

“Divinity – A Prayer Conditioned Church!”

Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

Dear Partners in Prayer,

Welcome to this Twenty-fifth Anniversary of Commissioning for all Ministers in Divinity's disciplines of prayer; Prayer Chain Ministry, Grace Team Member, Prayer Shawl Creators and Card Creator.

This is a very special time for us here at Divinity as we come together once again to dedicate ourselves to our chosen ministry(s). Twenty-five years is a long time to serve and most of you have been here since the Prayer Chains were re-organized twenty-five years ago. Since that time the Ministry of Prayer here at our church home has continued to grow to meet the needs of our church family and beyond as now, we have offered the availability of prayers to others through our website.

Our Prayer Shawl ministry has more recently grown to include shawls for children with hand-made animals and child appropriate cards. The handmade bags for all shawls are gifts. The cards for all shawls, male, female or child are appropriately handmade by Jackie Difford. Over 700 shawls have been given away as gifts of love since this ministry was started. That is a lot of shawls and even more prayers as the creators of the shawls pray for whoever will receive the shawl, they are creating even though they don't know who that might be. We are thankful to the Women of the Church, and private donations to fund our shawl ministry.

The love that is shared in the Ministry of Prayer and the people we pray for is such a loving and meaningful thing to do... it is an act of kindness like no other. Our sincere prayers offer a breath of relief just as soon as someone receives a shawl or calls in for a prayer.

Our Father continues to bless our ministry abundantly. We thank Him for His love and guidance for us and all people. Divinity thanks you, a Minister of Prayer for hearing His call to serve Him this way. Our church home is blessed by your acceptance to His call. You are a daily blessing to those we pray for. Our prayers are lifted to Him with the knowledge that God is indeed the power in prayer, and we give Him our thanks and praise for this gift, His love us, for those we pray for and for the ministry in which we serve.

God loves you and so do I!

Loretta

Within the Christian community, many faithful people desire a strong link between words and actions. In his New Testament letter, James writes, “If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?” (James 2:15-16). Faith without works, according to James, is dead.

In a similar manner, many Christians today *will argue that prayer without action is dead*. Consider the mothers being honored today on Mother’s Day. Are they going to be happy with thoughts and prayers? Maybe. They want a visit or a call and maybe a card or gift. And many men will feel the same on Father’s Day.

Loving *action* is what is needed, with good reason.

But not every human need can be met with gifts of clothing, food or other contributions. At times, nothing really can be offered *except* thoughts and prayers. Think of a relative dying of a terminal illness. Or a friend going through a divorce. Or a family member who is feeling deeply discouraged.

Yes, we can visit them, listen to them, love them and support them. But there is not much we can do to remove or solve their problems. Thoughts and prayers are what we have to offer.

All of which raises the question, “What is the real value of prayer?”

For starters, *prayer changes us*. More than changing the outcome of the situation in front of us — whether it is a natural disaster or a terminal illness — prayer changes our relationship with God. Psalm 31 is a prayer for deliverance, and it includes the appeal to God: “Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me” (v. 2).

This prayer is all about *the deepening of a relationship*. It asks for God to hear us and rescue us, and it requests that God be a rock of refuge, a place of safety and stability, a mighty fortress, a location of salvation. What it does *not* request is a change to the situation being faced.

A few years ago, a group called American Atheists put up a billboard outside the Super Bowl, which said, “A ‘Hail Mary’ only works in football.” Then the group issued a press release that said, “It’s time to stop believing that prayer works.”

The atheists had a point. Fans should not pray for their team to win. Players should not ask God to help them catch a pass or get the ball into the end zone. Prayer does not change the outcome of football games.

But the American Atheists were wrong to say that prayer does not work. Prayer changes the people who pray, making them more peaceful, accepting and connected to Almighty God. “You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name’s sake lead me and guide me,” says Psalm 31 in its appeal to God. (v. 3).

Prayer doesn't change the path of hurricanes or the outcome of sporting events, but it does change us. It draws us into a deeper relationship with the God who saves us, even as it asks for God's leadership and guidance.

One of the most well-known modern prayers is the Serenity Prayer, said first by Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr during World War II. It is now central to the recovery from addiction being achieved in thousands of 12-step groups: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

Notice that God is not being asked in this prayer to miraculously eliminate a desire for alcohol or narcotics. Instead, God is being asked to give serenity, courage and wisdom to people so that they can become well. As is said in a book called *How Al-Anon Works*, "We turn to the God of our understanding for the attributes necessary to live life more fully."

In other words, praying people turn to God and ask for help to live better lives. By praying to God in this way, millions of people have become sober through 12-step groups across our country and around the world. In each of these groups, the Serenity Prayer is said to change the hearts and minds of people, not the heart and mind of God.

Another value of prayer is that *it gives us skills to face the challenges of life*. Ever optimistic Indians fans, our thoughts might be turning to summer and hopefully baseball. Sadly, prayer does not mean that pitchers will suddenly be able to throw 100-mile-per-hour fastballs, or that batters will be able to knock curveballs out of the park. Prayer, never — changes the speed of a ball or the swing of a bat.

But baseball players who pray for serenity, courage and wisdom will find their prayers answered, and they will be given the attributes they need to be the best players they can possibly be. “In baseball, if you’re batting .300, you’re a star,” says Stephen Rossetti, chaplain to the World Champion Washington Nationals, “and that means the other two times you’re striking out. The point is: Hang in there, stay in the fight.” The same is true for each of us. Whether you are facing a tough situation in a ball game, at school, at home or in the office, mental and emotional health is always going to be an asset. Hang in there. Pray for serenity, courage and wisdom.

Eileen Flanagan has written a book on the Serenity Prayer called *The Wisdom to Know the Difference*. In it, she quotes a study which found that wise people like mothers “are able to step outside themselves and assess a troubling situation with calm reflection. They recast a crisis as a problem to be addressed, a puzzle to be solved. They take action in situations they can control and accept the inability to do so when matters are outside their control.”

These are the kinds of challenges that athletes face, that mothers face, and that we face as well when we encounter health challenges, relationship troubles, virus troubles, and crises of various kinds. “My times are in your hand,” says the writer of Psalm 31. “Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love” (vv. 15-16). We are going to experience the greatest serenity when we know that everything we face is in God’s hands. On top of this, we can handle problems most effectively when we believe that God is with us, working to save us, in every time and place and situation.

Another value of prayer is that *it aligns us with the will of God* for healing and wholeness in human life. God wants us all to have serenity, courage and wisdom — regardless of the

particular challenges we face. And when life is overwhelming, we can pray for God to rescue us and save us (v. 2). God wants to save us from the worst that life can throw at us, even death itself. Serenity comes from the knowledge that “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” Neither death nor life nor anything else in all creation “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-39).

Today we commission our Prayer Ministers via live stream to continue to pray for our Divinity family—a prayer conditioned church. Prayer changes us and draws us closer to God. Prayer gives us skills to face the challenges of life. And prayer aligns us with the will of God for healing and wholeness.

So, let’s offer each other our thoughts and prayers. We join with the Psalmist in praying, “You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name’s sake lead me and guide me”.

May the peace of God . . .

#742 – What a Friend We Have in Jesus