." She went on to elaborate about some of the what she called "lame" ways of praying that she did were – to think about those she loves who had needs; to worry about them and lift them up into God's consciousness, to take them to the doctor, to write in her journal, to look up prayers in the prayer book that spoke to her, to sit in quiet helplessness. As she spoke, I felt my jaw drop. It dropped closer and closer to my chest and when she stopped I said: You are a wonderful pray-er. I felt like she put *me* to shame.

There are lots of types of prayer: Praise, Penitence, Petition, Intercession, Thanksgiving. We can pray for ourselves, for others, for the living and the dead, for the sick and the whole, for those who are at risk, for God's good creation, for leaders and followers, for things done and left undone, for those who govern, those who teach and those who learn, the unloved, those who may have no one to pray for them, those who are alone and afraid and those who are too cocky for their own good, the homeless, prisoners, captives, refugees, for those we love and for those we find it very hard to love. We pray because we are so grateful that God is God. We pray not because we believe we *deserve* God's love or forgiveness, but because God loves and forgives us anyway. We can pray using our own words, the words in the prayer book or hymnal, the words of others, or no words at all.

Dom John Chapman was a Benedictine monk and spiritual director in the early 20th century. He is often quoted as having said "Pray as you can, not as you cannot." Teresa of Avila, the founder of the Discalced Carmelite Order, went through an extended period during which she said she had no consolation from God. Extended period as in 15 to 20 years, yet she is quoted as saying "prayer is nothing else than being on terms of friendship with God."

The disciple who asks Jesus: "Teach us to pray" is unnamed; it could have been any one of them. It could be any of us today, too. Jesus responds with what we now call The Lord's Prayer. A simple, basic prayer that covers the essentials and more. Part of its beauty is that stays in the present moment. No projection, no bargaining, no what-iffing. Simple basic requests that will ultimately bring about the reign of God. That little prayer Jesus gave to those disciples so many years ago, the one many of us learned at our grandmother's knee, is a gem. It is awesome in its simplicity and accessibility. Sometimes hearing a different translation or interpretation of such a familiar prayer can shake our brain up enough that we stop saying it on automatic pilot, and listen to the words again fresh, and perhaps pay a little more attention to what we are asking.

I like the version in the New Zealand Prayer Book; it goes like this:

Eternal Spirit

Earth-Maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all.
Loving God, in whom is heaven.

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the earth!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and testing, strengthen us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
now and forever. Amen.

Holy One: Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.

Help us to know you as you are and share your ways with those around us here on Earth.

Give us what we need for today; give others what they need also. If we all work together there will be enough.

Give us grace to work toward reconciliation and abundant life for all people. In you it is possible to live together in harmony.

When we are tempted to derail, give us strength and gently guide us back on track.

For we know that you are Holy, now and evermore.

“Ask, seek, knock” says Jesus. This persistence is not so that we are assured that we will get precisely what we *think* we must have, but that our ears, our minds, and our hearts will be opened and that we will come to see what our true needs are and how we have the capacity to supply them. The ultimate gift that we can expect from God is the Holy Spirit, who herself has gifts to bestow. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit named in the book of the Prophet Isaiah are: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Knowledge, True Godliness, Ghostly Strength and Holy Fear¹. The Community of the Holy Spirit sometimes names them this way: Wisdom, Discernment, Insight, Encouragement, Passion, Wonder and Godliness.

God teaches our hearts by sending us the promised gift of the Holy Spirit; may we use her gifts daily in such a way that we may have a right judgment in all things and rejoice in her holy comfort, for that would certainly make a difference in our lives and the lives of those we touch. That difference causes ripples beyond our own circles and touches those at farther distances. Sometimes it takes many individuals taking baby steps to effect a great change. Each of us using the gifts of the Holy Spirit as a filter through which we pass all our prayers and our decisions might be just the baby step we need now to help bring about the reign of God on Earth.

¹ Isaiah 11: 1 - 9

In a recent statement to the Episcopal Church, our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, reminded us that “prayer is not an escape from the world, but a way of deeper engagement with it by drawing us closer to God and closer to each other.”² This is true and this is important. God listens to prayer and prayer changes things. Most importantly prayer changes us.

But prayer alone is not enough. We must also *act* in union with our prayer. If we pray that God forgive us as we forgive others, then, we’ve got to put our money where our mouth is and forgive others. Forgiveness is not about *forgetting about a wrong*; it is about liberating us from holding on to a burden that will continue to drag us down indefinitely. Forgiveness enables us to move on.

We live in a horrific time in many ways: gun violence nearby and far away. There are more senseless shootings all the time. As of June 1st there have been 186 school shootings since Newtown, Ct. Black Lives Matter. They do. Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Philando Castile, Alton Sterling to name a few. Mass shootings in: Aurora, Charleston, Orlando, Cleveland. Shooting of Police Officers in: Brooklyn, Dallas, Baton Rouge. International mass shootings in: Paris, Brussels, Bagdad, Istanbul, Nice, and now Munich. These and many, many more.

This is wrong and it must stop. Now. It seems to me that the first step ought to be getting the assault weapons banned and rounded up – off the streets. People don’t need automatic weapons for recreation or hunting. We must, as our bishops in the Diocese of New York stated so well recently: “re-embrace the risen life to which *we* have been called, to join with one another to build true inclusive community in our churches and bear witness to that before the world, to be repairers of the breach, to trust God and God’s Kingdom Come, to never forget to love neighbor and enemy, to be advocates and servants of justice for all people, and to be ever in the things *we* do and the things *we* say witnesses to the love of God for all people, witnesses to the life and love of the Prince of Peace.”³

Lord, have mercy, that we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Lord, teach us to pray.

Again.

Today.

Amen.

² June 15, 2016 Video by Presiding Bishop Michael B. Curry following attacks in Nice, France.

³ June 13, 2016 Letter to Diocese of NY from Bishops Dietsche, Shin, and Glasspool following shootings in Orlando, Florida.