



THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE

*Daily Devotion at Zion + January 31, 2020 AD + **Epiphany Season***

This Week: Praying for Others

J.O.Y. — Jesus, Others, Yourself, in that order.

How many Sunday School teachers have taught that acronym to their students? However simple, even trite, it may appear, it bears the truth. A well-ordered soul leads to joy, and the order of joy keeps God in first place, others in second, and ourselves last. “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). Humility comes from God, who humbled Himself to the point of death—even death on a cross!—and counted us more significant than Himself (Philippians 2:5-8). As His life takes hold of us, we follow in its path—first God, then others, and only then ourselves.

A good place to put this order to work is in our prayer.

The last “Shepherd’s Voice” focused on praying for God. He does not need our prayer, and yet kindly He welcomes our prayers for His glory, praise, and honor. In that prayer, God communes with us and makes His life our own. This week, we look at praying for others. There’s no science to it: just open your heart and pray for the folks around you. Yet just as everyone can eat, and yet we can learn how to eat better, so can we learn how to pray better for our family, neighbors, strangers, and enemies, and thus have more and more joy.

About the Cover Art

In “Prayer in Church” (1947), artist Gerard Sekoto depicts a black congregation of all ages at prayer, a preacher leading the prayers from his pulpit. Viewers will note, in the bottom third of the painting, one little boy who isn’t praying, tugging at a sibling or playmate. The child-who-isn’t-praying is a common figure in paintings of worship (sometimes, it’s a young adult), reminding us that a congregation is at prayer even if the whole congregation doesn’t pray, for the members of a congregation don’t only pray for themselves but for all, even those who more or less playfully stray.

“Intercession” and the Priesthood of All Believers

Prayer is part of God’s inner life—that is, God prays. In the Holy Bible, we read that “the Spirit intercedes for us” and for all the saints (Romans 8:26-27), as does our Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Romans 8:34). To *intercede* is to pray on behalf of someone else, and specifically to pray for help in time of trial. Within the life of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Spirit and Son both pray to the Father on our behalf—amazing!

The Bible pictures this praying ministry of our Lord Jesus by calling Him our “high priest” (Hebrews 5:1-10, 7:11-28: “He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, as He always lives to make intercession for them” (7:25). What won’t the Father give His Son? Our example in praying for others remains this Jesus, our faithful high priest who prays for us. Joining Him in the work of praying for the world, we join Him in His priestly labor and become, with Him, priests of God.

Daily Readings for the Week of February 7 (Epiphany 5)

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| S Isaiah 57:1-13
Hebrews 12:1-6
John 7:37-46 | 2 Timothy 2:14-26
Mark 10:17-31 |
| M Isaiah 57:14-21
Galatians 6:11-18
Mark 9:30-41 | F Isaiah 61:1-9
2 Timothy 3:1-17
Mark 10:32-45 |
| T Isaiah 58:1-12
2 Timothy 1:1-14
Mark 9:42-50 | Sa Isaiah 61:10-62:5
2 Timothy 4:1-8
Mark 10:46-52 |
| W Isaiah 59:1-21
2 Timothy 1:15-2:13
Mark 10:1-16 | |
| Th Isaiah 60:1-22 | |

These readings correspond to pages 349-383 in Volume I of For All the Saints. To acquire For All the Saints or other devotionals, please contact the church office.

The Way of Praying for Others

1. Look for whom you might miss. The first step is to let the Lord open your eyes to “others.” As Christ teaches in the parable of the Good Samaritan, all people to whom we may show mercy are our neighbors (Luke 10:25-37). With Jesus, we who are His body, the Church, pray for everyone. Christians therefore include their family, friends, and nation in their prayer, but do not limit it those people. Pause to see whom you might be overlooking, and especially those who have no one else to pray for them.

2. Break the “Wishing Well” approach. We may certainly pray for anything and everything good, but prayer is more than a “wishing well” at which we only ask for the comforts of this life. Primarily, we pray for God to send His Holy Spirit upon others and to accomplish in them His gracious will—simply put, we pray for God to give others faith in His Son, hope in His Word, and a life of love. Then pray also for God to bless them with the comforts of home, family, health, wisdom, etc.

3. Pray big, pray small. As you pray for both the blessings of this world and those of the world to come, go big and go small. Pray for your nephew to have faith; pray for the whole nation of China to believe. Pray for your grandmother’s surgery; pray for the health and wellbeing of the whole world.

4. Remember the Church. God has set us not only within families, neighborhoods, and nations, but also within the Church. Pray for the Church and its ministry, that it may be faithful, safe, and fruitful in its witness.

5. Don’t forget strangers and enemies. “Bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:28). “Be sure to welcome strangers” (Hebrews 13:2). When Christians pray for others, we pray as Jesus prayed, asking God to bless our enemies with repentance and joy, and we pray for any whom we meet throughout the day. Imagine a day, asking God to bless all whom you meet. They may not know, but the One who needs to will!