

PRAYING DAILY FOR OUR NEEDS

Then the Lord said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day.” Exodus 16:4

Today we continue our winter focus on the core stories of Moses and David. Our lesson for today comes from the book of Exodus. Last week we heard the story of the most important miracle in the Old Testament, the deliverance of the Hebrew people. It was a great miracle when a mighty wind made a path through the sea delivering the people from the Egyptian troops seeking to take them back to slavery. The people were now free to serve God as they made their way towards the Promised Land.

One might think these events would have assured the Hebrews of God’s concern for them. No, sometime later as the people made their way across Sinai the people started complaining about not having enough food. They said to Moses you brought us out here to starve. We may have been slaves in Egypt, but at least we had food. What has God done for us lately.

God responded with the gift of food. God tells Moses, **“I am going to rain manna from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day.”**

What was manna? We are not completely sure, but some scholars tell us that manna is the honeydew excretion of two scale insects, which live on the branches of the tamarisk, a common desert shrub. That is only speculation. Whatever it was could only be gathered for the day. It spoiled easily. Each day, with the exception of the Sabbath, they would be required to go out into the field and gather the Manna.

Jesus knew this passage very well. I believe that when Jesus taught us how to pray in Matthew’s Gospel, he had manna in mind when he prayed **Give us this day our daily bread.**

The giving of manna teaches us two truths about prayer.

The first lesson we teach in our Confirmation class is the importance of connecting with God daily. We are taught by the manna, if our spirits are to be fed, we need to develop the practice of relating to God every day. This may be easy to say – but it can be hard to do. There are many impediments to our developing this practice. One great obstacle comes from the fact that so much of the literature about spirituality comes from the monastic tradition. The majority of writers that focus on spirituality were part of one order or another. They are people who devoted their entire lives to prayer and service. It can all seem impossible for us to even try.

Earnest Boyer in his introduction to a book called ***Finding God at Home*** shares his frustration by telling this story:

Two years ago, I sat in a crowded room at Harvard Divinity School as Dr. Sharon Parks gave a talk on what she called the spirituality of the desert. This is the way of life that takes its name from those men and women among the early Christians who interpreted the gospel as a call to a life of solitary prayer, left the comfort of family and friends, the security of home and village, and set out to live alone in caves or small huts in the harsh Egyptian desert. As she described this life of

deep commitment, solitude, prayer and reflection, I felt its attraction and recognized my own need for a way of life something like this.

But I also felt something else – a sense of frustration. Married and the father of three small sons, I was deeply involved with the needs of my children and of the family as a whole. Was such a life possible with the commitment of a family?

The lecture ended. I sat still for a while and tried to draw my conflicting emotions together, then made my way to the front of the room.

Dr. Parks was putting away her notes. She looked up. “Just one question,” I said, “Is there childcare in the desert?”

Many of us wonder, is connecting with God daily just another burden to lay on our already overstressed lives? How can we find the time and energy to be open to God’s presence? How can we follow a model of people who left normal society to devote their whole lives to God?

Another impediment is that we tend to stereotype what it means to connect with God daily. We sometimes envision that connecting with God daily means kneeling by our bed in prayer for an hour. We can sometimes interpret connecting with God to only mean time spent in silence before God for a long period of time.

We need to be reminded of the truth that there is no one way to connect to God daily. Each one of us is wired differently. There are a whole host of ways people find they connect to God.

There are many people who find it helpful to connect with God in quiet times. They often find it helpful to have a space set aside to meet with God. It may be a corner in a room with a comfortable chair. They may make the space more inviting by including an item that symbolizes their connection with God. It may be a cross or a candle or a piece of art.

Remember there are a variety of prayer forms that help meet the needs of different people at different stages of life.

Some people find centering prayer very helpful. This form of prayer involves sitting quietly and getting in touch with your breathing. One focuses on a sacred word or phrase such as spirit or Jesus. This prayer opens one to the presence of God.

Some men and women find the prayer of examen to be life giving. This is a prayer used at the beginning or end of the day. In this prayer you reflect on the last twenty-four hours to see where God’s hand has been at work in your life.

There are others who find prayer of thanksgiving or intercession and confession to be very meaningful in connecting them to God. There are almost as many prayer forms as there are people.

There are others who find music to be a pathway to God. They find if they sit quietly and listen to hymns or other sacred music it feeds their souls.

Other people find that having a guide helpful to structure their time with God. Aids like “These Days” devotional booklet can guide a person’s time with God.

I know many of you would like to say you can't follow any of these practices. You can't sit still that long. You say that these practices seemed to be designed for sedentary introverts. Well there are ways to pray for the more peripatetic among us.

There are many people who find that walking can be an aid to prayer. If one takes a solitary walk it can be a wonderful time of reflecting on where God is at work in our life. One can reflect on a verse of Scripture. One can just give thanks for the beauty of nature. The sheer movement can help lift one's spirit.

People can also connect with God while doing some of the mundane tasks of life. I find mowing the lawn to be a wonderful time to pray for direction. It does not take much concentration to go back and forth in my yard, so my mind is free to be open to the spirit of God.

The point I would like to make is that the important thing for us to know is that there is no one way to make a connection God. The important thing is for us to discover the best way for us to make a daily connection with the divine.

You know there are almost infinite ways for us to gain nourishment for our bodies. We can eat an almost infinite variety of foods. Just think of the number of choices that Wegmans provides. We can eat at home or in a variety of restaurants. We can pick up food in a drive through or at a roadside stand.

The choices are diverse but it is important for us to nourish our bodies daily. If we eat good food, in appropriate quantities, over time it creates good health.

The same is true for our spiritual health. When we follow a practice of connecting daily with God it creates healthy and growing spirits. It can shape the kind of person we are becoming. May we learn to connect with God daily.

The second lesson that manna teaches us is that our prayer is to be rooted in everyday life. God is not only the Lord of our spirits, but also the creator of our bodies. Jesus is not only to be with us on Sunday but every day of our lives. These words teach us to pray for our everyday normal needs

C.S. Lewis wrote a very popular book called **The Screwtape Letters**. This book was supposed to be the advice of a senior devil to his underling who was trying to win the soul of a human being. In one part of the book the focus is on the human subject's relationship with his mother. The senior devil gives this advice concerning prayer.

It is, no doubt, impossible to prevent his praying for his mother, but we have means of rendering the prayers innocuous. Make sure that they are always very "spiritual," that he is always concerned with the state of her soul and never with her rheumatism.

In the words **Give us this day our daily bread** Jesus teaches us that our prayers are to be rooted in our need for manna for the day. What Jesus is teaching us is to pray for the resources, spiritual and material to follow his call in the world.

I believe that we are given guidance about what constitutes manna or daily bread. The words **Give us this day** comes immediately after **Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

Jesus tells us to ask for help in the context of doing God's will. We are to ask for the resources we need in order to follow God's will for us. God gave the Hebrew people manna to continue their journey towards the Promised Land.

During the Revolutionary War, George Washington had a continuing battle with the Continental Congress. The Congress had appointed Washington to be the commanding general. His job was to lead his troops into battle and defeat the British. Yet his job was hindered at every turn by a lack of supplies. His men did not have adequate uniforms. They lacked enough boots to go around so that many marched on bleeding feet. They often were short of food and gunpowder.

Washington wrote letter after letter asking for more clothes, food, shoes and guns. He begged the congress to raise the funds required to equip his men in order that they might fight the enemy. He was not asking to make his men rich or to give them more than they needed. Washington was asking for the resources his army needed to finish the task that the congress had commissioned them to undertake.

Our prayers are to be like Washington's letters. We are to ask God for those things we need to carry out his will in our lives.

Therefore, each one of us must pray for ourselves. We each have unique needs to do God's will.

If God has made you a parent, you can pray that you will have the resources to provide a protective, nurturing home.

If God has called you to be a teacher, lawyer, minister or doctor, pray for the money needed to get an education.

If God has given you someone who is sick to care for, pray for the energy to give care.

If you are retired, you may pray for health to continue the volunteer service that you give.

If you need to heal a broken relationship, ask God for the grace to forgive and seek forgiveness.

If you lack direction in your life, ask God for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The list could go on and on of the individual responsibilities and needs of each person.

Remember God cares for your entire life. When you pray, do not ignore your basic human needs.

Share with God your anxiety about finances,

Tell God of your need for hope.

Ask for help in making decisions.

Pray for healing.

Each and every day we need to connect with God, trusting that God does care and will provide manna for the day.