



Week 4: Jesus the Lord, Hearing Prayer

Scripture References

Jesus was the supreme teacher of prayer (Luke 3.21; 5.15-16; 9.29; 22.40). Jesus alone, as God's only-begotten Son, can truly call God 'Abba' or 'My Father', (John 20.17). But he shares his unique relationship with the Father with us through the Holy Spirit (Galatians 4.6). Jesus also promises that our prayers will be heard. Because he is the Mediator who has entered heaven on our behalf (John 16.23), Christ's priestly intercession can never fail us (Hebrews 7.25).

From the Book of Common Prayer

Prayer of St John Chrysostom

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto thee; and dost promise that when two or three are gathered together in thy Name thou wilt grant their requests: Fulfil now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants, as may be most expedient for them; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting.

Amen.

Collect for the First Sunday after Epiphany

O LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Comment on BCP Prayers

These prayers (especially that of St John Chrysostom, originally an Eastern Orthodox prayer and addressed directly to Christ) **remind us of Jesus' promise that he will be among his people when we gather** (Matthew 18.20) and that we will be heard when we pray in his name (John 14.14). The Collect for the First Sunday after Epiphany asks God's guidance for what we need to pray about and gives us a lively sense that grace alone empowers our prayer.

Reflection, by Revd. Tom Robson

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When you picture Jesus, how often do you picture him in prayer? Occasionally, perhaps, when the Gospel reading leads us into accounts of Christ praying. And yet, to read through a Gospel is to encounter the Son of God in constant prayer to the Father. He prays at crucial moments, such as his baptism (Luke 3:21), transfiguration (Luke 9.29) and in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14.32). He prays in quiet moments, and busy moments, throughout his ministry (Luke 5.16). Jesus models not only a prayer life, but a life of prayer.

And yet, Christ offers even more than a pattern to follow. The Scriptures reveal, and the prayers of the Church explore, the wonderful gift it is that Jesus himself who enables our prayer. He helps us pray, he mediates our prayers, and he receives our prayers. Let's reflect on those encouragements to prayer, through the Scriptures and the prayers given for us.

Jesus helps us by teaching and modelling prayer for those who follow him. Matthew and Luke give us the heavenly wisdom of the Lord's prayer. Jesus also teaches us how to pray without pride or self-presentation: 'Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you' (Matthew 6.6).

He shows us how to pray for an audience of God alone, and reminds us that as we pray we are in fact never alone. The words of St John Chrysostom's prayer remind us that as we gather to pray, Jesus is in the midst of us. Christ helps us to pray.

Christ is also the mediator of our prayers. As Jesus prepared his disciples on the eve of his death, he encouraged them with these words: 'Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.' (John 16.23) Our prayers come to the Father in the name of the Son because the Holy Spirit of both Father and Son has been given to us (Romans 8.26-27).

I can picture a successful business leader, in the age of handwritten communication. Every day their assistant brings in a huge stack of correspondence. But which letter is placed on top? It is the one in the handwriting of their son, writing home from their travels abroad. That letter is opened and read first, because of the name in which it arrives.

Our prayers come to the Father in the name of the Son. That promise is claimed through this Collect for the First Sunday after Epiphany, and in so many of our prayers. May we never lose the wonder that our prayer to God is 'through Jesus Christ our Lord.' By his grace, the Father receives our prayers with the same joy as he did those of his Son. 'because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' (Galatians 4.6). Christ mediates our prayers.

But ought we also to pray to Christ? This reflection is headed 'Jesus the Lord, Hearing Prayer' but so far we've seen that Jesus models and mediates prayer that is often addressed to the Father. Should we pray only to the Father, or does this create a false division within the Trinity?

As we read through the New Testament, we are reassured that our God is three-in-one. From the earliest centuries of the Church, Christians have recognised that we can pray to God in Christ but can also pray directly to Jesus who waits in heaven for us, already interceding at the Father's right hand.

One powerful example of this is the first Christian martyr Stephen, at the moment of his death, crying out to Christ: 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit' (Acts 7.59). St John Chrysostom's prayer also invites us to speak directly to Jesus, since it is His promise to be in our midst. Likewise in the Collect, we ask the Lord to 'mercifully ... receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee.' In all these ways, Jesus not only models but mediates our prayer: Christ receives our prayers and brings them to the Father.

I began by asking how often you picture Jesus in prayer. If I may, let's turn that around. When you pray, how often do you picture Jesus listening? Trust him that he turns his face toward you and hears you. If you ask him, he will help you to pray. As you pray in his name, by the power of his Holy Spirit, your prayers come before God the Father in the name of the Son; and Jesus - who loves you and gave himself for you - receives your prayer. He listens because Jesus is the Lord, hearing our prayer.

Reflection on this week's image

Jesus became a compassionate High Priest because he called on God in his suffering and was saved out of death: as his followers how can prayer become a vital source of life for us?

Questions for Discussion

- What have you found most helpful for encouraging prayer along your Christian journey?
- Can we have confidence that our prayers and supplications come before Almighty God?
- When you pray, can you picture Jesus listening?
- What would help you to not only have a 'prayer life', but a 'life of prayer'?