Reading 1  Zec 12:10-11; 13:1

Thus says the LORD: I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and petition; and they shall look on him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only son, and they shall grieve over him as one grieves over a firstborn.

On that day the mourning in Jerusalem shall be as great as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo.

On that day there shall be open to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, a fountain to purify from sin and uncleanness.

Responsorial Psalm  PS 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

R. My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.
O God, you are my God whom I seek; for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water. R.

Thus have I gazed toward you in the sanctuary to see your power and your glory, for your kindness is a greater good than life; my lips shall glorify you. R.

Thus will I bless you while I live; lifting up my hands, I will call upon your name. As with the riches of a banquet shall my soul be satisfied, and with exultant lips my mouth shall praise you. R.

You are my help, and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy. My soul clings fast to you; your right hand upholds me. R.

Reading 2  Galatians 3:26-29

Brothers and sisters: Through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s children, heirs according to the promise.


Once when Jesus was praying by himself, and the disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” They said in reply, “John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, ‘One of the ancient prophets has arisen.’” Then he said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter said in reply, “The Christ of God.” He scolded them and directed them not to tell this to anyone.

He said, “The Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised.”

Then he said to all, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”

HOMILY

During baptismal preparation class, Barb and I often tell a story to the parents to help ease them into bringing prayer into their young children’s lives in normal everyday situations. Before their first child was born, our younger son and his wife had a yellow lab named Miller and taught the dog to wait for dinner while they said grace. When they said “Amen,” Miller could eat. Picture the dog with a full plate of dog food in front of him, he’s licking his lips and he’s staring at the food … waiting for that word “Amen”! Then little Tommy comes along and grows up with this going on around him, learning to say
grace, watching the dog wait for that key word. Well, a few things then happened – little Tommy says the prayer quicker, getting to that word “Amen” quicker, and then he learns that saying the word in the middle of grace works even quicker. The point was to introduce children to prayer in an interesting way, and in a regular home setting, and it worked. The side benefit was that grace needed to be said before dinner, or else the dog didn’t eat. Now their whole family continues to say grace on a regular basis.

In our Gospel reading today, Luke notes that Jesus was praying by himself, although His disciples were with Him, so they were certainly nearby. He had just fed the five thousand, and was about to tell His disciples for the first time about His upcoming fate – a very important revelation which could frighten them away. Now, all of the Gospel writers record Jesus praying often, but Luke especially notes more occurrences, and at all sorts of occasions, many of them very important in Jesus’ life. As examples, Luke notes Jesus praying alone and in public, praying at His own Baptism and after healing people, praying all night before choosing the 12 apostles and giving thanks to the Father before the feeding of the 5000, and praying at the Transfiguration, before teaching the Lord’s Prayer to His disciples, and for infants and little children brought to Him. He prayed at the Last Supper, in Gethsemane, on the cross, and then, at His dying breath. After His Resurrection, He again prayed before he ate with the others, and then before His Ascension. … Jesus showed His disciples, and us, how to pray, why it’s important to pray, and when to pray. He didn’t just pray in the Temple or synagogue areas during prayer time – he prayed often, and wherever He was at the time. By His example, he was inviting us to do the same.

So, what is prayer? It’s not complex, or certainly doesn’t have to be. Some say prayer is … conversation with God. St. Teresa of Avila said that “prayer is nothing else than being on terms of friendship with God.” St. Therese of Lisieux said that for her, “prayer is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus.” Conversation, friendship, glance – prayer is keeping God in our sights and in our minds, in what we do. How do we get from 1 hour a week of God-time to having God in our sights 24/7, getting closer to God 24/7? Or, how do we help someone else get there? We begin by forming habits of prayer that fit into the daily routines of our days, like saying grace with a dog like Miller. Some other examples:

Before even getting out of bed in the morning, we can say good morning to God, offer our day to God, and ask God to bless those we love through the day. Then, we ask God to help us through the day, to help us get through the day, to help us judge what is good from the not-so-good, to help us make sense out of the distorted and the confused events we might encounter. As the day progresses, we look for the good in the events of the day and say a quick “thank you” to God – found a parking spot in a crowded lot, just missed hitting a deer, found something we were looking for. As the day progresses, we offer each task of the day as a prayer, and we try to do them to the best of our ability – soon, we will find more meaning in even the smallest tasks. The best part is that the more we do this, the more these prayer habits will become a normal part of our days. It becomes easier to live our lives the way Jesus wants us to. Our lives can become more in tune with God’s Will, and take on a deeper, more personal note with others, relationships with those we love can grow. We move away from just ourselves and start focusing more on others, on their problems, their issues, their challenges. We pray that their lives become clearer to
them, that they experience the change we feel in our lives. We pray for them and we are on that path to 24/7.

Sure, Deacon Dave, you may be thinking, I’ll try and do that … someday. But right now, life is too hectic to even find a few minutes to do that each day. But, think about it this way – say quick prayers while doing things during the day: during that first cup of coffee (maybe just start with thanking God for that), waiting for a meeting to begin, lunchtime, a 5-minute break during the day, getting away from the computer for a few minutes, while at the store, even when driving the car to work or a child’s soccer game. Remember – conversation with God.

So, why the urgency now? There is so much to pray about – we all need to pray and we all need prayers, quite possibly more than ever. With the increasing polarization, confusion and distrust surrounding our nation during this election year, many people are feeling that the world … and what it offers … is not fulfilling their inner needs, and they are searching for more. A few months ago, I mentioned Blaise Pascale, the French scientist and inventor from a couple of hundred years ago, who noted that “There is a God-shaped hole in every human heart that can be filled by God and God alone.” That hole can’t be filled by alcohol, or drugs, or money, or power, or anything that the world gives. It can’t even be completely filled by good things, such as great relationships with those we love, but only by a personal and loving relationship with Jesus Christ. As today’s Responsorial Psalm noted, from Psalm 63: “My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.” Please take your Bible out later today and read that Psalm – it’s wonderful! … With a decreasing faith in what the world can give people, polls are actually showing an increasing faith in God. Blaise Pascal was right! Only God can fill that God-shaped hole in our hearts! At work, I find people willing and some even wanting to talk about God and religion – during breaks and lunch hours, of course. There’s even a prayer request list that is circulated among many Evangelicals and some Catholics.

We have much to pray about. We read in the news that people everywhere are concerned about the immigration and refugee crisis in Europe as well as here at home. Good people are divided while trying to discern between helping the least among us on one hand and understanding the dangers that might bring with it on the other hand. People are concerned for theirs and their children’s futures, as the nation and the world struggle with economic, social and justice issues, with many of the world’s answers tending to lead to further polarization.

We do have much to pray about. Please check out the tagboard on the back wall of the Church that now displays the Spiritual Works of Mercy, and some of the ideas listed under Pray for the Living and the Dead. Specific items listed include: having a Mass said for someone who has died, joining the Resurrection choir at St. Louis, sending your Godchild a note to let them know you love them, becoming a prayer partner at one of the area pregnancy help centers, and becoming an adorer with St. Louis’ Perpetual Adoration Program. Regarding Perpetual Adoration, it is a wonderful experience to spend some quiet prayer time with Our Lord, who is physically present in the consecrated Host right in front of you – in the near future, we will be having another formal sign-up period, but if you are interested in learning more about it now, please see me after Mass and I’ll take your name. Other prayer opportunities can be found on the tagboard under Bear Wrongs Patiently, and Forgive Injuries – as you may think, certain situations may require extensive prayer and healing time.
Other prayer opportunities abound. Think how good you would feel if someone were to tell you that they have been praying for you. And, on this Father’s Day, we should pray for all fathers everywhere – including also Godfathers, grandfathers, those who are mentors or viewed as fathers, our parish fathers – Fathers Bob, Ray and Peter and Msgr Gerry – and our Holy Father, and we should also include our deceased fathers. And we should always say a prayer of thanksgiving to our Divine Father, for all that God has given us.

We do have much to pray about – it brings us closer to God, and helps us to better know the Will of God. If you need to start, or know others who might need a boost, please consider doing so. And now, let’s continue on with our own prayers of thanksgiving in our Eucharistic banquet.