

Trinity 19, 2018
The Prayers of the Faithful

Matthew 9:1-8

St. Andrew's Church – Jacksonville, Or

By Fr. Bill Baker

“And behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.”

Have you ever wondered if your prayers really work? Do they ever make a difference? So often we are called upon to pray; to pray for someone in a difficult circumstance, to pray for success at a pivotal point in someone's life, or to simply pray for someone's safety. At other times we are compelled to pray, there is a sense of urgency that someone needs prayerful assistance in a circumstance we are not even aware of. And so we pray. We are told that prayer is a powerful way to communicate within the body of Christ...the banks of a river keeping us within the will of God. Prayer for the believer is essential to our spiritual walks and the evidence of our interconnectedness as Christians. Prayer is communication with God and spiritual communication within the brethren...and our prayers go deeper than mere words.

*“And behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus **seeing their faith** said unto the sick of the palsy; Son be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.”*

Seeing their faith this man is forgiven! The proof of prayer is found in faith, for only those of faith pray. Here we see a sick man, maybe to sick to even pray for himself, having his sins being forgiven because of the Godly faith of those around him. Seeing **their** faith Christ says to the sick man, “Son be of good cheer; **thy** sins be forgiven thee.” His sins are forgiven and he is called a Son of God! Your prayers matter! Your prayers are needed! Your prayers are required! We cannot be a body if we are not connected one to another. The most important thing we can do is pray...prayer is the foundation of everything else we do in the church.

“Therefore, says St. James, confess your sins to each other, and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16). James nailed it! Prayer...we have seen prayer in action. We have seen prayer answered. Our faith assures our prayers and our prayers assure our faith.

But what happens when our prayers are not answered as we imagine the answer should be? For those whose faith is weak, whose prayer life is shallow, doubt creeps in and we begin to question the very existence of God.

“And behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.” It is true...to be a Christian...a follower of Christ, one must have faith. This faith is necessary because we cannot comprehend that which we cannot imagine. And so, Jesus, knowing the thoughts of the doubters *said*, why do you think evil in your hearts? What evil? The doubting of the divinity of Jesus, the doubting of the power of faithful prayer. St. Jerome puts Christ’s words this way in his answer to those who doubt, *“With the same majesty and power by which I perceive your thoughts, I am able to forgive their sins.”*

And then Jesus asks the unbelievers, *“is it easier to say, thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise and walk?”* With God all things are possible. Only Jesus could know that this man’s sins were forgiven. He is the only one who could perceive or even grant such an inward grace. Those standing around would have to take his word for it by faith or choose to deny Christ’s divine power to forgive. *“thy sins be forgiven thee”* is an inward grace unseen by outward appearances. It is the doubter, the shallow in faith who demand an outward display...they need a miracle. And so Jesus, knowing their hearts says, *“But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the Palsy) Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thine house.”*

Faith can be difficult at times. We want to see the miracle. We want to know that our prayers are heard and answered. Sometimes God will glorify our senses and let us see his handy-work in action, but we must keep in mind that the true working of God happens on the inside where God’s eternal work is being done within us. This man with palsy will

still die some day (and has, I am sure, by now) but what is truly important is that his sins were forgiven and he is counted as a child of God!

Your prayers matter at the deepest level and are just as important to the faith today as they were when Christ walked amongst us. Today the Christian faith is suffering its greatest challenges. Grade school children in London are being forced to write LGTB love letters in the classroom (Christianheadlines.com). In China school children are forced to declare that they follow no religion (faithwire.com)...the state replacing religion. In Myanmar rebels are detaining Christian pastors, shaving their heads and destroying their churches (faithwire.com). As if tearing down a building and giving haircuts changes the internal integrity of the faithful! And here in the USA, where Christians are continually being marginalized, we have the Arch of Baal, the god of power, fertility and child sacrifice, being resurrected in cities all over our nation as a tourist stop (onenewsnow.com). With all these atrocities occurring all over the world there is good news; a story of a Chic-fillet employee who followed the commands of our God by feeding a homeless man and giving him his own shoes. Charity is God's love in action and still exists while the faithful remain true.

We pray and worship together here at St. Andrews, but the Christian world is bigger than that. We must have a world view of our brothers and sisters around the globe and pray fervently that Christ is able to do a good work in them despite the persecutions they endure. Prayer is bigger than mortal life...it is life eternal. To rise and walk is temporary...to be forgiven is everlasting.

Last week Fr. Chris told us to obey our thirst by consuming the pure and living water of Jesus Christ. I would add to this and tell you to obey your faith and share the pure and living Word of God in action and in prayer. There will always be doubters to confront us, but it will be God who answers them through our witness. Be faithful in your prayers and through Christ we can move mountains.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.