

Power of Prayer

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THE POWER OF PRAYER

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JESUS HEALS THE PARALYTIC MAN

“And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. Immediately many gathered together so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the Word to them. Then they came to Him bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son your sins are forgiven you.’ And some of the Scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ‘Why does this man speak blasphemy like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ Immediately when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned this within themselves, He said to them, ‘Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier to say to the paralytic? Your sins are forgiven you. Or to say arise, take up your bed and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins.’ He said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you arise, take up your bed and go to your house.’ (Mark 2:1-11)

According to St. John, it is written that the Lord Jesus Christ performed a large number of miracles and offered many signs of his divinity. And he added that “**there are many other things that Jesus did ,which if they were written one by one I suppose that even the entire world could not contain the books that would be written**”. (John 21:25) If we keep this sentiment in mind, and place it at the end of this section from St. John’s Gospel, we wouldn’t be able to say that He healed just one or two of those who were paralyzed, but countless others.

Why did the Gospels only record two people who were paralytic (St Mark recorded one of these miracles, and St. John in Chapter 5)? Why didn’t they tell us about the many people who were healed and **why** only concentrated on these two? I believe that these two miracles are a strong guide for the servants, priests and ministers on how to properly serve in the church and **all** mankind.

Expanding on the example from St. John, we see that the Lord Jesus Christ went to the

paralytic and started to speak to him and asked “do you want to be made well? (John 5:6). In the second example, He was at a house and waited until four friends brought the sick man, uncovered the roof and brought the bed down to Him. Why did the Lord Jesus Christ go to one but waited for the other? Do you think it is related to having a different level of respect for each person? He goes to some, and for the others He waits? In fact the two miracles are very important lessons in the life of a servant of Christ, because Christ told us not only to imitate Him, but to have Him always work through us.

SERVE AS a FRIEND OF CHRIST

We are unable to serve anyone by ourselves, but only through Christ that we could serve. It is God’s work!

What is the meaning to serve or to preach? According to St. Paul, it means to lift up a person from the state of death to life. In Paul’s experience, God granted him the ability to transfer from death to life; from being paralysed to being healed, God allowed Him to walk towards heaven. He was in darkness and God granted him the adoption of the Father who is the true Light, and thus Paul became a son of light not of darkness and Satan.

So in our ministry, we must know that it is not our work but God’s. The problem is that sometimes we are overly zealous and can become depressed when we see that the world is full of darkness. Our job is to ask the Lord to work through us or through others. I am not the Groom, but only a friend of the Groom (John 3:29).

As Origen claims, when a priest enters the sanctuary he must remove his shoes. According to the Old Testament (Deut. 25:7-10), if a man refused to take his elder brother’s widow as wife, he must take off his shoes at the door of the city. Thus when the clergyman or deacon enters the door of the sanctuary and removes his shoes, he is declaring that he isn’t the Groom, but only a friend of the Groom (John 3:29). My joyous goal is to unite the bride (church) with God the Groom, and not with me. Thus we must acknowledge in the service that we are just friends of Christ who grants us His own power and authority. I can’t raise a person from the dead and give him life. I can’t heal someone who is paralyzed and make him walk; but through Christ I can rest assured that nothing is impossible. As we in humility ask the Lord Jesus to be transfigured in our hearts, then we will surely be able to do the work of Christ Himself.

Our Lord Christ showed His concern for the unity of the Church by asking the Father that “they may be one with Me as I am One with You.” He is the Lord of each of the church members and He is also concerned with the church as a whole. We must learn to practice these two principles.

When the Lord was at people’s houses, that meant He was in the Church, He dwelled in the Church. In the story of the paralytic, Our Lord Christ was present in a very crowded house, where no more people could get in the door or reach physically to Him.

Yet He cared to heal him who couldn't possibly reach God on his own. While the church maybe so crowded, yet Christ cares for each of her members. In the story; four people were concerned for the healing of their friend. These four represent the clergymen (bishop, priest and deacon) and the layman. What if either of these four cared not for the sick man, then surely the bed would have been dropped and the man might have been further hurt or even died. In fact there is no separation amongst these groups. We can't say that a person's healing is the responsibility of only one group or another. According to **St. John Chrysostom** 'if there is a bishop with no people, he is not a bishop, and a priest with no people is not a priest.' We are all vital members of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, and any fault in one of these groups makes the entire church weaker. It is important for all members to work always together.

THE LAYMAN AS WITNESS TO THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

* Once in the presence of H.G. Bishop Serapion, I had asked some of our youth in Los Angeles, 'Who is the bishop here?'

They enthusiastically replied, 'Bishop Serapion.'

I said, 'you are all the bishop of California. It is not my idea, but the words of the archbishop **St. John Chrysostom**. He said to his people that they were the bishop because the bishop can't work without the people.'

When women go to the supermarket, they can bear witness to Jesus Christ. While it is not practical for a Bishop to go to the market place and preach there. Those that may bring the children to Christ are the children; through the youth, we can attract more youth to follow Christ. This is more effective than the ministry of the priest. The successful priest is the one that feels he is not the priest, but the priests are the people and they are his hands, his eyes and the instruments of Christ. Through them he can practice his priesthood.

St. Athanasius the Great was exiled five times in his life as a Pope and suffered most of his life, but he was cheerful, strong and successful. What do you think is the source of his success? He realized that he was only an instrument of Christ to do His work in Church, by His Holy Spirit and through Him in the life of others. Thus we must not be troubled or lose our peace when we discover people straying from God's path, but trust that God is the God of impossibilities who can grant life to the dead and healing to those suffering and in sickness.

So, why did Christ wait for the friends of the paralytic man to bring him down through the roof? Christ works in many ways; He knows what is suitable for each one. For some, He would go out to speak with them and encourage them to accept Him. This is the personal contact of God concerned with every single person, whether good or wicked. **St. Augustine** said 'If a person is very bad and has committed many sins, and insists not to repent, don't despair, for God is leaving him alive till now to reveal Himself to him, even to the last moments of this person's life.'

We tend to think that there are some hopeless cases around us. There is no such thing

as a hopeless case. Even those that persecute the church, or extremists who attack the church, we believe that God can **transform** any person, even in the final moments of his life. Thus, it is our responsibility to pray, **with ‘kneeling, mataniyas’** and **pleading** for the salvation of all **mankind in every country; and all nations of the world**. Do not feel that you are responsible only for your church, or a special class within Sunday school, this is just **administrative work**; but spiritually, every person should have a special place in your heart whether you know him or not. You should pray for all, and **rejoice** when anyone accepts the Lord Jesus **and** His redeeming work, having a fellowship with Him and has a place in the bosom of the Father.

The miracle recorded in the Gospel of **St. John** tells us that we must take care of all individuals, God is concerned with everyone. The second miracle completes the first. God works through the communal life, the church life, as well as with the individual. He loves His church and is concerned with His bride.

I truly hope that we can care for all mankind by all means and **take on this** responsibility. Don't be **involved** in the earthly and temporal things; **rather** be involved in the work of heavenly Father.

God created me as His own child. I am concerned for the work of my Father. As the Lord Jesus, while a youth of 12 years old, represented you and me, and didn't spend time in jokes and playing, but did serious work by entering the Temple to be in contact with the teachers and scribes. **He seemed at the time as if He ignored** His parents Joseph and Mary and said "I must do my Father's work." We should be **also** about our Father's work.

HOW TO EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF PRAYER?

Mainly, God wants us to be His own, "So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11).

God is not separated from us or isolated in heaven. He came to our world so that He could deal with us as friends. Moses of the Old Testament spoke to God as His friend, and what about us?

* Do you feel that God is your friend? Do you speak with Him face to face? In your private room or at church, do you feel that you are in heaven in front of God and God is in the midst of the church and within your heart?

1- You must practice the power of prayer; **we have to discover the friendship of Christ and to speak with Him as a man to his friend**. Secondly, it is important not only to speak frankly with God as our personal friend but also to focus our eyes on Him and not on our sins.

* **Abbot Bayamon**, one of the great desert fathers once said 'Why are you standing near a very dirty place and saying it smells bad? Instead of sitting near a dirty place, sit near the Lord and smell His sweet aroma. Instead of focusing on your sins and saying 'I am a sinner, I am very weak' Why don't you say 'I am a child of God, I am a member of the body of Christ, I am His ambassador, I am a temple of the Holy Spirit, I am an agent

of heaven, I am called to be an angel of God, I have a special place in the bosom of the Father, I am truly waiting to be with the angels and all the heavenly hosts.

PRAYING FOR THE SALVATION OF THE WORLD

The world today is paralysed. It is not the work of the clergy alone, but all the clergy and laymen must work in one spirit in harmony to bring the world to the Lord Jesus and ask Him to heal its paralysis. I believe that any person who does not pray for the salvation of all mankind has committed a fatal mistake or a sin, and must confess to the Lord that his heart is narrow. We must love all mankind.

Tertullian in the second century said, “The world hates the church and the church loves **those in the** world. The world can’t accept the church **and** attacks the church and **her** services.” It is our shared responsibility to work **through** the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of all mankind. When you say this child or this young person is in my group and I am concerned with him, you are **still** far away from the Spirit of Christ. Every person should have a special place in your heart. Church administration is important; **however** we need the Spirit of God, the lover of all mankind. **St. John Chrysostom** used to say to the people ‘I love you.’ One time he didn’t attend his sermon, and when he returned the following day he said to them ‘Yesterday passed for me like a year because I couldn’t pass a day without seeing you.’ What **a** lovely fatherhood! St John said ‘Don’t imagine that **I am rejoicing** because there are many of you. If **there is just one person in the city who** doesn’t enjoy Christ, I am in grief.’ If **there is** just one person in the capital of the Eastern Roman empire who is far from Christ, St John Chrysostom could not be happy.

What about how we feel? Sometimes while we are on the Internet or watching TV and we see a person committing some sin and we laugh, although we don’t know them, how is it that we do not care for their salvation?

St. Paul said, ‘I have the mind of Christ. I have the heart of Christ.’ He is the lover of mankind. If I am united with Him and have His characteristics, I share with Him to be the lover of mankind.

Do you love the whole world? Do you feel that you are a servant to every human being? Do you feel that you are a member of the body of the Lord Jesus and hope that the whole world becomes the church of Christ?

St. Paul said that if any person is weak, he is also weak. If any person is having difficulty, his heart will be inflamed as if by fire (2 Cor. 11:29), this is the heart of a servant to the world.

Once on Bright Saturday, a person had no car and needed to hitch a ride to church. The American man who stopped to pick him up asked where he was going at midnight, and he told him” I am going to the church to prepare for Easter and began to describe Good Friday”.

The **driver** asked if he wanted to go to the pub!

Although his English wasn't that strong, he asked the driver if he believed in Christ and found out that he didn't. Then he presented the **driver** with this question;

'If you don't believe in God and **you think you are right**, but you discover that there is God and then what will you do? For me when I die I will lose nothing for my faith in God even if there is no God'

The driver couldn't answer and when they came near the church, he asked him to come in and see what it was like. He entered and during the prayer, the driver began to weep. He asked him to visit him and speak with him about Christ, as the man had seen in the church an icon of heaven with the church half full at midnight **with** people in deep and sincere prayer. This should be at the end of our prayers that we **could** see the Lord here in this world before departing **to** the world to come. Not just to see Him but also be able to reveal Him to others.

COMPARE ADAM AND EVE TO JOB

I want to compare **Adam and Eve to Job** while the latter was **suffering tribulations**. Adam and Eve were escaping from the sight of God; **they were shamed and afraid for they were** naked. Now Job lost all of his animals, his children, his home, his friends became enemies and his wife turned against him. Even his body became infested with worms and was sickly, all except his tongue because the devil wanted him to blaspheme God with it.

Job, although he externally appeared to be in very bad shape, he practiced singing a very nice song, and according to **St. John Chrysostom** Job's song was better than the songs of the angels because the angels sang from heaven but Job sang and gave thanks to **God in the midst of his trials and tribulations**. He said 'I am in heaven; my life **is of time** and no one, even Satan can take away my God from my heart. He is in my heart and I see Him even in these bad situations.'

Therefore; my goal is to practice the peace of the heavenly life here in this world before leaving **it**.

The Lord Jesus is my first and last goal, he is everything to me. David, the king and prophet, said that he was among the garbage and God had lifted him up to be among great and noble creatures.

St. Paul was complaining about his flesh as if it was dead from sin, but he said 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me' (Phi. 4:13). He confessed that he was the chief of all sinners; at the same time he believed that he had the righteousness of the Lord Christ. He was proud that he was hidden in Christ and Christ granted him Himself as his own righteousness. He was proud that his inner man was focusing on the Lord Jesus and not on his weaknesses and sins. St. Paul often complained of his weakness and was focusing on the Lord to grant him victory. In Corinthians 15:57 he said 'Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.' I am victorious! God the Father granted me to be a member, or soldier of the army of Christ, who is the Captain of

the battle, so surely I will be victorious if I follow the captain. Again, we should speak frankly with God as our friend and focus our eyes on Him and not our weakness.

Now; **what would be the aim and purpose of our life, if it wouldn't be to see Him?** He said in Mathew 5:8 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.' If you will not see Him here through faith, you will not see Him face to face on the last day. Every day you must ask God, 'I want to see you. I want to be in touch with you. I want to hear your voice. I **want to** see you through the Eucharist, through daily events, through righteous men, in the sinners and while I am eating, drinking, studying, sleeping and working. I see you in every single moment.' God wants to reveal Himself to you and me. Why do we prevent ourselves from seeing Him?

In 1971 there was someone coming to Los Angeles, and I asked one of the youth then (now Bishop Tadros) to **meet** him at the airport. Later I asked him about the man he picked up, and he said that man knew nothing about God. He had never read the Bible nor had he heard of the Gospels, he only went to church at the feasts to see how people were dressed. He had lived in sin, and now began to live in the church. That man came to me once and wanted to confess. He said 'When I was in Egypt I was very strong and I felt that God couldn't **defeat** me, when I came to Los Angeles I had no friends or relatives and was very weak as I could do nothing, **here; God** put me in a corner and now I can't be far away from Him. It was a good chance for me to know God and I discovered how beautiful and nice my Lord Jesus Christ is in bringing me here to reveal Him self to me.'

This should at the end of our prayers, that everyone discovers the Lord whose aim is to bring us **all** to Him.

HOW COULD I ENJOY MY LORD AND FOR HIM TO BE MY EVERYTHING?

God created man to be joyful and cheerful. Although Jesus wept many times, but Pontius Pilate wrote a letter to Herod saying that 'When you see Christ, you desire to focus your eyes on Him, but it's too hard to see His eyes.' He is always cheerful and smiling and only sometimes weeping. Truly He was a man of suffering, according to Isaiah, He was a 'servant of suffering' but He, as a representative of us all, was always cheerful. When I accept my Lord Jesus as a source of joy within my heart, I am always cheerful, smiling, rejoicing and satisfied with Him because He is everything to me. He who provides food for my body, He gives me Himself as food for my soul. When I sleep, I thank God for the rest for my body and for His bosom for the rest of my soul. When somebody hates me, I thank Him that I have a divine chance to share with my Lord and love my enemies. In all things, I see Him as everything to me and satisfy all of my needs.

We have one life, if you are at home, at church, at a party or wedding, there is one life and **you are either with Christ or without Him**. We cannot live half between darkness and light.

Do I accept to be in Christ? This doesn't mean that you will not enjoy life, but that the Holy Spirit will sanctify everything in your life and give you a **special** personality and you will **truly** feel deep **joy**.

In 1975-76 in Sydney, once I asked the Sunday school servants in a meeting, who is the happiest person in the world? One said; **the** children, **another** said the prophets, but the answer should always be me! **I am the happiest person**, I lack nothing and I enjoy the Holy Trinity and thus I am happy in this world **and will be in** the world to come.

One year ago I read a letter from St. Ambrose to one of his friends; he asked 'Can we find a person in the world happier than a Christian person?' Do you have this feeling that you are the happiest person in the world? If not, you need to evaluate your faith and spiritual life, in confession one of the **more serious** sins to confess is that "I lost my joy".

I hope we all enjoy prayer as a close contact with Christ, enjoy His power that we **may** see Him as if we are in heaven and saying to Christ Jesus 'You are my first, you are my last. You are everything to me. Glory be to God forever. Amen.