



# Priestly People

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SERVING CHRIST'S PRIESTS

1947-2017

*“I’ll keep you in my prayers”*

*“Praying for you”*

*“Pray for me”*

Prayer is talking to God. It is our way of communicating our thoughts, needs, and desires to God on behalf of ourselves and others.

## Praying Our Ministry

*“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him... This then is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.’”*  
**Matthew 6:7-13**

I mentioned earlier in this series that prayer is not so much a response to a mandate imposed from without, but rather to an imperative of the heart. From our point of view it is interesting to note that unlike the Buddha, or teachers of other traditions, Jesus did not give detailed instructions on the discipline of prayer. We hear nothing of postures, techniques, emphasis on controlling thoughts or emotions. He did caution against “standing in synagogues and on street corners to be seen by others (Mt. 6:5); “babbling” (Mt. 6:7) as if we had to instruct God in detail about our needs, the needs of the world and how God should address these needs.

Significant is the statement that God knows our needs before we ask for them (Mt. 6:8). Jesus seems to indicate that prayer is more an intimate and personal matter of the heart; of opening our heart to the heart of God. In Matthew’s gospel we gain some insight into Jesus’ understanding of prayer from the fact that it occurs within the framework of the Sermon on the Mount, a development of the revelation given to the Israelites at Sinai. Sinai marks a turning point imparting a new sense of what it means to be human and covenanted to a God living and acting in history.

What is often overlooked in contemporary and moral theology is that to live according to God’s law is to live according to the innate truth of woman and man. It is to live according to the Divine truth out of which creation and humanity were spoken into existence. God beheld the work of Divine Wisdom and pronounced it very good (Gen. 1:31). Before the Fall, man and woman reflected the pure beauty of God’s eternal truth. This truth was most clearly manifest by the transparent intimacy shared between Adam and Eve; their nakedness was not an embarrassment, not a cause for covering themselves in shame and fear of being known (Gen. 2:21-25). This unembarrassed intimacy and unprotected presence to the other characterized their relationship to creation and ultimately to God. We have been created for union with God; only in union with God

## Praying As Jesus Taught Us

do we fully realize the truth of our nature. Sin severs that union; but sin also alienates us from the truth of ourselves created in the divine image (Gen. 3).

The Law given on Sinai is the law that was first written in our hearts, that continues in our hearts driving us on an insatiable search to recapture and possess the union from which we have been severed, the union with God that is also union with the truth of our individual selves, created to show forth the beauty and truth of God. It is helpful to note here that our natural inclination is not toward sin, but toward truth, unity with the source and end of all truth. Sin is the search for unity and truth snagged on the broken edges of our alienated ego. The Law of Sinai awakens us to the faint echo of truth deep within our hearts. To live in sin, to commit sin, is to offend against our god-like dignity; it is to taint the wisdom of God’s inner truth of which we are the most perfect reflection.

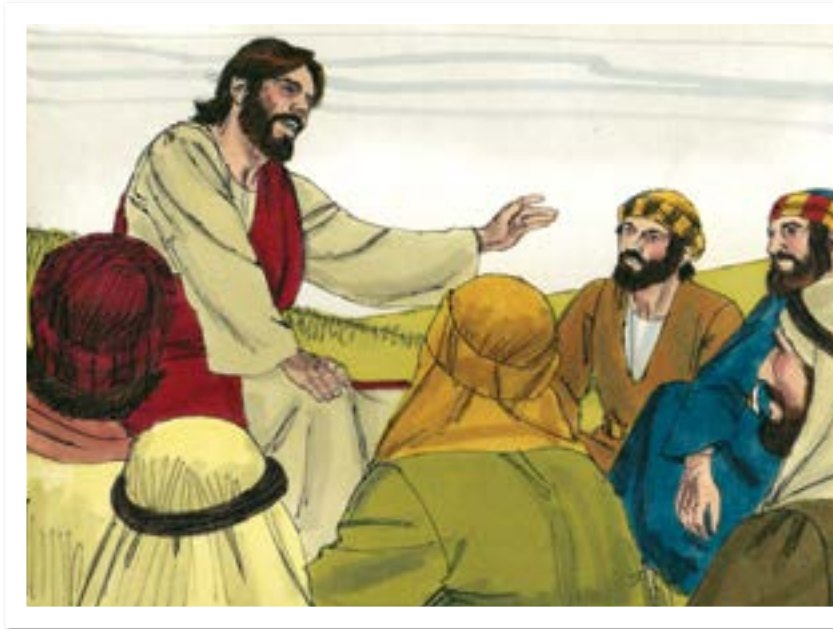
The Sermon on the Mount takes the Law given to Moses to its ultimate conclusion; it charts the journey to union with the heart of God; the union that is also a reconstitution of authentic humanity; unembarrassed, undefended intimacy with humanity, creation and God. It draws out in detail the task of purification from bondage to our alienated ego to the utter freedom exemplified by Christ on the Cross.

It is a charter for a renewed humanity restored to the original truth from which it was created. Jesus on the cross is the image of the human person freed from the tyranny of the egocentric self, free to love as God loves. The crucified Jesus is the image of the person totally emptied of all that is not true and holy; emptied of the fear and suspicion we have for one another; filled with the fullness of God’s life. Jesus on the cross is the paradigm of a humanity restored to its original state of total union with uncreated love.

The Sermon on the Mount has its foundations in the journey of Christ into the wilderness to encounter the satanic forces that tear and divide the heart and set us at odds with one another and creation. We cannot fully understand the Sermon, nor can we grasp the Lord’s Prayer in all its depth unless we see them as issuing from the encounter in the wilderness. It often comes as a shock to the pious that the first function of the Holy Spirit of God, Divine Wisdom herself, is to lead the Savior into an encounter with evil. The temptations illustrate for us the seductive enticements that delude us into easy gratifications of the innate hunger of the soul that is at the same time our hunger for spiritual fullness.

How seductively innocent is the search for bread, survival, the preservation of life. Yet we see all around us the cruelty,

the destruction, the evil, that accompanies the unrestrained, egocentric pursuit of the necessities of life. When personhood is experienced in isolation to other persons, we are at war. We live as adversaries, in competition for the scarce commodities of the earth. War begins in my heart, nourished by a justifiable need to survive and provide for loved ones, tribe, clan or nation, even at



the cost of lives of other persons, families, tribes or nations. Into this equation Christ inserts the Word of God (Mt. 4:4). Agape, the love of a sister for her brother, becomes the mitigating factor in the primitive, unrestrained pursuit of personal survival. Eucharist, sharing my table the fruits of my labor, surrendering my body and blood in love of neighbor, becomes the mark of a consciousness transformed by the Christ event occurring within my heart. The rigid defensive boundaries of the self are stretched to include the entire human family; the mind and heart of Christ become incarnate in human flesh. The Incarnation continues through history.

Christ exposes the face of the Evil One lurking in the heart of one who would serve God and then expect God to ratify and cooperate with the presumptions our unredeemed and unenlightened consciousness. Not the power of the temple, but God alone do we serve. Our claim on God's divine favor rests on the ground of our willingness to let God be God. We do not diminish God's wisdom and sovereignty to our dwarfed dimensions and self-serving agendas ( Mt. 4:7). Christ is free from the allurements of a temple religion grown complacent and shallow in the glib assurances of God's favor. The glib and unreflective arrogance that assumes that our corporate will is God's will. The cross on a hill of shame and failure, weakness and poverty of spirit is the mountain of God's frightening breakthrough into history. The earth quakes at the scandal of seeing failure and humiliation, weakness and spiritual poverty replace the pomp of temple and the arrogance of human self-righteousness through law. The heart of God, one with the broken heart of Christ, reaches beyond priests, Pharisees, Sadducees and kings to become one with the broken, tattered heart of humanity. Dismiss the criminal,

Mary the prostitute, tax collectors, gentile Wise men with disenfranchised no account women, in washed rowdies, are the royalty in the Kingdom of this subversive loser hanging on- a criminal's cross.

History is all too full of futile attempts unite the authority of heaven with that of politics. In the attempt, God and the divine wisdom become appropriated

into the service of human sinfulness. Examples abound of human suffering and tragedy, perpetrated under the banner of God's authority superimposed on the name of a king or president, pope, bishop, priest or president of parish council. Christ peered into the face of the evil one and exposed the liar lurking in the crevasses beneath our noble motives to bring political power and prestige into the service of gods created in our image. Christ, incarnate wisdom, repudiated and turned from such audacity (Mt. 4:10).

Knowing the pain of the human heart with its insatiable lust for the easy way, Christ turned us to the tortuous task of radical purification and emptying. He knows what lies beneath the layers of egotistical defenses against powerlessness and non-violence: The very brilliance of God's own divine image.

Refreshed, liberated, with the clear vision of a new humanity, a new creation beginning in the renewed hearts of man and woman, one heart at a time, he climbed the mountain to proclaim and announce a new epoch for humanity, a new direction for history. He confounded and confused, angered and dismayed many by his repudiation of everything that seemed so normal, so wise and so innocent. He set foot on the path of folly, revealing divine wisdom hidden, lost, long forgotten in the deep recesses of the human heart.

That same path begins for us when we, like the Apostles in Luke's Gospel, ask: "Lord, teach us to pray" (Lk. 11:1). We are taught the prayer that is already buried deep in our heart waiting for us to release it into our lives. "Our Father in heaven, holy be your name, may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven".

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