

Common Prayer – The Bride Dialoguing With The Groom – May 18, 2008

As Christians we are part of the world-wide church of the Lord Jesus Christ. I would be remiss if I did not remind you that whenever the Bible talks about “the church” it never refers to a building, but the people of God – those who have trusted in Christ as Savior and Lord. And that is what we are – we, as Christians, are the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, in the Scriptures there are many names for Christians as the Church – we are described as “The People of God”, “The Church of God”, “The Chosen Generation”, “Saints”, “Brethren”, “Brothers and Sisters in Christ”, “Beloved of God”, etc.

But one of the most personal and intimate terms used to describe Christians and the Church is “The Bride of Christ” – and therefore, if we, as Christians are the “The Bride of Christ” then Christ is the Bridegroom.

So then, if we, as a Church – the people of God – talk to Christ through prayer, what we have is simply the bride, dialoguing with the groom – that is, we, as the body of Christ talking to God through the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. Again, we see all three persons of the Trinity active in our lives.

And so then today I would like to talk about Common Prayer – the Bride – that is, US – dialoguing with the groom. It is called “Common Prayer” because it is all of us – those called to be Pastors and those sitting in the pew, or chairs as it were. As an aside, that is why we call it “The Book of Common Prayer” because it is for all us – praying together. To put it bluntly, it is not just a clergy thing – those ordained to the gospel ministry – No, it is for all the people of God.

I would like to begin our study on “Common Prayer” by looking today at something that is very familiar to all of us – The Lord’s Prayer. And how does it begin – “*Our Father ...*” – notice clearly that it does not say “My Father”. No, it says “Our Father ...” — it is a prayer for the church, the body of Christ – all Christians, to pray together. It is a Common Prayer.

Now you might have noticed it is something that we pray at each and every service – Holy Communion, Morning and Evening Prayer, the Litany, etc. The Lord’s Prayer is a prayer that is used in EVERY single service of our church – even, Morning and Evening Family prayers.

So what we have is a picture of the church – the whole church – that is, all Christians – praying together saying The Lord’s Prayer. Think about the fact that when we are praying the Lord’s Prayer in our service, Christians all over the world, in different languages are doing the same. That to me, that is an awesome thought.

Now, our purpose today is not to look at the different petitions in the Lord’s Prayer – that can be a study for another time – but simply to say that it is a prayer that we are commanded to pray by our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice the words that our Savior uses to introduce you to The Lord’s Prayer. In Luke 11:1,2 we read: “*Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach US to pray, as John also taught his disciples.” So He said to them, “When you pray, say: Our Father ...” ... Notice that he says, *when you pray* – in other words, when you as a group pray, say: “Our Father ...”*

This is exactly what we see in throughout the scriptures, that of The Church – that is, the Christians, praying together. For example, in Acts 1, after the ascension of Christ we read: 1:12-14: *“Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.”*

In Acts 2:42 we read of the practice of the early Christians: *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”* They all were together in prayer.

In Acts 4:24 we read of the early Christians: *“So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them...” – Another example of the church, that is, those early Christians, praying together. And what happened, the church grew.*

The point of all this of all this is that God’s people, the Church, prayed together, just as we do on Sunday Mornings, and at Evening Prayer. We find through the scriptures that there were appointed hours of prayer. Often times, we read they went to the Temple or the Synagogue to pray – but it was something that they did each and every day.

Time does not permit us to go through all the verses that command us to pray. But here are a few. Philippians 4:6: *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;”* Colossians 4:2: *“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving;”* 1 Thessalonians 5:17: *“pray without ceasing,”*

Hebrews 4:14-16: *“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

And one last passage, Hebrews 10:19-22: *“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”*

Prayer – daily prayer – as commanded by God, is something that should be part of our each of our lives. Just like we are to brush our teeth at least two times a day, we should be praying every day.

Ideally, as God’s people, The Church, we should be gathering at least two times a day to pray together. We find that this was the practice in various stages in church history. This was the purpose of DAILY Morning Prayer and DAILY Evening Prayer. But, it is totally impractical for us to do that today.

However, what I am suggesting is that we all set aside a few minutes in the morning and in the evening to pray. If you can get together with others, great. But if not, you should be praying morning and evening on your own. This is the challenge that I set before you this day. It is a discipline that we should all have.

I will tell you that as you strive to do this, that you will encounter opposition from the devil. He is very real, and will do anything and everything to try to keep us from praying because he knows that it is through prayer that we show our love for God, and get the strength to live in this world that God has created.

St. Theophan the Recluse said many years ago: *“If you are not successful in your prayer, do expect success in anything. It is the root of all.”* And as you try to be successful, you can expect opposition from the devil.

And the Scriptures teach us how to pray. Not only did he teach us the Lord’s Prayer, which were are to pray, but he also taught us about individual prayer. Jesus said this in: Matthew 6:5,6: *“And when you pray, (not if) you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”*

Now, you might say to me, I don’t know how to pray. Following the service in our coffee hour I will give you a little bit of instruction of the things that are available to help you.

If it has not been your habit to pray, begin by praying The Lord’s Prayer in the morning and in the evening. As I said there is Morning and Evening Prayer in the Book of Common Prayer. In the back there is also Morning and Evening Family Prayer – two versions. You can use the Lectionary in the front of the Prayer Book to find a Scripture Passage. And there are other helps available. I will go over this more in our coffee hour.

You can read the Collect for the Day, which we are to use throughout the week. And here I would say, that if you do not have a Book of Common Prayer, we will provide one for you.

Specific things that you can pray for are on the Prayer and Praise Sheet that you get each week. You can also pray for family members and neighbors, especially those who do not know Christ. Remember, the Lord know our hearts and He helps to pray. We have the Holy Spirit of God, and listen to what Romans 8:26 says: *“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”* In other words, God gives us the help that we need to pray.

But the point of it all is that as a Church – as God’s People – as the Bride of Christ, we should be dialoguing with the groom. We should be praying daily – at least twice a day – coming boldly before the throne of grace. Let us commit ourselves to do this, for our own benefit and the benefit of this branch of the church of Christ, St. Timothy’s.