

Chapter 13: PRAYER

It is unrealistic to imagine that the religious life keeps a nun in the chapel praying all day. It is not unrealistic to pray all day. It depends on how one understands prayer. If prayer is reciting written praises and petitions before an altar, there is just so much time within a day to be able to do that if a household is to be maintained, a farm is to be run, and community and personal responsibilities are to be handled. However, if prayer is two-way communication with God, praying can be done with or without words anytime and anywhere. Just realizing that you are in the presence of God, with or without activity, creates a place of worship. Perhaps one of the better things the Mothers came to understand through many structured experiences of prayer is this broad aspect of prayer as over-all communing with God, that all offering of self to Him can rightly be thought of as prayer.

For the sake of looking at Holy Redeemer's history, there are several specific aspects of prayer which the Mothers used as spiritual tools.

LITURGICAL PRAYER

When monastic life began in Ladoga, there were many set hours of corporate prayer and set ways of “doing prayers”. Now at Agape House the women gather for common prayer every evening they can manage and participate in parish prayer at the church building as often as possible.



Easter in Ladoga

Liturgical prayer is using pre-written (often ancient) text in praise (mentioning an attribute of God), thanksgiving (mentioning an action of God), or petition (making a request of God for yourself or someone else). Some of these prayers are as old as the Old Testament, and many are intentionally praying back to God His own words from the Scriptures. For instance, a before-meal prayer that the Mothers used for many years is from Psalm 22:26: *“The poor shall eat and be satisfied, and those who seek the Lord shall praise Him; their hearts shall live forever.”*

The Mothers have also used more contemporary liturgical prayers, such as this prayer of thanksgiving and entreaty set to music (also sometimes used at meal times) from New Skete Monastery in New York:

“We give You thanks, Christ God,
For Your earthly gifts.
Do not deprive us
Of Your heavenly Kingdom;
But as You came among Your disciples,
O Savior, giving them Your peace,
Come also among us,
And save us.”

From the earliest years of Christian monasteries, liturgical prayers were offered every three hours on a regular basis throughout the day, the number of these Hours of Prayer done in a single day depended on how many monastics were available for this work in the chapel. The Mothers began in Ladoga with evening, morning, and noon prayers but quickly discovered it was extremely difficult to keep up with other tasks with the break in the middle of the day. For a short period they tried rising at midnight for prayers but found they could not sustain that schedule. Evening prayers (Vespers) and morning prayers (Matins) continued in Bloomfield, with additional prayers during Lent, Holy Week, and the Nativity preparation. In Agape House only evening prayers are done together as Mother Pilar and Carol work away from the house on irregular schedules. Most of the liturgies used are a gift from New Skete Monastery, by the monastics there who have worked over many years to put traditional texts into contemporary language.

The most important time of liturgical prayer is the Sunday Divine Liturgy. While in Ladoga the Mothers participated with the local EOC parish which met in a home just across the road. Occasionally they traveled 45 miles to Indianapolis to participate with their original parish. When in Bloomfield, they were mid-way between the parish in Indianapolis and the parish in Terre Haute, and for most Sundays for 13 years they alternated between these two locations for Sunday worship. It was always a very special treat when one of the EOC priests came to Bloomfield so the Liturgy could be celebrated in the chapel there. Agape House is located close enough to the local church building that they are now able to be there every time any service is celebrated.

The use of liturgical prayers may seem stifling and boring, but the Mothers have learned their richness. Using the prayers of saints who have gone before provides a connectedness to them, which is a great encouragement. Liturgical prayers also give a good focus, making sure that all points of theological truth get included in times of worship: God as creator, provider and sustainer, shepherd, redeemer, and sovereign. As someone once said, these are “words small and light, waiting humbly about ready for use.” Repetition of the same prayers over time write them on the heart and imbed them in the spirit. For instance, even those who would not profess any interest in spirituality find the Lord's Prayer (perhaps the most used liturgical prayer, often learned as a child) comes immediately to mind in times of need.

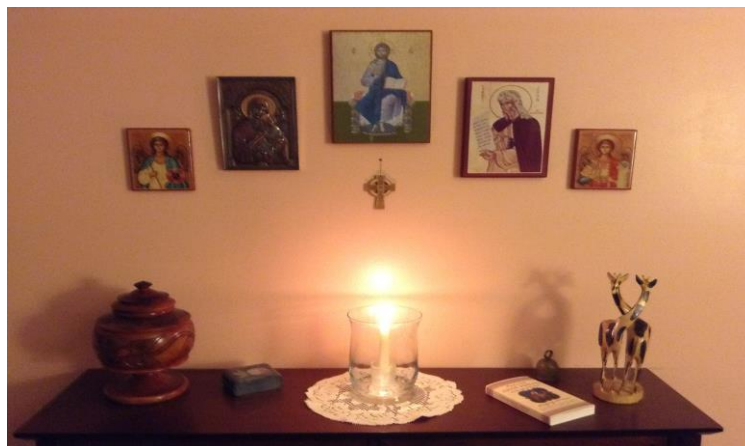
EXTEMPORANEOUS PRAYER

The Holy Spirit moved those who first prayed what are now considered liturgical prayers to write them out, thus they could be shared. The same Spirit can move His children to offer immediate, original prayers. The format of prayers used in EOC worship provides for both liturgical prayers and extemporaneous prayers, a rich combination. Portions of time for personal praise, thanksgiving, and intercessory needs are specifically included in EOC worship. This allows for items of immediate importance to be offered up in prayer.



Christmas in Bloomfield

Each of the women in Agape House is responsible for her own personal devotions. They include both liturgical prayers and their own contemporaneous prayers for a balance of traditional and currently meaningful. This combination keeps prayer dynamic.



Daily at Agape House

MUSIC

Music is an integral part of EOC worship. It can be instrumental selections that set a reflective time before a service, chanted prayers, and sung hymns and spiritual songs. When a prayer is chanted, the words are set to a simple, minimal melody which supports the text but does not detract from it.

Early advice from 4th Century St. Augustine is, “To sing is to pray twice” – once through the text and once through the music. Singing resonates throughout the body and includes more than just the mind in worship. Mother Pilar and Carol each enjoy singing at the church building in the parish choir for special services and chanting for mid-week Vespers.

Both in the parish church and at the Holy Redeemer altar, songs used in worship are chosen for the meaning of their texts. Depending on the occasion or the placement within a liturgy, a song may be on the theme of light, thanksgiving, petition, praise, confession, celebration, or a festal occasion (such as LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM). In addition to these situations, Agape House has a library of recorded music, mostly by current Christian artists, which all may use.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

In another of their newsletters the Mothers included this about prayer: “St. James says in his Epistle that *‘the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.’* (5:16) Is this because we can say good prayers? Is this because we are good and God is obligated to reward our admirable behavior? To borrow some ideas from Bernhard Anderson’s 1983 book about the Psalms, BEING IN RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, we suggest St. James’s “righteous” here has a deeper meaning. Righteousness is trusting who God is and what He says. Such a relationship is not an achievement of man; it is something that God initiates and to which we respond. Rather than assuming that a righteous person (the pray-er) is one who is perfectly conforming to some law or moral standard, it is God accepting us as righteous who are in a trusting covenant relationship with Him. The righteousness is God's gift to indicate the status of this right relationship. God gives the gift of being righteous; we give it back to Him when we pray in faith — and that prayer accomplishes much. Because we have experienced that God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6), we can have confidence that His answers to our requests, whatever form those answers take, reflect His love. God is love. Can His response be anything less?

As they pray for others the women use a combination of liturgical and extemporaneous prayers. The parish has a litany for the Divine Liturgy's intercessory prayers, a set list of topics that are always included. This litany includes prayer for those in the service of the Church and all the faithful, civic leaders and the military, travelers, the welfare of the city, the unselfish use of what is provided, unbelievers, the suffering and neglected, parish needs, visitors, seekers, and the second coming of the Lord. During other services, especially when the sacraments of healing and confession are offered, a combination of liturgical and extemporaneous prayers are used. Holy Redeemer includes a similar litany for communal prayers. Spontaneous prayers are added daily regarding Agape House ministries, immediate needs, and prayer requests from others.

Christians are clearly called to pray for one another. The Indianapolis parish provides the name of a weekly “prayer partner” randomly selected from among the parish members as a focus for intercessory prayer. From the very beginning in Ladoga, there have been many prayer requests come to Holy Redeemer by phone, by mail, by e-mail, and in person. All are lifted up to the Lord.