

Easter 7



May 27, 2001

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and eternal God, your Son, our Savior is with you in eternal glory. Give us faith to see that, true to his promise, he is among us still, and will be with us to the end of time; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Or

God, our creator and redeemer, your Son Jesus prayed that his followers might be one. Make all Christians one with him as he is one with you, so that in peace and concord we may carry to the world the message of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever

Acts 16:16-34

{16} One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. {17} While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation." {18} She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. {19} But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. {20} When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, "These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews {21} and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe." {22} The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. {23} After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. {24} Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. {25} About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. {26} Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. {27} When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. {28} But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." {29} The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. {30} Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" {31} They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." {32} They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. {33} At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. {34} He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

16. we: "We" includes Paul and Silas (see verses 18-19), and may also have included Luke, the author of Acts.

a slave girl who had a spirit of divination: "Lit. 'a little girl having a python spirit' or 'a python as spirit'.... In Greek mythology, *Python* was the serpent or dragon that guarded the Delphic oracle at the base of Mt. Parnassus.... Later on, its name came to denote a 'spirit of divination,' or 'soothsaying,' and even of 'ventriloquism.'" [1]

the place of prayer: This is the same "place of prayer" where Paul met Lydia.

16b-19: "The exorcism of the possessed slave girl is used by Luke to depict the triumph of

Christianity over pagan Greco-Roman practices. A pagan religious practice is made to acknowledge that salvation comes from the Most High God of Christianity. Again the refrain of 'the name of Jesus' is introduced, as Paul frees the girl of the python spirit (16:18). This exorcism results again in persecution, as Paul and his companions are flogged and imprisoned." [2]

20-24: Paul and Silas are arrested, accused of disturbing the peace of the city, beaten and imprisoned.

26. *an earthquake...the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened:* Earthquakes are not uncommon in this area, but the earthquake is a natural phenomenon which manifests God's intervention, a second miracle.

27-28: the jailer...was about to kill himself.... Paul shouted in a loud voice, "...we are all here." Loss of the prisoners would have been a malfeasance punishable by death, but Paul assures the jailer that his prisoners have not escaped. (compare this with Peter's escape from Herod's prison, Acts 12:5-11).

30. *what must I do to be saved:* In some way Paul and Silas' failure or refusal to escape leads the jailer to ask the same question asked at Pentecost (Acts 2:37).

31-33: In response they "spoke the word of the Lord" to him and his household, and "he and his entire family were baptized."

33-34: The jailer treated their wounds and fed them.

[35-40: The story continues with Paul's assertion of Roman citizenship, the acknowledgement that their rights had been violated, the apology and release of Paul and Silas, and their departure from Philippi. Leaving out this conclusion shifts the emphasis to the conversion of a Roman official.]

Psalm 97

{1} The LORD is king! Let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! {2} Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. {3} Fire goes before him, and consumes his adversaries on every side. {4} His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles. {5} The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth. {6} The heavens proclaim his righteousness; and all the peoples behold his glory. {7} All worshipers of images are put to shame, those who make their boast in worthless idols; all gods bow down before him. {8} Zion hears and is glad, and the towns of Judah rejoice, because of your judgments, O God. {9} For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods. {10} The LORD loves those who hate evil; he guards the lives of his faithful; he rescues them from the hand of the wicked. {11} Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart. {12} Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!

1. *The Lord is king:* An acclamation honoring Yahweh who is "the Lord of all the earth (verse 5)," "most high over all the earth...exalted far above all gods (verse 9)."

2-5: Yahweh's power and majesty is accompanied by darkness, fire, lightening and the melting of mountains, characteristics of theophany.

6: See Psalm 50:6.

7, 9. *all gods:* This idea comes from old traditions in which each nation had its own God to represent its interest before the Most High. Yahweh was the supreme God and because of his superiority the gods of the nations bowed before him. This contrasts with the notion that there are no other gods, that the gods of the other nations are only worthless idols.

10-12: Yahweh loves and cares for his people, who are faithful and righteous and hate evil. They rejoice and give thanks to his holy name.

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21

{12} "See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. {13} I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." {14} Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the

gates.... {16} "It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." {17} The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come." And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.... {20} The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! {21} The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

12. I am coming soon: In verse 16 Jesus identifies himself as the one who is coming soon.

13. I am the Alpha and the Omega: The Alpha and Omega is the Lord God (Revelation 1:8). "...the whole extent of a thing was often denoted by the first and last letters of the alphabet, [aleph-tau]." [3] Jesus claims identity with the Father.

14. wash their robes: See Revelation 7:14.

the tree of life: Adam and Eve were ejected from the garden so they could not eat the fruit of the tree of life which was in the center of the garden (Genesis 3:22-24; 2:9). The tree of life is in the new Jerusalem (Revelation 22:2). To have access to the tree of life implies the restoration of paradisaical conditions. See Revelation 2:7.

enter the city by the gates: This is the new Jerusalem. To enter it by the gates implies the rights of citizenship.

16. I am the root and descendant of David: This is the answer to Jesus' conundrum concerning Psalm 110 (Mark 12:35-37).

the bright morning star: Jesus is the Light of the world; the morning star of the new creation.

17. take the water of life as a gift: The connections are with the "living water" of John 4:10-11, and the invitation to come to the waters in Isaiah 55:1.

20a: The one who testifies to these things: Jesus. He will soon return.

20b-21: The author's prayer for Jesus' return, and his benediction on his readers.

John 17:20-26

{20} "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, {21} that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. {22} The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, {23} I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. {24} Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. {25} "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. {26} I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

"With another opening, 'I pray,' Jesus addresses the Father on behalf of 'those who will believe in me through their word (v. 20).... Jesus expresses concern for his honor, now shared with all of his disciples, so that all generations of disciples may abide in unity with one another and in Jesus (vv. 22-23).... Jesus has given them the honor God has given him—much like a fictive kin group in which the honor of one is the honor of all.... Not only this but Jesus intends all of them to 'be with me where I am...'. ...his statement recalls the beginning of John's Gospel and the Word, the Lamb of God, Son of Man—existing before the foundation of the world.... Israel has not known the 'righteous Father,' but Jesus has, and he has made the Father's name known.... Thanks to God's love, Jesus may continue to abide 'in them.'" [4]

Reflection

The literary context of Jesus' high priestly prayer (John 17) the three years of the RCL on the seventh Sunday of Easter. We are reminded of Jesus love and care for his followers as he prays for them to the Father. This Sunday falls between the festival of the Ascension

which celebrates Jesus' departure from earth, and the definitive coming of the Spirit in power on Pentecost. The Spirit's activity in the life of the church and each Christian will be worked out in the Sundays of Pentecost.

In the first lesson we see how God protected and empowered Paul and Silas in their mission to Macedonia. Paul entered Macedonia at the direction of the Spirit. The Psalm describes the natural forces which accompanied God's activity in the world. In Revelation Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega, has all the forces of heaven and earth at his disposal. All who serve him await his coming, and he has promised that he will come soon.

Hymns [5]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

255 --E--Lord, Receive this

88 --D--Oh, Love, How

460 --I--I Am Trusting

802v --I--When in Our Music

527 --P--All Creatures of

33 --II--The King Shall

744v --II--Soon and Very

206 --G--Lord, Who the

315, 364, 394, 768s

Prayers of the People [6]

P or A: In this Easter season, we celebrate the many gifts which you bestow upon your people. We also reflect upon the challenging call to live as a new creation in Christ. Recognizing both the blessing and call to service in Christ's resurrection, we pray saying "Christ is risen" and respond, "Christ is risen indeed".

A: God of the Church, your apostles were persecuted for the sake of the gospel. Such suffering continues today in the face of human cruelty and intolerance. We pray for all who are persecuted for the sake of their faith and political beliefs. Strengthen the work of organizations such as Amnesty International, which seek to disclose and put an end to these great injustices. Christ is risen! Christ...

A: God of righteousness, empower us weak-willed human beings to be faithful to the promises made in affirming our baptisms: to reject Satan and all his empty promises. Help us to discern your will from our own selfish desires. Christ is risen! Christ...

A: God of justice, your Son began his ministry proclaiming the arrival of the Kingdom of God, in which the blind are given sight and the oppressed released from bondage. Give us grace to enact the vision of that kingdom, by living lives of service that are dedicated to justice. Christ is risen! Christ...

A: God of the weak, be with those who suffer and their friends and families who keep vigil with them. We remember _____ in our prayers. Christ is risen! Christ...

A: God of all people, it is both a gift and a responsibility to have Christ dwelling in us. Let us be truly grateful and willing to live as one with the Lord. Christ is risen! Christ...

P: Hear our prayers, Heavenly Father, considering all things spoken and unspoken. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Or [7]

Presider or deacon

As we wait for the Lord Jesus to come, let us pray for all who thirst and desire the water of life.

Deacon or other leader

For this holy gathering and all who enter our circle of faith.

For the newly baptized illumined by the light of Christ.
For our leaders, and all the holy people of God in every place.
For the leaders of the nations and peace in the world.
For this city and the community around us.
For all in any pain and all who sorrow.
For the dying and the dead.
For ourselves, our families, and those we love.
Lifting our voices with the blessed Virgin Mary, *N*, and all the saints, let us offer ourselves
and one another to the living God through Christ.

To you, O Lord.

Presider

Blessed are you, O Lord, one God with your Son and Spirit. Hear our prayers for all
peoples and bring them out of the prison of darkness. Glory to you for ever and ever.

Notes

[1] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1998, p. 586.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 583.

[3] R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John: With Introduction, Notes, and Indices*.
Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920, Vol. 1, p. 20.

[4] Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel
of John*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998, p. 245.

[5] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rclc0001.txt>

[6] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_c.txt

[7] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>