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PRAYING THE SCRIPTURES

*Open my lips, O Lord,
And my mouth shall proclaim your praise.*

Prayer is both one of the simplest and most daunting tasks of the Christian life. It can be as simple as “thank you” or “help!” and yet even Jesus’ own disciples, those who heard Jesus’ own prayers, still asked him for instruction.

As a parish priest, I am frequently asked for guidance in learning to pray. Like the first disciples, we’re still asking for help. And, of course, when asked, I can share a variety of methods and techniques; I can offer examples. There are many forms of prayer but I have found, and perhaps you have as well, that not every form works for me. I should say I’m sure they work; I suspect God hears even our clumsiest prayers; I am confident God appreciates the time and effort of our honest attempts. But not every style of prayer speaks in my language.

For me, it is writing; writing is my prayer language. I did not really discover to what extent writing prayers would become my language for prayer until I started writing them for my congregation. You are holding my prayers—my offerings to God, to my parish, and now my offering to you and to your church. I discovered quickly that these prayers were *my* prayers only for a short time. As soon as they are prayed within communal worship, they become the prayers of the people. These prayers, these forms, take on new life as they carry your concerns, cradle your thanksgivings, and join the prayers of your heart.

The prayers in this book are shaped by the Holy Scriptures. I found my voice in the ancient voices of the biblical authors. As in the Anglican Prayer Book tradition, biblical language is the foundation of each and every collection of prayers. Using the texts given each week in the Revised Common Lectionary, I wrote prayers that, I hope, speak to the issues of our world in the familiar language and images of our sacred texts.

By doing so, my intention was to create a more cohesive liturgical experience. In the context of thoughtful worship planning, the prayers, scripture readings, sermon, and hymnody should all speak to the same themes; they should reinforce and enhance each other. My hope is that each week the concerns of the world are filtered anew through the sacred text and the rhythm of the Church.

I first started writing these prayers because I noticed in my own parish, and in other parishes where I have served and worshiped, that the time of congregational intercessions had little energy. We were rotating a few of the six forms found in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer and had been for decades. They are lovely forms, poetic and comprehensive, but there was just no energy. I could watch folks in the pews zone out and not because they did not value that time of prayer together. They value the opportunity very much. However, it was one of the few places in the Sunday service that was not being approached creatively or thoughtfully. And so I started writing prayers that would engage the congregation, prayers that would feel fresh and connected.

It is my hope that this collection incites prayer in your congregation and in your life. Whether these are prayed communally or in private devotions, I hope that they help you find your own prayer language. I believe every prayer is a poem—words strung together between the human heart and the heart of God. And so with that, let us pray.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Each litany is essentially structured to adhere to the form suggested in the Book of Common Prayer. That means each Sunday, while praying the prayers, the congregation will pray for: the Church, the nation and the world, the created order, the local community, those who suffer, and the departed. Intercessors may choose to add additional petitions when a need arises.

It is perfectly appropriate to use the following prayers in your Sunday worship as written. You may, however, adapt them for your local community. The intercessor who leads the congregation in prayer might, for example, name the city, town, or village where the church is located. When members of the congregation die, they should be named within the people's prayers.

I have included some rubrics in the text for the intercessor. While I have directed a moment of silence after each petition, some congregations might choose to instead pray aloud in those places. I direct the intercessor to invite thanksgivings and petitions during the prayers; this practice may or may not work in your congregation.

I prefer the congregation and the Intercessor to share the prayers. Each litany has a call and response. This call and response is repetitive. I chose this style for two reasons: First, I don't want the congregation tied to the script. I want the prayers to develop a rhythm, to feel organic. At my parish, we print only the call and response. The petitions are printed only for the Intercessor.

It is Episcopal tradition for the presider to add a concluding collect to the end of the prayers. I have included some in this book. Worship books from other traditions offer additional options.

Finally, because the prayers are based on the Sunday lectionary, they can also be used in private devotions as a way of meditating on Sunday scriptures.

YEAR A

People of God, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord. Let us pray to the Lord, saying, "Teach us your ways, O God, *that we may walk in your paths.*"

Wake from sleep, O God, your Church. Let us lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us live honorably as salvation draws ever nearer.

Silence

Teach us your ways, O God,
That we may walk in your paths.

Wake from sleep, O God, this nation. May we beat our swords into plowshares, and our spears into pruning hooks. May we learn war no more.

Silence

Teach us your ways, O God,
That we may walk in your paths.

Wake from sleep, O God, your creation. May the mountains rise to meet you and the crops of the fields burst forth in praise.

Silence

Teach us your ways, O God,
That we may walk in your paths.

Wake from sleep, O God, this city. May there be peace and prosperity within our walls. Make clear our paths that we may walk in your light.

Silence

Teach us your ways, O God,
That we may walk in your paths.

Wake from sleep, O God, those in pain and sadness. Deliver them from their darkness that they may rejoice in your light. May all those waiting for healing find your salvation is near.

Invite the congregation to add their petitions and thanksgivings, followed by silence

Teach us your ways, O God,
That we may walk in your paths.

Wake all your people from sleep, O God. Prepare your saints for that day when the Son of Man will return, with the saints at rest, to reign with us forever and ever.

Silence

Teach us your ways, O God,
That we may walk in your paths.

Advent 2A

Friends, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing. Let us come before the Lord, praying, “Blessed are you, Lord God; *may the earth be filled with your glory.*”

Grant your Church, O God of encouragement, to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that we may glorify you with one voice. Make us a people of repentance and bless us with your Holy Spirit and fire.

Silence

Blessed are you, Lord God;
May the earth be filled with your glory.

Grant this nation, O God of justice, the will to defend the needy and the poor. May we sincerely work for that day when hurt and destruction are no more.

Silence

Blessed are you, Lord God;
May the earth be filled with your glory.

Grant your creation, O God of faithfulness, the hope of renewal. May we who are stewards of this earth, also live at peace with all you have created.

Silence

Blessed are you, Lord God;
May the earth be filled with your glory.

Grant this city, O God of understanding, prosperity. May all people know and do justice. Teach us and our leaders how best to meet the needs of all our neighbors.

Silence

Blessed are you, Lord God;
May all the earth be filled with your glory.

Grant all the needy, O God of steadfast love, your mercy. Prove yourself to be a God of righteousness and faithfulness. To all their pain and suffering bring your healing and peace. With your winnowing fork clear from their lives all the forces of oppression.

Invite the congregation to add their petitions and thanksgivings, followed by silence

Blessed are you, Lord God;
May all the earth be filled with your glory.

Grant to those who have died, O God of hope, eternal life in you. Bring the departed into your glorious dwelling where all their hope will be fulfilled in your Christ.

Silence

Blessed are you, Lord God;
May all the earth be filled with your glory.

Sisters and brothers, strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Let us seek the Lord, praying, "Let us see your glory, O Lord; *come to us and save us!*"

Lord, save your Church from weakness of heart. Give us strength to prepare this world for the coming of your Christ and give us patience when it seems Christ's kingdom does not come quickly enough.

Silence

Let us see your glory, O Lord;

Come to us and save us!

Lord, save this nation from disordered priorities and misplaced hope. May our values mirror your values. May we be a nation that offers justice to the oppressed, food to the hungry and care to the stranger.

Silence

Let us see your glory, O Lord;

Come to us and save us!

Lord, save your creation from human misuse. Bless us to play a part in the redemption you have planned for all of creation.

Silence

Let us see your glory, O Lord;

Come to us and save us!

Lord, save this city from hopelessness. Give us a vision and a future. Raise up prophets who will speak hope and encouragement to the people of our region.

Silence

Let us see your glory, O Lord;

Come to us and save us!

Lord, save the sick and the sorrowful in the midst of their affliction. May they experience the healing work of their Messiah. Make happy all those who have you for their help.

Invite the congregation to add their petitions and thanksgivings, followed by silence

Let us see your glory, O Lord;

Come to us and save us!

Lord, bless all members of your heavenly kingdom. May they obtain eternal joy and gladness in your presence—where sorrow and sighing are no more.

Silence

Let us see your glory, O Lord;

Come to us and save us!

Advent 4A

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us appeal to the Lord, praying, “Restore us, O God of hosts; *show the light of your countenance and we shall be saved.*”

We ask you, O God, to bless your Church. Give us your grace. Stir up your strength and come to help us even as we declare the gospel concerning your Son.

Silence

Restore us, O God of hosts;

Show the light of your countenance and we shall be saved.

We ask you, O God, to bless this nation. May our leaders not trust in their own strength but in you, O God of hosts. Teach us to refuse the evil and choose the good.

Silence

Restore us, O God of hosts;

Show the light of your countenance and we shall be saved.

We ask you, O God, to bless this planet. By your creative power bring forth new life in the places in which we have reaped too much or sown too little.

Silence

Restore us, O God of hosts;

Show the light of your countenance and we shall be saved.

We ask you, O God, to bless our city. Let your hand be upon us. Guide and strengthen all those who find themselves in difficult situations—especially young and single parents.

Silence

Restore us, O God of hosts;

Show the light of your countenance and we shall be saved.

We ask you, O God, to bless all those who are distressed. Hear their prayers, O Shepherd of the flock. May they take comfort in the knowledge that you are with them.

Invite the congregation to add their petitions and thanksgivings, followed by silence

Restore us, O God of hosts;

Show the light of your countenance and we shall be saved.

We ask you, O God, to bless all who have died. Welcome into your heavenly kingdom all who are called to be saints.

Silence

Restore us, O God of hosts;

Show the light of your countenance and we shall be saved.

Christmas Eve & Christmas Day

Come let us adore Christ, the Lord. Let us pray, "Glorious Lord, *grant us your peace.*"

Christ the Lord, we humbly adore you: make joyful our hearts. Strengthen your Church with humility and faith that we might triumph over the power of evil.

Silence

Glorious Lord,
Grant us your peace.

Christ the Lord, we humbly adore you: you abhor neither the simple nor the lowly. Shine your light on all the world that the nations may look upon your truth and find their salvation.

Silence

Glorious Lord,
Grant us your peace.

Christ the Lord, we humbly adore you: may all of creation burst forth in songs of praise. May all the works of your hand glorify you.

Invite the congregation to add their thanksgivings, followed by silence

Glorious Lord,
Grant us your peace.

Christ the Lord, we humbly adore you: summon the people of the city to yourself. May all of the distractions and heartache of our lives fade away in the joy of your presence.

Silence

Glorious Lord,
Grant us your peace.

Christ the Lord, we humbly adore you: you love us so dearly. Grant your healing grace to sinners, to the poor, to those in need of love. Open your arms to the sick and the lonely.

Invite the congregation to add their petitions, followed by silence

Glorious Lord,
Grant us your peace.

Christ the Lord, we humbly adore you: all glory be given to you. You blessed our earthly bodies with your birth; and you promise to raise us to new life by your death and resurrection.

Silence

Glorious Lord,
Grant us your peace.

Christmas 1

The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. We are witnesses, praying, "Shine forth in our lives, O Lord. *Hallelujah!*"

Abba, Father, you have received us as your children. Make our hearts shine ever brighter with the pure light of Christ, that all people might witness your all-encompassing love.

Silence

Shine forth in our lives, O Lord.

Hallelujah!

Almighty God, let all the nations witness your glory. Cause righteousness and praise to cover the earth.

Silence

Shine forth in our lives, O Lord.

Hallelujah!

Great Lord, you are mighty in power: you graciously make the earth to burst forth with green plants; you provide food for flocks and herds; you give us the resources to thrive on this planet. May we be thankful in our hearts and generous in our lives.

Invite the congregation to add their thanksgivings, followed by silence

Shine forth in our lives, O Lord.

Hallelujah!

O God, it is you who establishes peace. Comfort your people with safety and security; assure us that it is not by our own strength, but by your goodness, that we can rest in quiet confidence.

Silence

Shine forth in our lives, O Lord.

Hallelujah!

Loving God, you are the healer of the brokenhearted; it is you who binds up their wounds; you lift up the lowly. Clothe your children with the garments of health and salvation.

Invite the congregation to add their petitions, followed by silence

Shine forth in our lives, O Lord.

Hallelujah!

O God, you sent your Son to redeem us from sin and death: draw us closer to your Son Jesus—into your heart, both now and in the life to come.

Silence

Shine forth in our lives, O Lord.

Hallelujah!