

Bishop Beveridge on the Great Necessity and Advantage of Public Prayer

by J.H. Newman

The sermon emphasizes the importance of public prayer, its traditional times, and the duty of ministers to read public prayers daily, highlighting its benefits to individuals and society.

Scripture: Psalm 55:17, Daniel 6:10, Luke 11:2, Luke 18:7, James 5:16

Topics: "Public Prayer", "Daily Devotion"

Description

J.H. Newman preaches about the importance of setting apart specific times each day for prayer and devotion, following the example of Daniel and King David in the Bible. He emphasizes the significance of public prayers in Christian churches, highlighting the duty of ministers to lead daily Morning and Evening Prayers for the congregation. Newman stresses the value of using the Lord's Prayer in public worship, as Christ intended it to be a communal prayer for all believers. He encourages consistent daily prayer as a means of seeking God's protection, support, and blessings for individuals and communities.

Transcript

BESIDES our praying to, and praising GOD in the midst of other business, we ought to set apart some certain times in every day wholly for this. The Saints of old were wont to do it three times a day, as we learn from Daniel. For when King Darius had signed the decree, "That whosoever should ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, except of the king, should be cast into the den of lions," it is written, "That when Daniel knew that the decree was signed, he went into his house; and, his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks unto his GOD, as he did aforetime." (Daniel vi. 10.) As he did aforetime; which shows that this had been his constant practice before, and he would not leave it off now, though he was sure to be cast into the den of lions for it. But what times of the day these were, which were anciently devoted to this religious purpose, we may best gather from king David, where he saith, "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud; and He shall hear my voice." (Psal. lv. 17.) He begins with the evening, because day then began, according to the Jewish account; but he observed all these times of prayer alike. And so questionless did other devout people as well as he. The Jews have a tradition that those times were ordained to that use, the morning by Abraham; noon, by Isaac; and evening by Jacob. But whether they have any ground for that or no, be sure this custom is so reasonable and pious, that the Church of CHRIST took it up, and observed it all along from the very beginning. Only to distinguish these times more

exactly, the Christians called them, (as the Jews also had done before,) by the names of the third, the sixth, and the ninth hours. Of which Tertullian saith, "Tres istas horas ut insigniores in rebus humanis, ita et solenniores fuisse in orationibus divinis; Â's as they were more famous than others in human affairs, so they were more solemn in divine prayers.Â' " (Tertul de Jejun c. 10.)

I know the Primitive Christians performed their private devotions at other times as well as these; but at these set times every day, especially at the third and ninth hour, they always performed them publicly, if they could get an opportunity. And if we would be such Christians as they were, we must follow their pious example in this, as well as in other things.

* * * *

As the Jewish Church had by GODÂ'S own appointment the Morning and Evening Sacrifice every day in the year; so all Christian Churches have been used to have their Morning and Evening Prayers publicly performed every day. As might easily be shown out of the Records of the Church, from the beginning of Christianity.

Not to insist upon other Churches, I shall instance at present only in our own; which, as in all things else, so particularly in this, is exactly conformable to the Catholic and Apostolic Church. In the First Book of Common-Prayer, made by our Church at the beginning of the Reformation, there was a form composed both for Morning and Evening Prayer: the title of that for the Morning ran thus; An Order for Mattins daily through the year; and of that for the Evening, An Order for Even Song throughout the year: and accordingly there were Psalms and Chapters appointed both for the Morning and Evening of every day. About three or four years after, the same book was revised and put forth again. And then the Church taking notice that Daily Prayers had been in some places neglected, at the end of the Preface she added two new Rules, or, as we call them, Rubrics; which are still in force, as ye may see in the Common-Prayer Books which we now use.

The first is this:

And all Priests and Deacons are to say daily the Morning and Evening Prayer, either privately or openly, not being let by sickness, or other urgent cause.

By this, every one that is admitted into Holy Orders, although he be neither Parson, Vicar, nor Curate of any particular place, yet he is bound to say both Morning and Evening Prayer every day, either in some Church or Chapel where he can get leave to do it, or else in the house where he dwells, except he be hindered by some such cause which the Ordinary of the place judges to be reasonable and urgent.

The other Order is this:

And the Curate that ministereth in every Parish Church or Chapel, being at home, and not being otherwise reasonably hindered, shall say the same in the Parish-Church or Chapel, where he ministereth, and shall cause a bell to be tolled thereunto, a convenient time before he begin, that people may come to hear GodÂ's Word, and pray with him.

Here we have a plain and express command, that the Curate, whether he be the Incumbent himself, or another procured by him to do it; whosoever it is that ministereth GODÂ'S Holy Word and Sacraments in any Parish-Church or Chapel in England, shall say the same Morning and Evening Prayer daily in the Parish-Church or Chapel where he ministereth, and shall take care that a bell be tolled a convenient time

before he begins, that people having notice of it, may come to GOD'S House to hear His Holy Word read, and join with the Minister in performing their public devotions to him. This every Minister or Curate in England is bound to do every day in the year, if he be at home, and be not otherwise reasonably hindered. And whether any hindrance be reasonable or no, the Minister himself is not the ordinary Judge; for in all such cases that is referred by the common laws of the Church to the Bishop of the Diocese, or the Ordinary of the place where he ministereth.

The law hath made this the duty of every Minister, and the Bishop or Ordinary is to see he doeth it; and whether any have reasonable cause ever to omit it, or whether the cause they pretend for it be reasonable or no; this is left by the law to him. He may allow or disallow of the pretence, as he upon the full hearing of it shall see good; and may punish with the censures of the Church any Minister within his jurisdiction that doth not read the Prayers of the Church, or take care they be read every Morning and Evening in the year, except at such times when the Minister can prove that he had such a reasonable hindrance or impediment as will justify him before GOD and His Church.

This care hath our Church taken, that Public Prayers be read every Morning and Evening throughout the year in every parish within her bounds, that all who live in her communion may, after the example of the Apostles....., go every day into the Temple or Church at the Hour of Prayer. She hath not appointed the hour when either Morning or Evening Prayer shall begin; because the same hour might not be so convenient in all places. So that in some places it might be pretended that there was a reasonable hindrance; that it could not be done just at the time. Wherefore to prevent any such plea, and to make the duty as easy and practicable, both to the Minister and people, as it could be, the Church hath left that to the Ministers themselves, who considering every one his own and his people's circumstances, may, and ought to appoint such hours both for the Morning and Evening Prayer in their respective places, as they in their discretion shall judge to be most convenient. Only they ought to take care in general that Morning Prayers be always read before, and Evening after noon. And it is very expedient that the same hours be every day, as much as it is possible, observed in the same place, that people knowing it beforehand, may order their affairs so as to be ready to go to the Church at the hour of prayer.

But notwithstanding this great care that our Church hath taken to have daily prayers in every parish, we see by sad experience, they are shamefully neglected all the kingdom over; there being very few places where they have any Public Prayers upon the Week-days, except perhaps upon Wednesdays and Fridays; because it is expressly commanded, that both Morning and Evening Prayers be read every day in the Week, as the Litany upon those. And why this commandment should be neglected more than the other, for my part I can see no reason. But I see plain enough that it is a great fault, a plain breach of the known laws of CHRIST'S Holy Catholic Church, and particularly of that part of it, which by his blessing is settled among us. But where doth this fault lie? I hope not in the Clergy. For I dare not suppose or imagine, but that every minister in England that hath the care of souls committed to him, would be willing and glad to read the Prayers every day, for their edification, if the people could be persuaded to come to them. I am sure there is never a Minister but is obliged to read them daily; and never a parish in England but where the people may have them so read, if they will; for they may require it by the laws both of our Church and State, except at such times when their Minister is reasonably hindered from the execution of his office, in the sense before explained.

But the mischief is, men cannot, or rather will not be persuaded to it. They think it a great matter to come to Church upon the LORD'S Day, when they cannot openly follow their particular calling if they would. Upon other days they have other business to mind of greater consequence, as they think, than going to

Prayers. To some it is a great disturbance to hear the bell sounding in their ears, and calling them to their duty, which they being resolved not to practise, it makes them very uneasy to be so often put in mind of it. Others can make a shift to bear that pretty well, as not looking upon themselves concerned in it. For they take it for granted, that Prayers were intended only for such as have nothing else to do. As for their parts, they have a great deal of work upon their hands, and must mind that, without troubling their heads about any thing else. This is the plain case of some; but not of all. Blessed be GOD, He hath opened the eyes of many, especially in this city, who now see "the things that belong to their everlasting peace," and therefore are as constant at their public devotions, as they are at their private business. And I trust in His infinite Goodness and Mercy, that He who hath "begun so good a work among us," will one day perfect it, that we may all meet together with one heart, and with one mouth to pray unto Him," and praise and glorify His great name every day in the week, both in this city, and all the kingdom over. What a happy city, what a glorious kingdom would it then be! And how happy should I think myself, if it would please GOD to make me, the unworthiest of all His Servants, an instrument in His Almighty hand towards the effecting of it in this place! It is too great a felicity for me to flatter myself with the least hopes of. Howsoever I must do my duty, and leave the issue to Him who hath the hearts of all men in His hand.

* * * *

That it is His [CHRIST'S] pleasure that we should constantly use the Form of Prayer, which He, as our Great LORD and MASTER, was pleased to compose for all His Disciples, is so plain that I wonder how any can doubt of it; there being no command in all the Bible more plain than that, "When ye pray, say, Our Father, which art in Heaven," &c. (Luke xi. 2.) But it is as plain, that He designed this Prayer should be used publicly, and in common, by His Disciples when met together in their public assemblies: in that He hath drawn it up all along in the plural number, that many may join together in it, and say, " Our Father, which art in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil." So that there is not one petition, nor one expression in it, but what a whole congregation may jointly use. From whence St. Cyprian truly observed, that this is Publica et Communis Oratio: a Public and Common Prayer Not but it may, and ought to be used also privately by every single Christian apart by himself; because every Christian is a member Of CHRIST'S Catholic Church, and should pray as such in private as well as in public; and for all his fellow-members, as well as for himself, they being all but one body. But however, it must be acknowledged, that, it being so exactly fitted to a public congregation, it was primarily and chiefly intended for that purpose. And that our SAVIOUR would have us say this Prayer every day, appears most plainly from that petition in it, "Give us this day our daily bread." For this shows, that as we depend upon GOD every day for our necessary food, so we ought to pray unto Him every day for it. And if we must put up this petition every day, we must put up all the rest with it. For CHRIST hath joined them together, and therefore we must not put them asunder. Neither is there any part of the Prayer but what is as necessary to be said every day as this.

Wherefore seeing our Blessed SAVIOUR Himself was most graciously pleased to compose this Prayer so as to suit it to our daily public devotions, and hath plainly commanded us to use it, according as He had composed it; we may reasonably from thence infer, that it is his divine will and pleasure that we should publicly pray to our Heavenly FATHER every day, as His Church had all along before done it, Morning and Evening. Be sure His Apostles thought so, when they had received His Holy Spirit, "to lead them," according to His promise, "into all truth," and to "bring into their remembrance all things that He had said unto them." For after the day of Pentecost, on which the HOLY GHOST came upon them, the next news

that we hear of any of them is, that "Peter and John went up together into the Temple at the hour of Prayer, being the ninth hour," or the hour of Evening Prayer; which they would not have done, if they had not believed it to be agreeable to the doctrine which He had taught them.

* * * *

The more pleasing any duty is to GOD, the more profitable it is to those who do it. And therefore He having so often, both by word and deed, manifested Himself well-pleased with the public or common Service which His people perform to Him, we cannot doubt but they always receive proportionable advantage from it. The Jews call stated public Prayers [Hebrew text] Stations; and have a saying among them, "that without such Stations the world could not stand." Be sure no people have any ground to expect public peace and tranquillity, without praising and praying publicly unto Him, who alone can give it.

But if all the people (suppose of this nation) should every day with one heart and mouth join together in our common supplications to ALMIGHTY GOD, how happy should we then be! how free from danger! how safe and secure under His protection! This is the argument which CHRIST Himself useth, why "Men ought always to pray and not to faint;" in the Parable of the unjust Judge, who was at last prevailed with to grant a widow's request, merely by her importunity in asking it. "And shall not GOD," saith He, "avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them?"

I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." But then He adds, "Nevertheless, when the SON of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke xviii. 7, 8.) As if He had said, GOD will most certainly avenge and protect those who cry day and night, morning and evening, to Him. But men will not believe this; and that is the reason why there are so few who believe that He will hear their prayers, according to His promise. But blessed be GOD, though they be but few, there are some, who really believe GOD'S Word, and accordingly pray every morning and evening, not only for themselves, but for the country where they live, for all their Governors both in Church and State, and for all sorts and conditions of men among us.

To these the whole kingdom is beholden for its support and preservation. If they should once fail, I know not what would become of us. But so long as there are pious and devout persons crying day and night to GOD for aid and defence against our enemies, we need not fear any hurt they can ever do us; at least according to GOD'S ordinary course of dealing in the world. I know that He is sometimes so highly incensed against a people, that He will hearken to no intercessions for them.

As when He said of the idolatrous and factious Jews; "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet My mind could not be towards this people," (Jer. xv. 1.) Moses had before diverted His wrath from them, (Exod. xxxii. 11, 12, 14) and so had Samuel, (1 Sam. vii. 9.) but at this time He saith, Though both of them stood before Him, and besought Him for it, yet He would not be reconciled to this people. Which plainly implies, that this was an extraordinary case, and that He ordinarily used to hearken to the prayers which His faithful servants, such as Moses and Samuel were, made to Him in behalf of the people among whom they dwelt: according to that of the Apostle St.

James, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," (Jam. v. 16.) To the same purpose is that parallel place in the Prophet Ezekiel, where GOD saith, "That if a land sin grievously against Him, and He send the famine, the sword, the pestilence, or the like punishment, to cut off both man and beast from it; though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they should deliver none but their own souls." (Ezek. iv. 14, 16, 18, 20.) But here we may likewise observe, that in such an

extraordinary case as this, (which GOD grant may not be our own ere long!) although such righteous persons by all their prayers and tears can deliver none else yet they themselves shall be delivered.

As Lot was out of Sodom, and the Christians at the final destruction of Jerusalem, when eleven hundred thousand Jews perished, (Joseph. de Bel. Jud. 1. 7. c. 17.) and not one Christian, they being all, by the secret providence of GOD, conveyed out of the city before the siege began. (Euseb. Hist. Eccl. 1. 3. c. 5.) Which shows the particular care that GOD takes of all that believe and serve Him. And that one would think is enough to prevail with all that consult their own and others' welfare, to neglect no opportunities which they can get of serving so great and good a Master, all the ways they can, and particularly by performing their daily devotions to Him. In that they have good ground to hope that He will hear their prayers for others, but may be sure He will take care of them, whatsoever happens.

OXFORD .

The Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul.

Source:

<https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jh-newman/bishop-beveridge-on-the-great-necessity-and-advantage-of-public-prayer/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net