



Simple Oil Lamp

Prayer

In the coming months, Holy Trinity is going to focus on prayer. Of course, in some ways we already do that—as a congregation, we pray each week together during worship. We also offer a contemplative prayer opportunity each week (September-May) open to everyone in the community as part of the World Community of Christian Meditation (www.wccm.org). We list people requesting prayers in our church bulletins each week so that you can pray privately for them. We encourage our children and youth to pray, and teach them different forms of prayer to enrich their lives. We encourage family prayer—at meals and at other times (to open or close family devotions, or before bedtime, or in the morning). Each of you has your own prayer practices.

Sometimes people think that prayer is mainly about *telling* God what we want, and there certainly is an important component of prayer that involves us speaking to God about our concerns and desires. But ultimately *prayer is about being open to what God wants to say to us*. You may have already noticed that sometimes what we want to ask of God and what God wants to tell us may be quite different!

Perhaps you may have been introduced to the **A.C.T.S.** of prayer: “adoration,” “confession,” “thanksgiving” and “supplication”. Here’s another way to think about prayer: as a **Pause**—a cessation of regular activities (chores, work, play, study, errands)—in order to communicate with God. The acronym for “pause” as it relates to prayer is: a “**P**lanned **A**ppointment to **U**plift, **S**hape, and **E**nergize”.

If we don’t make a conscious, intentional plan for daily prayer, it’s easy to skip praying. There’s plenty going on in our lives to fill the five, ten, or even sixty minutes we might otherwise spend with God. Keeping our “prayer appointments”, even when they “interfere” with another task or activity is a spiritual discipline; it builds focus and commitment. In medieval times, people used the “liturgical hours” to foster prayer. The “hours” were specific times of the day when people stopped their activity and prayed. The term “matins,” “vespers” and “compline,” refer to specific liturgical hours instituted by St. Benedict of Nursia (c.480-543AD). In all, there were eight defined prayer times: **Matins** (or Vigils, early in the morning, like 2am!), **Lauds** (at dawn), **Prime** (6am), **Terce** (9am), **Sext** (12 noon), **None** (3pm), **Vespers** (“at the lighting of the lamps”) and **Compline** (at bedtime). Over the centuries, Roman Catholic and Protestant churches have, dropped the “liturgy of the hours”, except at abbeys, convents, monasteries, and special venues (like retreat centers) where scheduled events are arranged to include them. Yet even today the conventional times for prayer still correspond to Benedict’s “hours”: most of us pray when we awaken, when we eat meals, and before we go to sleep.

Considering prayer in terms of how it uplifts us (emotionally, intellectually and physically), shapes (or re-shapes) our points of view and commitments, and energizes us for our daily activities places the emphasis on the “big” goals of prayer rather than on the ways in which we pray.

Of course, prayer is too **BIG** a topic for a small space like this! Keep praying, and listen for new ideas and possible ways to enrich your prayer practice.

