

SUNDAY, January 28, 2024 EPIPHANY 4 "How to Pray for Family"

Psalms 127 Philippians 1:9-11 Ephesians 3:14-15 Mark 10:13-15

We continue in our sermon series "Preparing to Pray" with our focus on "How to Pray for family." In these last couple of weeks we have reflected on prayer by sharing the words of John Wesley's covenant—"a prayer of commitment to serve in faith" and how to pray for oneself. As we change from focusing on me to family many questions might arise about the need for praying for family. Just who is 'family'? How often is it necessary to do this? What kinds of things should we bring to God about family even though we do not know full stories of what members are experiencing? And what exactly should we be asking God to do or respond?

The question of how often we need/ should pray is often asked. In Apostolic Tradition, Hippolytus instructed Christians to pray seven times a day "on rising, at the lighting of the evening lamp, at bedtime, at midnight" and "the third, sixth and ninth hours of the day, being hours associated with Christ's Passion." But there are often other times to pray: before meals, before difficult tasks, in thanksgiving over completed tasks but most especially when one is in need of talking with God.

In our reading from Mark 10, Jesus was teaching people and they were bringing children to him in order that he might touch them. The disciples spoke sternly to the parents. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to the disciples, "Let the little children come to me, do not stop them for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." He then states, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." Then Jesus took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them and blessed them."

Why were the parents taking their children to Jesus? They wanted Jesus' touch upon them so that he would bless them for who they were—young people learning and growing in faith following Jesus' teachings as the parents had heard him preach. The parents wanted Jesus to embrace their children as Jesus embraced them in love as he offered to these parents hope which they did not seem to know. But when the disciples tried to stop the children from seeing Jesus, it was Jesus who stopped them. He wanted the children in his midst so that the parents would learn how to live, love and pray following the example of Jesus himself. And Jesus warned them that those who would prevent a child from entering into God's kingdom would not be entering it. Jesus loved children and parents and wanted to help families grow and understand his way of love and to have parents raise their children with hope.

When we think of family we often think of parents and children together, yet today many kinds of family exist-and it is up to us to discern to whom we are reaching. When Paul was travelling and setting up churches, he taught the community of what it meant to be blessed. Paul prayed for these young churches just as Christ prayed for himself—fully and with conviction. Paul writes to the Ephesian church: “I bow my knees before God from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. He prays that all will be strengthened by the Spirit and that Christ would live in their hearts as they are rooted and grounded in love.” Paul is praying for families- he does not define any type of group but everyone because all families take their name from God. Everyone who is a child of the creator.

When Paul wrote to the church family at Philippi his prayer was that their love would overflow with knowledge and insight to help to determine what is best so that in the day of Christ they may be pure and blameless having produced the harvest of righteousness through Jesus. Paul prayed for this church family of new believers just like the Psalmist calls us to rejoice with those in the home- to be with family means to know joy and love.

So what are we to do? We are to pray for family under different circumstances and this means to ask God to do what we cannot fully do at all times.

- 1) for family protection and guidance We pray and ask God to guide and keep them, to help them to trust in you each day. To guard them as they go and come all the time.
- 2) for family relationships We pray and ask God that there would be peace each day; unity and joy, to get along well and to encourage and strengthen each other.
- 3) for parents- mothers and fathers- to be examples of people who pray and live according to Christ teachings; to be blessings to others as they learn and grow in faith and share this with children
- 4) grandparents- to share wisdom gained and as they continue to grow and gain knowledge; to let their beacon of light shine bright for each family as they share your grace and truth to the next generations
- 5) for spouses- husbands wives as they strive to put their family first; as they struggle with challenges in marriage; as they honour their spouses and pray for encourage each other
- 6) children and teens and young adults- we pray for the challenges each person faces as they grow older—from the need to learn basic skills and knowledge as children; learning and developing to think and feel on one’s own; and then eventually applying it with desire and hope

that what they will do in life will bring joy and hope in their hearts for themselves and to the world

We are reminded that not every day is easy. Many families today are struggling with the basic needs we all have- food, shelter and clothing. But there are others who are diligently working to bring change in their lives. There are times when some family members just do not know what to do. So our prayer includes: praying on behalf of family- that they might receive the tools and wisdom to overcome difficulties. And even when we do not have the words to pray, God's Spirit will intercede on our behalf.

Families are hurting with what is happening in our world. Children and youth who have only experienced images of war in movies, now see these situations on the news. Generations of people have fled war zones, sought safety and immigrated to have hope and begin anew. Many not wanting to talk about their experiences. The number of people coming to Canada and US is increasing because living and raising their families in peace is the dream of all. Help us to encourage others. Through the power of your Spirit we know that we are not alone and we pray that you will help and guide people whom we care about and know to a new life.

We also pray for families so that all may develop perseverance, hope and character through grace and power.

Praying for family may be complicated when differences of opinion arise or cause disunity to occur. What we need to remember is where we started from- and where we are going now. If we cause others pain and hurt, forgiveness must take place. And most importantly, God's will be done.

A farmer had two daughters. The elder one was married to a farmer. The younger daughter was married to a potter. The father used to visit his daughters frequently. During one of his visits, the elder daughter requested him to pray for more frequent rains as their growing crops were badly in need of water. He agreed. Then he visited his younger daughter. She told him that they wanted more sunshine to get their clay pots dried in the sun for hardening. She wanted him to pray for more sunshine without any rain. The poor father was in great confusion as his daughters were demanding his prayers for contradictory gifts. Finally he took a bold decision and prayed, "God, do as you wish. May your will be done!"

Ultimately when we pray it is up to God. And God's responses vary—yes, no, or not yet.

We may not like the answer we receive or how we interpret his response, we just need to pray and express our thoughts, concerns so that we might grow.

TO pray for our family means not only the nuclear family we were a part of as children, or the family created with spouses, or with the family yet to come, to pray for family mean to ask God to give us strength. It means seeking His help as we strive to love and cherish each other on a daily basis. IT means seeking forgiveness when we have wronged each other. It is asking that God's grace with intervene when our words cannot. And it means spending time together, reflecting on God's word and sharing with one another the bread of life and the covenant of hope in Jesus Christ.

When we pray for family it is to ask God to give us strength when we need it and to be sustained with hope and love. And it is God's response for which we wait for we are God's children, family in faith, and brothers and sisters in Jesus our Saviour. Thanks be to God.

PRAYER

Holy God bless our families- of past times when we were children, when our parents guided us to the time when we took on these responsibilities. Bless us now where we are in our time of life- and show us your way. Give us strength and faith strong enough to enable us to live life to its fullest. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.