

Praying Without Ceasing

A Communion Meditation by the Rev. John P. Dick
Theme: Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven...

Yes?

Don't interrupt me. I'm praying.

But - - you called ME!

Called you? No, I didn't call you. I'm praying.

Our father who art in heaven...

There - - You did it again!

Did what?

Called ME. You said, "Our Father who art in Heaven"

Well, here I am. What's on your mind?

*But I didn't mean anything by it. I was, you know, just saying my prayers for the day.
I always say the Lord's Prayer. It makes me feel good, Kind of like fulfilling a duty..*

Well, all right. Go on.

Okay, Hallowed be thy name.

Hold it right there. What do you mean by that?

By what?

By "Hallowed be thy name"?

*It means, it means... good grief, I don't know what it means. How in the world should I
know? It's just a part of the prayer. By the way, what does it mean?*

It means honored, holy, wonderful.

Hey, that makes sense. I never thought about what "hallowed" meant before.

Thanks. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, On earth as it is in Heaven.

Do you really mean that?

Sure, why not?

What are you doing about it?

*Doing? Why, nothing, I guess. I just think it would be kind of neat if you got control of
everything down here like you have up there. We're kinda in a mess down here you
know.*

Yes, I know; But, have I got control of you?

Well, I go to church.

*That isn't what I asked you. What about your bad temper? You've really got a problem
there, you know. And then there's the way you spend your money - All on your self.*

And what about the kind of books you read?

Now hold on just a minute! Stop picking on me!

I'm just as good as some of the rest of those people at church!

Excuse ME. I thought you were praying for my will to be done.

If that is to happen, it will have to start with the ones who are praying for it.

Like you - for example.

*Oh, all right. I guess I do have some hang-ups.
Now that you mention it, I could probably name some others.*

So could I.

I haven't thought about it very much until now, but I really would like to cut out some of those things. I would like to, you know, be really free.

Good. Now we're getting somewhere. We'll work together - you and ME.

I'm proud of you.

Look, Lord, if you don't mind, I need to finish up here. This is taking a lot longer than it usually does. Give us this day, our daily bread.

You need to cut out the bread. You're overweight as it is.

Hey, wait a minute! What is this? Here I was doing my religious duty and all of a sudden you break in and remind me of all my hang-ups.

*Praying is a dangerous thing. You just might get what you ask for.
Remember, you called ME – and here I am. It's too late to stop now.*

Keep praying. (pause) Well, go on.

I'm scared to.

Scared? Of what?

I know what you'll say.

Try ME.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

"What about Sue?"

See? I knew it! I knew you would bring her up!

Why Lord, she's told lies about me, spread stories. She never paid back the money she owes me. I've sworn to get even with her!

But – your prayer – What about your prayer?

I didn't - - mean it.

Well, at least you're honest. But it's quite a load carrying around all that bitterness and resentment, isn't it?

Yes, but I'll feel better as soon as I get even with her.

Boy, have I got some plans for her. She'll wish she had never been born.

No, you won't feel any better. You'll feel worse. Revenge isn't sweet.

You know how unhappy you are - - Well, I can change that.

You can? How?

Forgive Sue. Then, I'll forgive you. And the hate and the sin will be Sue's problem – not yours. You will have settled the problem as far as you are concerned.

Oh, you know, you're right. You always are.

And more than I want revenge, I want to be right with you. (sigh)

All right... all right... I forgive her.

There now! Wonderful! How do you feel?

Hmmmmmm. Well, not bad. Not bad at all! In fact, I feel pretty great!

You know, I don't think I'll go to bed uptight tonight

I haven't been getting much rest, you know.

Yeah, I know. But you're not through with your prayer are you? Go on....

Oh, all right. And let us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

Good! Good! I'll do that. Just don't put yourself in a place where you can be tempted.

What do you mean by that?

*You know what I mean.
Yea. I know.
Okay... Go ahead. Finish your prayer.
For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.
Do you know what would bring me glory – - What would really make me happy?
No, but I'd like to know. I want to please you now.
I've really made a mess of things. I want to truly follow you.
I can see now how great that would be. So, tell me...
How do I make you happy?
YOU just did.
Now, say it after me... AMEN!
AMEN!*

Prayer... wouldn't it be wonderful if every time we prayed we could be in a dialogue with God. If only we could hear the voice of God or read the mind of God to more clearly understand the holy response to all of our thoughts.

Evidently there are a lot of people endeavoring to do just that. According to the most recent national survey by the Barna Group (Barna Organization Update, April 26, 2010), more people claim to be closely connected to Jesus than have a Facebook page or Twitter account. In an age of social networking when people are feeling more connected to each other than ever before, this is pretty significant.

That's right, this recent survey discovered that two out of every three adults (that's 67%) claim to have a "personal relationship" with Jesus that is currently active and that influences their life. And in order to enhance this relationship... in order for it to be meaningful... there must be effective two-way communication. And that brings us to prayer. In any given week, an overwhelming majority of Americans claim to pray... more than 80% of us according to Barna's latest statistics. And get this... the majority also believes that Jesus speaks back to them. That's right... 59% said they are either "completely certain" or "somewhat certain" that Jesus responds.

In our Sunday school class we have been talking about prayer over the past couple of weeks, and it can safely be said that all of us in that small gathering believe in the efficacy of prayer. But it is also fascinating to see the different ways we embrace and understand the meaning of prayer.

For example, most everyone sees prayer as "conversation with God". That's pretty basic. Others understand it to be "communion with God". Another classic description, don't you think? Still others suggested it is for them a time for "inner reflection". I confess that this is a perspective I often bring to prayer. But then there was another response which I hadn't heard before but which I love.

Arnold Decker said, "for me, prayer is tuning my heart to God." As we pursued that picture of prayer, we envisioned an orchestra getting ready for a concert. The first chair violin plays the perfect note and suddenly there is a cacophony of sound as the rest

of the orchestra tunes to that perfect pitch. You know what it sounds like when they first begin... But slowly each musician finds the pitch they are to embrace and the chaos gives way to beauty.

If you will allow your imagination to capture that image, you can see that God is the One who plays the perfect note to which we all resonate. And as we find ourselves in tune, beautiful music ensues. Isn't that a great metaphor.

Then there is something else we discovered through our conversation around prayer. As the presenters on the video suggested, prayer is much more than simply a conversation with God. It is an intentional effort to move into intimacy with our Creator. Prayer when properly and more fully understood is an ongoing endeavor to consciously stand in the presence of God so we are aware of the Divine every waking moment. To be sure, this is more than a challenge and most of us, if not all of us, find it impossible to be constantly conscious of the holy. But when Paul is talking about "praying without ceasing" and about "rejoicing always" and about "giving thanks in all circumstances," this is what he is pointing us toward.

It's not that we are literally speaking to God constantly every moment of the day. It's that we are endeavoring to be mindful that we are shrouded by the holy in every moment of life. There is never a time when we are out of the presence of God. Put another way, we can be intimately related to our Creator, Sustainer and Savior at any and every instant and that's what it means to pray without ceasing.

As we approach the communion table this morning, I want to invite you to seriously embrace this opportunity to *rejoice always, to pray without ceasing and to give thanks in all circumstances* with the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. Toward that end, I leave you with the words of Henri Nouwen for he describes this movement in and out of prayer as beautifully as anyone I've ever heard. In his words, "Let me say a few things systematically about prayer. A biblical text that has been very, very important for me is the story in Luke 6:12-19 where Jesus spent the night in prayer on the top of the mountain. In the morning, he came down and created a community of apostles around him. Then, in the afternoon, with his apostles, he ministered - - he went out and healed and proclaimed the Good news. I've been fascinated by that because it basically says: prayer at night, community in the morning, ministry in the afternoon. (But it all starts first with) communion with God - - prayer - - or being in solitude with God..."

You see, from the intimacy of conversation with God, our life unfolds with a sense of community which encourages us to be engaged in ministry. This is praying without ceasing... it is bringing the voice of God alive for the world to hear and it is making the witness of Jesus plausible for the world to see every moment of every day.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you! Amen and AMEN!