

The Lord's Prayer: The rhythm of salvation  
Rev. Dr. Martha Tucker  
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Blessed be God who animates our lives and teaches us to pray that we might realize our deepest sacred connections to God and to each other. AMEN

“When a doctoral student at Princeton asked: What is there left in the world for original dissertation research? Albert Einstein replied, To find out about prayer. Somebody must find out about prayer?”

It seems to me that that research has been going on since the beginning of time. And it seems to me that the disciples asking Jesus to teach them to pray were really keen researchers. What they learned is at least that the key to prayer lies in the praying not just reciting of the Lord's Prayer. It is that which connects us to God and to each other as a faith community. It is of a universal and unifying language. (If you have ever been at a service where everyone prayed the Our Father in their native language you will know Pentecost!) And at least some of the research would indicate that when we orient our lives toward God, when we place ourselves in that sacramental stream of God's love and grace, we might experience peace and wholeness. Our research continues with living testimony to this power.

There are many incredible and inspiring and heart wrenching stories of 9/11. And there is one which I believe is directly relevant to today's Gospel.

A retired us army colonel working for blue cross blue shield in the north tower that day found himself jerked and thrown from the impact of the plane and struggled to maintain his balance. Having lived in California he thought earthquake; his military training screamed bomb!

He directed his coworkers to the stairway and after checking its status, headed down from the 19th floor through a pillar of smoke and dust. Without conscious realization he was at some point aware he was praying the Lord's prayer over and over. His instincts for balance, survival triggered this most intimate of prayers spontaneously.

At first the prayer was fragmented - thy will be done being the main phrase - but gradually he was relaxed into a space different from his fear and the prayer became a unified whole, a mantra, which supported new found calm and generosity of spirit even in the midst of this tragic chaos. His story was one of a courageous faith fueled by prayer, the Lord's Prayer, and it merged with stories of survival and pain and grief and courage.

As though a blanket of consolation were wrapped around him, the rhythm of the Lord's Prayer caused him to feel held in sacred trust.

The Lord's Prayer saved his life.

It may be saving ours.

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Lord teach us to pray becomes for us as for the disciples, yet another How to in this ordinary time and perhaps the simplest seminal lesson in all. For the Lord's Prayer in particular, prayer in general, connects us to God, connects us to each other. It aligns us with the God who created and longs for us to live into our deepest relationship with the Divine. It is a direct line to the sacred and holy.

The Lord's Prayer rhythmically, systematically and essentially rocks us gently and powerfully in God's hallowed space that we might realize our intimate eternal relationship with God, safe, blessed loved and saved!

Many have parsed this prayer dividing it into segments like faith, forgiveness and fidelity, or giving, delivering etc...and yet I am reluctant to go too far down that road as it might over analyse words which after all only approximate the indefinability of God and our relationship with Him. Over analysis can often mask the emotion and intimacy and sacredness. Sometimes we just need to rest in the blessedness of it all.

I would say that from the very first words, Our Father, hallowed be thy name, there is a wonder and supremacy invoked which perhaps only the original aramaic could convey. Hallowed be thy name is the best we can do apparently to approach an understanding in Jesus' native language of such a holiness that shined with the glory, the doxa, of God. We begin this conversation with God seeking reverently to abide in this holiness itself.

And so I would like us today to consider the mystery of this prayer and why it is so important to our faith. I would like us to consider the effect of this prayer: its consolation, its security, its hope. I would like us to give thanks for the wonder love and praise of it all.

As the story of 9/11 indicates there is an instinctive rhythm and truth to this prayer which has been literally written into our being! I have had the incredible privilege to sit with many persons in hospice or in crisis and if conscious, the Lord's Prayer becomes a shared bond we recite. I witness a relaxing of muscles and often a sacred sense of acceptance. If unconscious I have witnessed remarkable responses, also a relaxing but even more poignant are the muscle changes. Some have squeezed my hand, some have moved their previously immovable heads toward me or more probably toward God.

It is a remarkable experience which we ought not take for granted. In fact, as the Gospel suggests, we ought to practice the Lord's Prayer. There are many ways to do so, including my favorite which is to pray it in the rhythm of breathing. Breathing in breathing out God through the holy spirit breathes in us...

I am often struck by the necessity of the Lord's Prayer in our sacraments and worship. It completes our practice of the presence of God. It is also in those settings corporate not individual and thus transports a power which stretches toward Unity. it is the power of a faith community!

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Today, when we reach the place in the great eucharistic banquet of Christ's Body and Blood, I invite us to find a renewed intentionality in praying the Prayer which Jesus Taught us. I invite you to imagine entering that hallowed space and seeking that which we need as well as that which God needs from us. And then...may you know as the bread and wine are communed as you receive the sacred gifts, that the holy rhythm has transformed you by presence and participation.