



THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE

*Daily Devotion at Zion + February 7, 2021 AD + **Epiphany Season***

This Week: Praying for Yourself

Do you dare pray for yourself?

The Lord invites you—no, He even commands you—to do so. “Cast all your cares on Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6). “If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him” (Luke 11:13). Indeed, we see our Lord Jesus Himself praying for Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night in which He was betrayed (Mark 14:32-42). By His own example, Christ teaches us to pray for ourselves.

Yet remember: prayer is the Lord’s workshop, not ours.

The apostle Paul prayed three times for the Lord to relieve him of a long-felt grief, and God responded, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). The disciples had surely joined their fellow Jews in praying for the consolation and deliverance of Israel, and God responded by making them martyrs and confessors for His Son. Job cried out to God for an explanation, and God called him to repent. Yes, we pray for ourselves, with hope and trust, and in so doing, we will surely find God doing even more than we expect.

About the Cover Art

Artist Ruth Palm chose two titles for this painting: “Intercessory Prayer” and “Ascending.” It’s a study in opposites held together: bright colors speak of joy, but splatters, drips, and twisted figures evoke struggle and agony. Then as the prayers of the multicolored figures rise, so do their colors bleed together, picturing the communion of saints—or is it a fall-colored tree of life?—or are the colors bleeding downward, reminding us of Christ’s sanctifying blood? Don’t miss the cloudy blue hand in the upper-right corner, a symbol of God’s providence, both receiving the prayers and reaching to help.

Praying for Yourself to Lose Yourself

“Whoever wants to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.” (Luke 17:33). The way of following Jesus is the way of the cross. He says, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself” (Luke 9:23), and St. Paul writes, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives within me” (Galatians 2:20). The life, mission, and goals of Christ supplant our own as the Holy Spirit unites us with Him by faith.

Prayer serves as one place where our Lord performs this good work. By teaching us to pour ourselves out to God in prayer, laying on Him our cares, concerns, and worries, Christ leads us to let ourselves go and lose ourselves in Him. It is a true crucifixion, a spiritual burial, yet in the hands of Him who was crucified for us only to rise again, it serves also as a resurrection. Our lives commended into God’s hands, we are freed to trust and seek Christ in every circumstance, our selves no longer our concern.

Daily Readings for the Week of February 14 (Transfiguration)

S Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14
2 Corinthians 3:1-9
John 12:27-36a

Titus 1:1-16
John 1:29-34

M Deuteronomy 6:1-15
Hebrews 1:1-14
John 1:1-18

F Deuteronomy 7:12-16
Titus 2:1-15
John 1:35-42

T Deuteronomy 6:16-25
Hebrews 2:1-10
John 1:19-28

Sa Deuteronomy 7:17-26
Titus 3:1-15
John 1:43-51

W Jonah 3:1-4:11
Hebrews 12:1-14
Luke 18:9-14

Th Deuteronomy 7:6-11

These readings correspond to pages 374-486 and 771-787 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 Yourself

1. **Look first at what you're given.** We can so often look at life, its blessings, and its problems as *ours*: *I have this problem, I earned this thing*. The life of prayer militates against this perspective and opens us to a better one. By turning us to the Author of life, it teaches us to see all life as *given*, and therefore, it teaches us root our prayer, beginning, middle, and end, in *praise* and *thanksgiving*.
2. **Next, pray for yourself by praying *against* yourself.** If Jesus were happy with how things are for you, He would never have died in order to save you from sin, death, and the devil. Some of the harder but most wholesome work of praying for ourselves is seeing where we are not yet what God would have us be, and then commend ourselves, with all of that sin and incompleteness, to God's work. Repent, grieve, and ask Him to do in you what He would have done, trusting that His power to heal are greater than sin or failure.
3. **Pray for what Jesus promises you.** Along with praying against yourself, you pray for what God promises to do for you. Pray *for* His forgiveness, *for* His wisdom and understanding, and *for* His peace and protection. Pray for Him to preserve His word and sacraments in your life—pray for Him to help you pray! Pray for faith, hope, and love, and pray for blessed death and joyful resurrection.
4. **Pray what's on your mind.** Having given thanks for what's given, grieved what's lacking, and asked what Jesus promises to give, gather up all those things weighing on your mind and pour them out to God. Truly *cast* them upon the Lord, tossing them out, telling Him everything that's bothering or blessing you, and ask Him to help you leave them there, in His hands and on His back.
5. **Don't forget the Lord's Prayer!** It's meant for you! Gather yourself into that prayer, and having lost yourself in the Lord's own praying, find yourself in His dying and living.