

We are bold to pray

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson in Saint John's Episcopal Church, Franklin, Massachusetts on the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, July 25, 2010.

For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Luke 11:10

Of prime importance in being educated to mature Christianity is to know how to pray. When one of the disciples asks Jesus to teach them to pray, Jesus teaches them his own prayer. There are many versions of what we know as the Lord's Prayer. Today's New Revised Standard Version reads, *Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.* In our Prayer Book liturgy you might think that we use one from the King James Version of the Bible authorized in 1611 during the reign of King James I of England. But that reads differently: *Our Father, which are in heaven, thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.*

In whatever version, this most widely known prayer in all Christianity addresses God as Father and Creator. The God who creates and redeems us also sustains and guides us. God who knows us better than we know ourselves loves us better than we can love ourselves.

We then ask that God's name be revered and honored, holy and set apart as sacred. Because the name of God is holy, it must never be used casually, or worse yet, never used in cursing and swearing. To use God's name in vain is blasphemy and is a serious offense because it is wrong to ask God to condemn or curse anyone or anything. This is God's universe and not ours, so we are addressing the One who brought us into being and sustains us. We therefore approach God with awe and reverence.

We then ask that God's kingdom and realm be realized here on earth as it is in heaven. The realm of heaven, more than a physical place, is a relationship with God in which we have the perfect model of what God intends for us by which we gain our worth and value. God's realm exists on its own and we pray that we may be part of it. We pray that God's will, not ours, be done and that the realms of heaven and earth be drawn together.

We then ask God to provide us with our daily needs as represented in the bread. When you receive the bread of the Eucharist today, remember that it is so much more than the physical body of Christ. It represents Christ's whole person who provides us with all our basic physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

We then ask for forgiveness. When we alienate ourselves from God and each other through our own sin, we are reconciled through the example of Christ giving himself up on the cross. If we accept our own forgiveness and pardon, we must be willing to extend it to others. Remember that the next time you say you will never forgive someone for what you think is an unforgivable offense.

And then we pray to be spared temptation. There is no sin in being tempted, only in yielding to it. God does not lead us into being tempted; we really do quite well with that on our own! We can ask that we not be left in temptation, but we can't expect to be saved from being tested. We are tested and judged every day.

The object of prayer is not to give orders to God or second-guess God's knowledge and concern, but to make known our own needs and desires and those of others. In our age of advanced communications and social networking, we are still far from perfecting the fine art of communication with those we know and love. Just as when the power goes off and we can't communicate with the outside world, when we have an angry encounter with someone and aren't on speaking terms, we isolate ourselves by cutting off all communication. When we are angry with God for what we feel is an injustice and stop praying, we cut off all communication and isolate ourselves. Though we may pull away, God never abandons us.

Most of us probably don't recall when we learned to say the Lord's Prayer. A little child who prayed the Lord's Prayer every night once asked, "Was I born knowing the Lord's Prayer?" He didn't remember learning the prayer he said every night before going to sleep.

Jesus emphasizes the importance of asking God for what we need when he taught, *Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.* No matter what the concern, we must never hesitate to call upon God for help and guidance. Often, there are times when we have to take the initiative to find a solution and not expect to be bailed out. We too easily blame our situation on our circumstances when we can make the necessary circumstances we need to make a situation better.

By engaging in prayer, we stay close to the heart of God and are in a better position to understand our options. God knows our needs before we ask and our weakness in asking and always answers our prayers with either "yes," "no," or "wait." If we are not listening, we won't hear the answer.

In prayer, be regular, be bold, be simple, and be humble. Too often we turn to prayer only when we are desperate and feeling hopeless. Whether we are facing difficulty, having to work out way through a dilemma or performing the most mundane of tasks, always begin with prayer.

An ancient Christian proverb in the Latin is: *Lex orandi, lex credendi*- the rule of prayer precedes the rule of belief. When we pray earnestly, we grow in faith. When we find our faith ebbing, it is important to remain involved with the church in spite of our doubts and uncertainties. When our day is bound together with prayer, it is less likely to unravel, especially when we are being pulled in different directions.

Pray, then, as if your life depends upon it...because it does!