

Daily Prayer

Gregory the Great, Bishop of Rome, 604

Wednesday, September 2, 2020

We enter into a time of quiet. We offer to God our selves and in the silence know that God embraces us as God's very own. We offer to God our hopes and our concerns through our prayers and in the silence listen for God. Today we hold in our prayers the ordinary moments in life—the trials and the joys and remember Gregory the Great, Bishop of Rome, 604. (transferred from September 3)

We begin by saying

Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

Mark 10.43

The First Reading

For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

2 Corinthians 4.5-12

The Psalm

Exalt yourself above the heavens, O God, *
and your glory over all the earth.

My heart is firmly fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; *
I will sing and make melody.

Wake up, my spirit;
awake, lute and harp; *
I myself will waken the dawn.

I will confess you among the peoples, O Lord; *
I will sing praise to you among the nations.

For your loving-kindness is greater than the heavens, *
and your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.

Exalt yourself above the heavens, O God, *
and your glory over all the earth.

Psalm 57.6-11

The Gospel Reading

We continue with the gospel reading and the reflection that follows. In silence, we ask what the readings have to say to us today. Is there something in the reflection that draws us more deeply into the reading? What does God have to say to us? What do we have to ask God?

'Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." But the

wise replied, "No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Matthew 25.1-13

The Reflection

Steven Mackison

Gregory became Bishop of Rome in one of the most turbulent times in the history of the church and of the world. In late sixth century Italy, all the horsemen of the apocalypse had arrived on the scene: war, famine, pestilence and death were everywhere. So for Gregory and his people, the end was just around the corner.

And like all of us, when we know the end is near; when we realize for the first time that the clay jars of our lives are about to break - and our hearts with them - that is when we have a choice, to live in hope or die in despair; to see only the vastness of the darkness that seems to overwhelm us, or to fix our gaze on the light - however faint it seems - and trust and pray to God that the light will overcome it.

Like the bridesmaids in the Gospel appointed for this day, Gregory had a choice. As one of the bridesmaids sworn to attend the church until the bridegroom returned - the maid of honour in fact - he could have followed the world's folly and buried his head in the sand while the church and the world went to hell in a hand-basket. But he found something that gave him hope. He prayed about the plight of the church and the world and this is the passage that God planted in his heart.

For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

Pious legend suggests that he was so moved by that passage that he decided to pray publicly for the church and the world. He led a procession, around the streets of Rome, asking for God's mercy and relief from the plague that had inflicted the city. While the procession was praying to the saints to intercede for Rome, they approached Hadrian's Tomb. At that moment, Gregory had a vision of Michael the Archangel atop the tomb overlooking the city, sheathing his sword - a sign that Gregory's procession had been pleasing to God, that the world wasn't going to end, that the church wasn't going to die, and that light would overcome the darkness. Everything changed after that. The darkness ended, the light shone forth and the plague came to an end.

This is what Gregory saw...



To this day this statue adorns the Castel Sant'Angelo to commemorate Gregory's vision. It is a symbol that when we believe the end is near, it is merely God's new beginning, that when all seems dark, the light of Christ will shine forth and God's glory will be revealed. It is a symbol that when we raise the sword against one another in judgement, God commands his holy angels to sheath theirs in forgiveness. Eight centuries later, during another turbulent time, another Pope

named Gregory - this time the 10th - would remember what the first Gregory had done.

Gregory the 10th lived at a time when the church couldn't decide whether the next Pope would be of French or Italian stock. In 1268, the church was so divided on this issue that the conclave took three years, – the longest conclave in the history of the Catholic Church. It might have lasted longer, except that the citizens of Viterbo - where the Cardinals were assembled - locked them in the building, only allowing them bread and water, until the deadlock finally ended.

One of the first things that Gregory the 10th did after his election as Pope was to institute a practice that remains to this day.

When a new Pope is elected, he stands in the loggia, addressing the throngs of people gathered in St. Peter's Square and gives the most anticipated and famous blessing of the church. It is called the *Urbi et Orbi* - a blessing "to the city and to the world." When

Gregory the 10th took the name of that first Gregory, he started this tradition in memory of Gregory the first, asking God's blessing on the city and the world.

Eight hundred years and countless Popes later, the church and the world find themselves in deep need, in the midst of storms that shake our faith and our world, changing our lives forever.

Prophetically, the last *Urbi et Orbi* was pronounced by Pope Francis on March 27, 2020 – just weeks into a global pandemic. This is what Pope Francis said to a world that hungered for hope in the midst of despair:

In this storm, the façade of those stereotypes with which we camouflaged our egos, always worrying about our image, has fallen away, uncovering once more that (blessed) common belonging, of which we cannot be deprived: our belonging as brothers and sisters.

Dear brothers and sisters, from this place that tells of Peter's rock-solid faith, I would like this evening to entrust all of you to the Lord, through the intercession of Mary, Health of the People and Star of the stormy Sea. From this colonnade that embraces Rome and the whole world, may God's blessing come down upon you as a consoling embrace. Lord, may you bless the world, give health to our bodies and comfort our hearts. You ask us not to be afraid. Yet our faith is weak and we are fearful. But you, Lord, will not leave us at the mercy of the storm. Tell us again: "Do not be afraid" (*Mt 28:5*). And we, together with Peter, "cast all our anxieties onto you, for you care about us" (*cf. 1 Pet 5:7*).

It's a reminder that every age has its darkness, every age believes that the end is near, and every age looks for God's blessing to deliver it from the perils of its present. In this current storm of racial

injustice and global pandemic, we seek the faith on which Christ built the church, remembering to not be afraid, for God is with us.

When the time is right, we conclude our time of silence with the canticle

The Canticle ~ A Song of Praise

Glory to you, Lord God of our fathers; *
you are worthy of praise, glory to you.

Glory to you for the radiance of your holy name; *
we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.

Glory to you in the splendour of your temple; *
on the throne of your majesty, glory to you.

Glory to you, seated between the Cherubim; *
we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.

Glory to you, beholding the depths; *
in the high vault of heaven, glory to you.

Glory to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; *
we will praise you and highly exalt you for ever.

Song of the Three 29-34

We continue in prayer for those people and situations that we hold up before God (The Intercessions) and continue with the concluding collect, the Lord's prayer and the closing sentences.

The Intercessions

Let us pray to the Lord,
who is our refuge and stronghold.

For the health and well-being of our nation,
that all who are fearful and anxious
may be at peace and free from worry:
Lord, hear us, Lord, graciously hear us.

For the isolated and housebound,
that we may be alert to their needs,
and care for them in their vulnerability:
Lord, hear us, Lord, graciously hear us.

For our homes and families,
our schools and young people,
and all in any kind of need or distress:
Lord, hear us, Lord, graciously hear us.

For a blessing on our local community,
that our neighbourhoods may be places of trust and friendship,
where all are known and cared for:
Lord, hear us, Lord, graciously hear us.

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,
to the mercy and protection of God.

Merciful Father,
accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

We conclude our prayers

Almighty God,
who raised up Gregory of Rome
to be the servant of your servants,
grant that our lives like his may resound with your Word
and proclaim your saving work in deeds of justice and mercy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

[let us pray as our Saviour taught us,]

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen

We conclude

May God grant to the world justice, truth and peace.
Amen. Alleluia.

Credits:

Scripture quotations are from *The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible* Copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches in the USA. Used by permission. All Rights Reserved.

The Psalm and The Collect are from the *Book of Alternative Services*: Copyright © 2004 by the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada. All rights reserved. Reproduced under license from ABC Publishing, Anglican Book Centre, a ministry of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, from *Anglican Liturgical Library*

The Intercessions are from the Church of England Coronavirus resources.

The Collect is from *For All the Saints* © 2007, General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada

The Concluding Sentence are found in *Common Worship: Daily Prayer*. © The Archbishops' Council 2005 and published by Church House Publishing.

The reflection: The Rev'd Canon Steven Mackison

Church of the Redeemer

162 Bloor Street West Toronto, ON M5S 1M4

416.922.4948

office@theredeemer.ca

www.TheRedeemer.ca

Twitter: @theRedeemerTO

Facebook: theRedeemerTO

Instagram: theRedeemerTO