

Practicing Prayer on Our Resurrection Walk

Session 4 – Prayer as Response to God by Deeds

The catechism, or Outline of the Faith, in the Prayer Book defines prayer as “responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words” (p. 856). Last week in this space we explored what it might mean to pray without words, simply to sit in silence with Christ. Not something we’re used to doing, we who live in a world hell bent to fill silence with words, sounds and images! This week we tackle another challenging counter-cultural idea: prayer as response to God by deeds – by what we do and how we live out our lives.

A fundamental question to begin. Some years ago St. Andrew’s had a wonderful adult formation series that asked, “how do you fit God in your work life?” Groups of parishioners, organized by occupation, talked about the challenges of “fitting God” into their demanding work lives. The series was deservedly popular. However, we might better turn that question around and ask, how does our work life (or our family life, our life as citizens, etc.) fit into the life of God? This way of putting the question is essentially the way Scripture puts it – and the way Christian worship is oriented. Separating God or religion off into a separate compartment of our life to be “fitted in” to the important stuff, is a trick played on us by modern secularism. It would have baffled Jesus or indeed ordinary Christians up until the ascendancy of secularism and its money-oriented children, capitalism and socialism. So we begin by realizing that prayer as response to God by our deeds asks us to look deeply at how we live.

Black, white and gray. Suppose you are a young person, just graduating from school. What career choice should you make? Should you marry – and whom? Have kids? Try to make money, do good (and what would be good), make a difference in the world, be famous? Suppose you are retiring. How should you use your time and resources? At such turning points in our lives, but not just then, we are faced with an array of difficult choices. How do we make them? Well, the catechism definition of prayer suggests an interesting way. What choices would constitute a response to Christ’s love and goodness? What choices would yield instead – to use Scriptural images – to the temptations of the Evil One? There are some obvious black or white alternatives: drug dealer versus school teacher. Aim to make big bucks or to help the poor? – although even there, careful thought leads us to realize those alternatives are not a matter of simple black or white, but of shades of gray.

Seeking to lead a moral life. So we are left with the challenge of leading a moral life, a life that can be characterized as a prayer in response to Christ’s call to us. Come to think of it, that’s what those promises in the Baptismal Covenant (Prayer Book p. 304) are all about; why we read Scripture; come to church each week; confess our sins; pray for God’s help. This is what it is to be a Christian.