

**Sermon for Morning Prayer  
Rogation Sunday (Easter V)**

**Lessons:**<sup>1</sup>

**The First Lesson:** Here beginneth the twenty-fifth Verse of the thirty-fourth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.<sup>2</sup>

“And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them. And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beast of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid. And I will raise up for them a plant of renown, and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more. Thus shall they know that I the Lord their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord God. And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord God.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

**The Second Lesson:** Here beginneth the eleventh Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.<sup>3</sup>

“And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which

art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

“And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

### **Text:**

From the First Lesson: “[O]ne of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”<sup>4</sup> In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

### **Introduction and Theme:**

In today’s First Lesson, the Lord tells Ezekiel to tell the Hebrews: “And I will make with them a covenant of

*the Spirit of Prayer* found in the *Family Prayer* section at the back of THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER:<sup>8</sup>

**O** ALMIGHTY God, who pourest out on all who desire it, the spirit of grace and of supplication; Deliver us, when we draw nigh to thee, from coldness of heart and wanderings of mind, that with stedfast thoughts and kindled affections, we may worship thee in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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The Rev’d Canon John A. Hollister<sup>9</sup>  
May 17, 2009.

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<sup>1</sup> *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER x (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 34:25- 31(KJV).

<sup>3</sup> St. Luke 11:1-13 (KJV).

<sup>4</sup> St. Luke 11:1b (KJV).

<sup>5</sup> Ezekiel 34:25 (KJV).

<sup>6</sup> St. Luke 2:14 (KJV).

<sup>7</sup> *The Collect for Rogation Sunday*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 175-76 (PECUSA 1928/1943).

<sup>8</sup> *For the Spirit of Prayer, ibid.* 594.

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**4. Finally, complete prayer ends with our acknowledging to God our needs, in the confidence that He will meet them.**

The Lord's Prayer asks simply, "Give us day by day our daily bread", where the bread that sustains our bodies represents all our other needs as well. These needs are as often spiritual as they are physical; as today's Collect has it, "Grant to us thy humble servants, that by thy holy inspiration we may think those things which are good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same...."

As Jesus explained to his followers by means of the parable of the importunate neighbor, God will answer our sincere prayers. When we pray properly, then, in Ezekiel's words, "there shall be showers of blessing".

**Conclusion:**

Prayer, especially private prayer, all too easily concentrates on what we want, not on what God wants. It readily degenerates into a mere laundry list of things we would like God to let us have, like Janice Joplin's amusing lament, "Lord, give me a Mercedes Benz".

One of the best ways to work against this unavoidable but unworthy tendency is, every so often, to review the elements of prayer and to compare our efforts with that "ACTS" checklist:

- A – Adoration**
- C – Contrition**
- T – Thanksgiving, and**
- S – Supplication.**

Another good way is frequently to pray "for the spirit of grace and of supplication", perhaps using the prayer *For*

peace...."<sup>5</sup> Think about that: a covenant of *peace*. That clearly requires two separate but very important things.

First, a covenant is a relationship and, moreover, a relationship that exists by the agreement and consent of both parties. So Ezekiel was telling the ancient Jews that they could have a real relationship with God and, by implication, that they had real choice about whether to enter into and abide by that relationship.

Second, the object of this relationship would be *peace*. Now what could be more welcome than peace to people who are battered and confused by the random chances and struggles of life? At least seventeen times the Old Testament extols the virtues and desirability of peace, or describes how much happier are the people who are at peace with those around them. At least thirty-three times it praises those who are at peace within themselves.

And then, according to St. Luke, the announcement of Our Lord's birth concentrated especially on peace: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."<sup>6</sup>

**Theme:**

So nothing is more desirable for human beings than to have a relationship with God, especially a relationship that brings the promise of peace. But to have a real relationship, especially a voluntary, consensual relationship, we must have real communication. And our primary means of communicating with God is by *prayer*.

Someone, I wish I could remember who it was, once said the essence of true prayer can be summarized by the acronym "A.C.T.S.", pronounced "acts":

**A – Adoration**  
**C – Contrition**  
**T – Thanksgiving, and**  
**S – Supplication.**

**Development:**

**1. Good prayer always starts with Adoration, with acknowledging Who God is and What He does for us.**

The Lord's Prayer, which is the subject of today's Second Lesson, starts out with *Adoration*. First it refers to God with the intimate term "Our Father" – actually, in the original it is more like "Daddy" -- and then declares that His Name should be held as holy, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed [or 'sacred'] be thy name".

Finally, in St. Luke's version, it acknowledges God's sovereignty over every one and every thing by praying that His Will may be fulfilled: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth."

Look at any of the many Collects in the Book of Common Prayer. You will see that each begins with the acknowledgement of God and of His place in the scheme of things, often including a reference to some specific example of His blessings. The Collect for today<sup>7</sup> is a good example; it begins with just such an acknowledgement or adoration: "O LORD, from whom all good things do come...."

**2. True prayer requires the open and honest expression of sorrow for our sins.**

Good prayer includes *contrition*, which is sorrow for the sins we have committed because they offend God. But we are not truly sorrowful unless we are determined to make a sincere effort to overcome the temptations that lead us into

those sins. If we listen carefully to the Lord's Prayer, we hear our avowal of that contrition.

First, when we pray Our Lord's own Prayer, we implicitly acknowledge our guilt for our many sins, and also implicitly declare our intention to correct them, because we invoke His aid in healing them: "And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us." Then we ask for His aid in avoiding them in future, which evidences our sincere purpose of amendment of life: "And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil."

**3. Proper prayer is offered in the spirit of thanksgiving for God's many blessings of us.**

Thanksgiving is central to prayer, so much so that our most important act of Christian worship is known as "The Thanksgiving". That, after all, is precisely what *Eucharist* means: it is the Greek word for "Thanksgiving". So, in one way, it seems a bit odd that neither the Lord's Prayer nor the normal form of Collect include words that expressly say something like, "O Lord, we thank thee that...."

I suspect Our Lord is like many anonymous givers, who do not want to invoke expressions of thanks. However, even when the donor does not need to hear us offer our thanks, we need to hear ourselves doing so. Fortunately, the entire tone and context of the Lord's Prayer, and of the average Collect, carry with them the spirit of the "humble and hearty thanks" that are so magnificently expressed in detail in the "General Thanksgiving" at Morning and Evening Prayer.