

Prayer

O Heavenly Father, who hast filled the world with beauty; Open, we beseech thee, our eyes to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works; that rejoicing in thy whole creation, we may learn to serve thee with gladness; for the sake of him by whom all things were made, thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer

Shortly before his death by execution on 9 April 1945 (by direct orders of Adolph Hitler and, by the way, this order was one of the last orders Hitler gave before he took his own life), Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer penned these words:

Who am I? They often tell me
I stepped from my cell's confinement
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
Like a squire from his country-house.

Who am I? They often tell me
I used to speak to my warders
Freely and friendly and clearly,
As though it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me
I bore the days of misfortune
Equally, smilingly, proudly,
Like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really all that which other men tell of?
Or am I only what I myself know of myself?
Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
Struggling for breath, as though hands were
compressing my throat,

Yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,
Thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness,
Tossing in expectation of great events,
Powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,
Weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,
Faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?

Who am I? This or the other?
Am I one person today and tomorrow another?
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
And before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling?
Or is something within me still like a beaten army,
Fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am Thine!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

Prayer

From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, oh God of truth, deliver us.

Ancient Prayer

When it appears as nothing is happening, when your prayers are not being answered, when heaven seems shut to your cries, when the night is at its darkest, rest assured, the Light of the Radiance of the Living God is shining.

James Nickel

The Christian faith is not a weak-kneed faith; it is not marginal, but central to life and culture because Jesus Christ is Lord of all. Christianity is a strong-kneed faith founded upon the knees of Biblical prayer. It is through this type of prayer, combined with obedient action, that God's full-orbed kingdom is advanced on the earth to bless all nations (Psalm 2, Acts 4, Matthew 6:9-10, Matthew 28:18-20).

James Nickel

O God, who takest delight in helping the afflicted, help a soul too often distressed with an inward rebellion against Thy just appointments. Who am I, that I should make exceptions against the Will of God, infinitely great, wise and good? I know not the things that are for my good. My earnest desires, if granted, may prove my ruin. The things I complain of and fear, may be the effects of the greatest mercy. The disappointments I meet with, may be absolutely necessary for my eternal welfare. I do therefore protest against the sin and madness of desiring to have my will done, and not the will of God. Grant, gracious Father, that I may never dispute the reasonableness of Thy will, but ever close with it, as the best that can happen. Prepare me always for what Thy providence shall bring forth. Let me never murmur, be dejected, or impatient, under any of the troubles of this life; but ever find rest and comfort in this: This is the will of my Father, and of my God; this for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Bishop Thomas Wilson of Sodor and Man (1663-1755)

Almighty and most merciful Father; We have erred, and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against Thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is no health in us. But, thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare thou those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore thou those who are penitent; according to Thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for His sake; that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of Thy holy name.

Book of Common Prayer

I confess to God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and before all the company of heaven, that I have sinned, in thought, word and deed, through my fault, my own fault, my own grievous fault: wherefore I pray Almighty God to have mercy upon me, to forgive me all my sins, and to make clean my heart within me.

Office of Compline

I bind unto myself today
The strong name of the Trinity,
By invocation of the same,
The Three in One and One in Three.

I bind this day to me forever,
By power of faith, Christ's incarnation;

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His baptism in the Jordan river;
His death on the Cross for my salvation;
His bursting from the spiced tomb;
His riding up the heavenly way;
His coming at the day of doom;
I bind unto myself today ...

I bind unto myself today
The power of God to hold and lead,
His eye to watch, His might to stay,
His ear to hearken to my need.
The wisdom of my God to teach,
His hand to guide, his shield to ward;
The word of God to give me speech,
His heavenly host to be my guard.

Against all Satan's spells and wiles,
Against false words of heresy,
Against the knowledge that defiles,
Against the heart's idolatry,
Against the wizard's evil craft,
Against the death-wound and the burning,
The choking wave, the poisoned shaft,
Protect me, Christ, till thy returning.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger ...

The Hymn of St. Patrick (387-461)

The Puritans were not without their faults, but they prayed to the very real and providential God, as witness this prayer of Minister Miles for rain:

O Lord, thou knowest we do not want Thee to send a rain which shall pour down in fury and swell our streams and sweep away our haycocks and fences and bridges; but, Lord, we want it to come down drizzle-drozzle, drizzle-drozzle for about a week. Amen.

Again, note the prayer before the Battle of Monmouth of the Rev. Israel Evans, chaplain of General Enoch Poor's Brigade:

O Lord of Hosts, lead forth thy servants of the American Army to battle and give them the victory; or, if this be not according to Thy sovereign will, then, we pray Thee, stand neutral and let flesh and blood decide the issue.

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The theology of these prayers can probably be criticized. What cannot be gainsaid is that for Miles and Evans God was very real, very personal, and very near. They saw Him as the Providential Father, ever mindful of His own. Without that faith, prayer is an empty exercise.

Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, pp. 148-149

... anxiety is the mark of autonomy. Anxiety seeks to do what only God can do, to perform miracles and to govern by acts of providence the course of human affairs. Worry and anxiety are the marks of prayerlessness; they mark the man who seeks to be the master of his own fate, and the captain of his own soul.

Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, pp. 154-155

We have today the age of aspirin, of migraine headaches, indigestion, ulcers, drugs, alcoholism, and tensions, all marks of distrust and rebelliousness, and all masquerading as sensitivity. Ours is an age of anxiety because even among churchmen providence is remote and vague. But where the doctrine of providence is not the life-blood of man, we have, not faith, but anxiety.

Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, Vol 1, pp. 159-160

How then shall we pray, as the redeemed of the Lord? All too many manuals stress the essential ingredients of prayer, citing praise, thanksgiving, petition, and so on. Their emphasis is sound but also unwise. By stressing the formal components of prayer, they lose the essence of prayer, i.e., *dependence* and *communion*. Where there is dependence, there will be praise, thanksgiving, petition and more. Where there is communion, God's kingdom, word, and Spirit will be crying out in all our being ... If we are not in dependent communion with Him, we are dead men.

Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 155, 157

... we pray best in God's own words, and hence the necessity of Scripture reading to prayer. We pray best, for prayer is communication, when we ourselves hear God speak through His word. If someone does not speak to us, we cannot long speak to him, and if we refuse to hear God in His word, how can we hear or be heard in prayer? The Psalms thus are basic to the life of prayer. Here the Holy Spirit has spoken in and through the lives of God's saints, and here He speaks to us today, and in us if we make them our daily prayer.

Rousas J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 157

101st Airborne Regimental prayer, written by Lt. James Morton

Almighty God, we kneel to Thee and ask to be the instrument of Thy fury in smiting the evil forces that have visited death, misery, and debasement on the people of the earth ... Be with us, God, when we leap from our planes into the dark abyss and descend in parachutes into the midst of enemy fire. Give us iron will and stark courage as we spring from the harnesses of our parachutes to seize arms for battle. The legions of evil are many, Father; grace our arms to meet and defeat them in Thy name and in the name of the freedom and dignity of man ... Let our enemies who have lived by the sword turn from their violence lest they perish by the sword. Help us to serve Thee gallantly and to be humble in victory.

Cited in Stephen F. Ambrose, *Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy to Hitler's Eagle's Nest*, p. 119

Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance; it is laying hold of His highest willingness.

Richard C. Trench

Gracious Father, we pray for the holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where any thing it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of

Prayer

Jesus Christ. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer