

My Prayer Journal

Use this weekly prayer to help you begin your time with God each day.

Prayer of Confession: Lord God, full of mercy and compassion, give us courage today to see ourselves in the mirror of Your Son, Jesus Christ. We confess that we fall so short of all You have made us to be. Give us grace, O gracious Lord, or we will be overcome by the truth of our shortcomings. Give us understanding, O Lord of truth, that we might receive and grow in the redemption so freely offered in Jesus our Savior. Amen.

My Prayers this Week:

Family Time:

If you've ever been part of any kind of a team, you know that the team works best when everyone knows exactly what they're supposed to do, and makes sure they do their part really well. On a baseball team, the pitcher, catcher, infielders, and outfielders all have very specific things they are responsible for to help the team to win. The Bible says that church is like that, but it uses the picture of a human body to talk about how everybody has a part to play. Just like ears, eyes, arms, legs, hearts, and lungs all do their part to make the body work, churches work best when pastors, teachers, musicians, caregivers, businesspeople, kids, youth, grownups, and seniors all use the abilities God has given them to help turn the world into the kind of place God wants it to be. The Bible calls us "the Body of Christ" because when we work together, we can do things like Jesus did!

MONDAY 5.23.22

Matthew 18:15-35

Last week, we focused on the Christian understanding of the church as those "called" out of the world to be the people of God, following Jesus Christ as Lord. Both individually, and collectively as a local church, we are called by God. This week, though, we will look at another, perhaps more shocking claim of Christianity—that the church is "the Body of Christ." More than simply a metaphor, this belief claims that the church, like Christ Himself, is both a human institution, but somehow also divine in its nature. While many people view the church as simply a human institution they join, much like a Rotary Club or the country club, Christianity holds that the church's origins are divine, instituted by God. In today's reading, we see Jesus Himself setting high standards for membership in this human/divine organization. Jesus' words demonstrate that the Godly integrity of the church community is important, but must be set within the context of the expansiveness of grace. Stubborn and unrepentant sinners are to be treated like pagans or tax collectors (that is, treated as outsiders who need to be loved back into the fellowship.) But the parable of the unmerciful servant makes it clear that even so, severe punishment awaits the insider who refuses to forgive!

- Do you view the church as both human and divine?

TUESDAY 5.24.22

Acts 6:1-7

It didn't take long for the earliest Christians to recognize that some sort of division of responsibilities was going to be required for the church to fully meet its mission to the world. The disciples who had followed Jesus when He was on earth, and who were the core leaders of the early church, saw evangelism and spreading the Word about the resurrected Christ as their first and foremost calling. And yet, they also realized that part of their calling was to uphold the laws of God—especially those laws that Jesus had specifically criticized the Jewish leadership for failing to uphold. In particular, the care of widows, which had been neglected by the teachers of the law (see Mark 12:38-40,) was of primary concern to these Christians. Wisely, the leaders made the decision to assign the care of widows to newly appointed leaders who could dedicate themselves to this work while the apostolic leaders continued to preach and pray. Furthermore, the ones chosen to lead this relief effort came from among the ethnic group that was feeling slighted (the names in verse 5 are all Greek, not Hebrew, names.) In this way, the church began to organize itself as a "body" with diverse parts contributing to a unified purpose.

- Why do you think everyone wasn't expected to do everything? What is the value of appointed task leaders?

WEDNESDAY 5.25.22

Ephesians 2:11-22

While the symbolism of the "Body of Christ" is Paul's most common way of describing the unity in diversity of the church, in today's reading, Paul uses the metaphor of a building—in fact, of a temple. In Christ, differences in ethnicity—Jew versus Gentile—have been wiped away, such that Christians are not to consider themselves with those kinds of categories. Instead, all persons, regardless of former associations, are to consider themselves equal citizens of the Kingdom of God. Each Christian is a necessary building block in the construction of a temple in which the Holy Spirit will reside, and every block is equal—except for the cornerstone of the temple, Jesus Christ Himself. This concept was unheard of in the ancient world, in which every religion's god was worshipped in, and believed to reside in, a physical temple. Christianity, uniquely, would have no temple other than the very *people* who professed faith in Jesus. The people *are* the temple, in which God resides through the Holy Spirit. Just as the Holy Spirit filled Jesus, enabling Jesus' ministry in His earthly Body, the Holy Spirit fills the people of the church, enabling "the Body of Christ" to carry out its ministry. The church, and each individual that is part of it, is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

- How do you experience God residing in this "temple"?

THURSDAY 5.26.22

Colossians 1:15-23

In yesterday's reading from Ephesians, Paul wrote that Jesus Christ is the "cornerstone" of the temple in which God will reside through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Today, Paul returns to the language of the church as the "Body of Christ" - making clear that Jesus Christ is the "head" of that "body." But more than that, Jesus is supreme over *all* things, sustaining them, and leading them to holiness. In fact, holiness is intended to be one of the identifying marks of the church—in Ephesians 5:25, Paul writes that Christ "loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy ... a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." We might be tempted to look around and question how this can be true—but if we reflect on Scripture's identification of the church as "the Body of Christ," we should ask instead, "how can it be otherwise?" Just as Christ's sacrifice purifies the individual believer, it also purifies the church. St. Augustine described the church as both *visible* and *invisible*. Most of the time, we only consider the *visible* church—the earthly institution that is sometimes an embarrassment to its Lord. But the *invisible* church of genuine believers—known only to God—is a holy institution, the very Body of Christ.

- What makes it hard for you to believe the church is holy?

