

MORNING PRAYER
ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY
08.11.24

From the Second Lesson: “The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sounds too deep for words.”

Someone once defined prayer as “lobbying in the courts of the Almighty”. If that is how we think of prayer, then surely the Apostle is right. We do not know how to pray as we ought.

There is nothing magical about prayer, but there is something mystical. It involves the perfect internal communication of the Holy Trinity. When we participate in it properly, we are drawn into the life of God himself.

How do we participate in it properly? I’ll come to that in a moment. But first I want to clarify what I mean when I say that prayer involves the perfect internal communication of the Holy Trinity, and that when we participate in it properly, we are drawn into the life of God himself.

The Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, is of the same divine substance as are the Father and the Son and is their equal in glory. When he dwells in us, He searches our hearts and then reaches out from within to communicate with the Father on our behalf. Deity communicates with deity. God essentially prays for us, or as the Apostle puts it, “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sounds too deep for words.”

And the second Person of the Trinity is not left out because, as St. Paul writes farther on in the passage, Christ Jesus, who is at the right hand of the Father, also intercedes for us. We pray in His name because, as He told us when He walked the earth, no one comes to the Father except through Him. Moreover, when the Son of God was asked to teach His disciples to pray, He gave them the very words to say. We still say those words today: “Our Father, who art in heaven. . . .”

But the Holy Spirit goes beyond words and from the deepest darkness of our souls communicates to the Father the needs and realities of which we ourselves are not aware. “He who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

So, the Word and the Spirit, which go forth from the Father to carry out His will, return to Him in prayer. And so it is said that as Christians we pray to the Father through the Son in the Spirit.

St. Paul says, “The Spirit helps us in our weakness.” It does no good to try to hide our weakness and present ourselves to God as worthy of His favor. The Spirit does not help us when we do that.

The Gospel for today, which we are not reading because we are not participating in the Eucharist, tells about two men who went into the temple to pray. One of them presented himself before God as a good and righteous man, scrupulously obedient to God’s laws. And so he was. But Jesus said that his prayer was not heard.

The other man was ashamed of himself. He presented himself in all humility, standing off to the side with his head bowed and not even looking up. He called himself a sinner and asked for God’s mercy. His prayer was answered. You see, there is no such thing as an entitlement in the Kingdom of God. The Spirit does not help us in our strength. He helps us in our weakness.

The Holy Spirit was implanted in you when you were baptized. He was called forth when you were confirmed. If you present yourself properly before the Lord, the implanted Spirit will help you in your weakness and your prayer will be answered because you will be praying in accordance with the will of the Father.

When we come to God with a shopping list or a wish list of things we want for ourselves, or even for others, we are not really praying. We are just lobbying. It is when the Spirit within us communicates with the transcendent Father that prayer takes place. It begins with a recognition of the greatness of God. It appeals to His mercy and proceeds from there to align our hearts with His will.

There are many prayers in our Prayer Book that are structured that way. I will close with one of them:

ALMIGHTY God, the fountain of all wisdom, who knowest our necessities before we ask, and our ignorance in asking; We beseech thee to have compassion upon infirmities; and those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask, vouchsafe to give us, for the worthiness of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Written by: The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest-in-Charge
Presented by: Ted Randall, Lay Reader