Not the Lent We Expected III

+Practicing God’s Presence+

“In the morning, while it was still very dark, (Jesus) got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed” -Mark 1: 35

This is a challenging time that has caused a lot of havoc in the lives of all of us. It is, however, a time that has given a lot of people the opportunity to make real positive changes in their daily routine. Many have used this time to change their behavior to be more health conscious, to get more sleep, to exercise more, read, or tackle those jobs around the house which have be on delay for a long time. Some have started a new hobby, or renewed a passion for a hobby that has been neglected for some time.

With this in mind, I’m suggesting that you use this change of pace to become more regular in your daily devotions. The season of Lent, after all, is a time when people try to grow in faith and commitment to the Gospel and God’s Kingdom. Since we all have been sequestered, personal devotions are a great way to do this. Below are some resources and strategies to help you grow in the Lord at this time.

* Be intentional. Have a specific time and place for your devotions. This doesn’t have to be a separate room; it can be a particular chair or place to sit. It does help to have a quiet space free from the usual distractions that divert your attention away from your reading and prayers.
* Have a plan for reading the scriptures. It might be a few verses or a chapter from one book of the Bible. Take time to try to imagine how this passage addresses your life.
* Use a devotional. One of the overlooked devotionals for prayer is a hymnal. If you have an old LBW (green book) you can find prayers for all occasions on pages 179-192. If you have a new ELW (red book) you can find prayers listed on pages 72-87. A portion of these prayers are below. Praying prayers that are written is not inauthentic, it is a way to ‘prime the pump’ and inspire your own prayers.
* Read the text of the hymns, or sing them. The words of the hymns offer great insights into the gospel and how to live a life of faith.
* Don’t give up. If you miss a day, or a few days, start again. Remember, God is not counting and neither should you! The goal is to be as faithful as you can, don’t try to be perfect.
* Other strategies include engaging a friend to share your thoughts and prayers, keeping a journal of prayers and insights from your reading, and keeping silence.

Remember, God is always more willing to hear than we are to pray! I hope you find these suggestions helpful.

Peace, Pastor Mike

**Prayers from the ELW**

**The church**

Gracious Father, we pray for your holy catholic church. Fill it with all truth and peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in need, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

**Church unity**

Most high and holy God, pour out upon us your one and unifying Spirit, and awaken in every confession of the whole church a holy hunger and thirst for unity in you; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

**General thanksgiving**

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we humbly thank you for your goodness to us and to all that you have made. We praise you for your creation, for keeping us and all things in your care, and for all the blessings of life. Above all we bless you for your immeasurable love in redeeming the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies that with thankful hearts we praise you, not only with our lips but in our lives, by giving ourselves to your service and by living in your gifts of holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all worship and praise, now and forever. Amen.

**General intercession**

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work or watch or weep, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, comfort the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love’s sake. Amen.

**Peace**

O God, it is your will to hold both heaven and earth in a single peace. Let the design of your great love shine on the waste of our wraths and sorrows, and give peace to your church, peace among nations, peace in our homes, and peace in our hearts; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Peace**

Gracious and holy God, lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth. Lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust. Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace. Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

**Peace among the nations**

Gracious God, grant peace among nations. Cleanse from our own hearts the seeds of strife: greed and envy, harsh misunderstandings and ill will, fear and desire for revenge. Make us quick to welcome ventures in cooperation among the peoples of the world, so that there may be woven the fabric of a common good too strong to be torn by the evil hands of war. In the time of opportunity, make us be diligent; and in the time of peril, let not our courage fail; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**National distress**

Eternal God, amid all the turmoil and changes of the world your love is steadfast and your strength never fails. In this time of danger and trouble, be to us a sure guardian and rock of defense. Guide the leaders of our nation with your wisdom, comfort those in distress, and grant us courage and hope to face the future; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

**Time of conflict, crisis, disaster**

God, our refuge and strength, you have bound us together in a common life. In all our conflicts, help us to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, to listen for your voice amid competing claims, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Time of conflict, crisis, disaster**

O God, where hearts are fearful and constricted, grant courage and hope. Where anxiety is infectious and widening, grant peace and reassurance. Where impossibilities close every door and window, grant imagination and resistance. Where distrust twists our thinking, grant healing and illumination. Where spirits are daunted and weakened, grant soaring wings and strengthened dreams. All these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

**Time of civic mourning**

God our creator, through whose providing care we enjoy all goodness and life, turn our eyes to your mercy in this time of confusion and loss. Comfort this nation as we mourn; shine your light on those whose only companion is darkness; and teach us all so to number our days that we may apply our hearts to your wisdom; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

**The nation**

Almighty God, you have given us this good land as our heritage. Make us always remember your generosity and constantly do your will. Bless our land with honesty in the workplace, truth in education, and honor in daily life. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance; and from every evil course of action.