

Raymond Friel *and* David Wells

FOREWORD BY BILL HUEBSCH

— AT —
YOUR
SIDE

PRAYERS FOR
*Messy, Delightful,
Complicated, Outrageous*
EVERYDAY LIFE

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Introduction

Why we wrote *At Your Side*

In Luke's Gospel the disciples say to Jesus, "Teach us to pray." This request is made because they see in Jesus something they hope for. Jesus can live the things he teaches. Jesus is not paralyzed by worry, he loves generously, he acts justly, he doesn't court popularity and he doesn't engineer advantage for himself. The disciples see in Jesus who they want to become. To realize their hope, the followers know they must connect to a divine strength. In reply, Jesus offers them what must have first seemed like dangerous words: the Lord's Prayer. The prayer would have felt radical in many ways. It is shockingly familiar in its assertion that we, too, may call God "Our Father." It also entwines God's actions with our own, "as we forgive." God's activity in the heavenly realm is to become ours in the earthly realm.

The prayer Jesus gave us is a gift to all Christians. It encompasses all we need to say. Yet, in learning and repeating it we can begin to lose the very intimacy and action the prayer itself compels. It is possible to say these words and yet remain a stone's throw from the Father. The language of our inherited prayers is essential to a life of faith and community, but it points us in the direction of yet another language, a language more intimate still, a humble and childlike language.

In frequent appeals, Pope Francis draws our attention to the importance of a personal encounter with the divine. This encounter is often personal, deeply honest and eventually wordless. To achieve it we need a sense of God's presence. This presence is not "beginners'" Christianity. It is what we are about as Christians; without it, we will find ourselves living by willpower rather than God power. Pope Francis puts it like this:

“Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.” This first proclamation is called “first” not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense, because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways.¹

To have Jesus at “our side” is not only a question of faith, because it also demands imagination. It calls for us to involve Jesus in what first appear to be quite trivial matters. When we begin to do this, we grow in our conviction that the very things that delight us delight him, the very things that distress us distress him, and we grow in friendship. To those of us for whom prayer has been a formal experience, this type of encounter can be troubling: “Can Jesus really be that entwined in the personal circumstances and situations of my daily life?” We are called to persevere. As we begin to talk to Jesus in this way, our conversation becomes a relationship. It is then that we begin to enjoy the accompaniment of Jesus, as he once accompanied the disciples at Emmaus. As Pope Francis suggests: “To be friends with God means to pray with simplicity, like children talking to their parents.”²

This book does not draw attention away from the inherited prayers of our traditions. Far from it. This book encourages you to begin to see the ordinary and everyday circumstances of your lives as an opportunity

to fulfill those inherited prayers. When you delight, learn to cast your eyes to heaven in utter gratitude. When you are distressed, learn to stretch out an empty hand as a beggar before God. These things happen as a result of the things life throws at us. So here is a collection of prayers drawn from the messy, delightful, complicated, outrageous and mundane things of life. As you read them, allow them to encourage your own inner dialogue. Notice that in the most unexpected circumstances, Jesus will begin to accompany you. He will accompany you out of the confines of time set aside for prayer and into the Monday mornings. Sometimes God is going to speak to you through the difficult meeting at work, the woman at the bus stop, or the pregnancy test. It's not all walking on water!

The aim of this book is to encourage all Christians to build upon the many great written prayers of our tradition, so that with fresh eyes we will encounter Jesus at our side, every day, to enlighten, strengthen and free us. Once that begins to happen, your life will become a prayer and every day an opportunity for adventure. In the end, your prayer will become all about what God is doing, and you may return to those inherited words in a much more intimate way: "Thy will be done."

Don't read this book cover to cover. Consult the titles in the contents or just dip into it. May you encounter Jesus in the reading and discover that you and the world around you are the work of the Father, brought to life by the Spirit. May prayer help you to enjoy your life.

Raymond Friel and David Wells
October 2019

◆ Morning Prayer (I)

Lord, help me to be still for a few moments
before the day begins,
to be still and know that you are God,
the God who made me and knows me and loves me.

Help me to be silent
and in the silence to trust in the presence
of your Spirit within me –
my rock, my shield, my deepest me.

When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases
as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard
because of their many words. Do not be like them, for
your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Matthew 6:7-8



◆ Morning Prayer (II)

Lord, thank you for this new day –
another chance to become my better self,
to learn from yesterday, to go again,
to open up to your Spirit, prompting me to what gives life.
Help me to recognize in my moods,
in my annoyance at the moments that could have gone better,
in the glimpses of love for loved ones,
your Spirit within me, your voice in the sanctuary of my soul –
my true self, my conscience –
and help me to act on those promptings, trusting that this is you
shaping me, moulding me with infinite patience
and love, like a parent
with a wayward,
wilful child.

Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

Isaiah 64:8

There is no bad way to pray and there is no starting point for prayer. All the great spiritual masters offer only one non-negotiable rule: you have to show up for prayer and you have to show up regularly. Everything else is negotiable and respects your unique circumstances.

Ronald Rolheiser, *Prayer: Our Deepest Longing*³

◆ Morning Prayer (III)

Lord, give me a big heart today,
a generosity of spirit in all my encounters,
especially the interruptions, the moments of grace

by the side of the road, the chance to step in and help.

Give me the grace to be really present in the presence of others,
to see the “sacred grandeur” of my neighbour,
to listen well, to take the first step towards them,
to let go of my well-earned assumptions;
to give less offence,
to take offence less easily.

Give me the grace to see the needs of the world around me,
to see through normality,
to see injustice hidden in plain sight.

Give me the grace to see in the most ordinary moments of encounter
the graced reality of our world.

May I have the courage today
To live the life that I would love,
To postpone my dream no longer,
But do at last what I came here for
And waste my heart on fear no more.

John O'Donohue, *Benedictus: A Book of Blessings*⁴



◆ Morning prayer at the end of the week

Lord, as we come to the end of the week,
help me to see when I was closest to you,
when I felt your presence,
when you had a message for me,
when I felt consolation.

And help me to see when I was distant from you,
when the thinking I indulged in,
my actions or lack of action, prevented me from hearing
what you were saying to me, when I felt desolation.

Help me to cope with my tiredness today,
so that I don't say or do anything
that is not me, not my better self, the self you want me to be.

I look forward to the weekend, a time for rest,
a time to spend with those I love, or try to love,
a time to restore the balance, visit the wells, wander the hills.
But help me not to see my downtime as just about my needs;
catch me when I'm shaping the world around my pleasures,
give me a heart for the vulnerable of the world
and a desire to spend some of my time, my free time,
helping where I can.

We live in a world that is for the most part spiritually tone-deaf, where all the goods are in the store window, digitized, or reduced to a flat screen. And so, prayer is a struggle. So are a lot of other things. When the surface is all there is, it is hard to be enchanted by anything, to see depth, to be deeply touched by poetry, faith and love.

Ronald Rolheiser, *Prayer: Our Deepest Longing*⁷

Meanwhile, the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas... True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness.

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel")⁸

Personal reflection

- How do I start my day?
- Do I make any time to still myself, to encounter the divine, to pray?
- Do I take any time to try and recognize the presence of God in everyday events?



◆ When I feel sorrow for another –
See it. Say it. Sort it out⁹

To the young mom soaked to the skin,
pushing her stroller up a hill:
send your Spirit, Lord.

To the woman in the supermarket
patiently waiting for the bread to be reduced in price:
send your Spirit, Lord.

To the man who's placing a bet, just one more time:
send your Spirit, Lord.

To parents waving goodbye to grown-up children as they leave home:
send your Spirit, Lord.

To seniors whose cherished garden is becoming a source of stress:
send your Spirit, Lord.

To the driver now living with regret that he wasn't watching
when he pulled out:
send your Spirit, Lord.

To the job applicant making the long journey home wishing she
hadn't applied:
send your Spirit, Lord.

To the thief in the train station who needed the laptop
to feed an addiction:
send your Spirit, Lord.

To the person in the waiting room waiting for a diagnosis:
send your Spirit, Lord.

To the lonely man in the corner store who is taking forever
to buy lottery tickets:
send your Spirit, Lord.

To the timid child who fears going back to school every Sunday night:
send your Spirit, Lord.

To the victim struggling to escape the memory:
send your Spirit, Lord.

Loving Father, so many people struggle behind the veneer of a smile.
Open the eyes of my heart, Lord.
Help me to encounter people with a heart that sees.
May I see it, say it and, if possible, sort it out.
Everywhere.

Amen.

The Christian's programme – the programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus – is “a heart which sees.”
This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.

Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (“God is Love”) ¹⁰

Personal reflection

- When does your heart recognize the plight of other people, drawing you in to an experience of compassion?

◆ When I need to lighten up a bit

Lord, come off the pages of my Bible and into my life. Come out of the Order of Service and the beautifully crafted prayer books and into my Mondays and Fridays. Fall out of the canvases and off every Renaissance painting. Leap out of the art galleries:

that your joy may be in me and my joy complete.

Lord, push aside the clutter and jumble and the piles of paperwork. Break into a house full of things I bought, and things I have acquired and things I don't use. Cast out these distractions I have accumulated:

that your joy may be in me and my joy complete.

Lord, disturb my business as usual. Derail my regular commute. Fill in the rut I have dug for myself. Open my mind to the possibility of conversion. Break through the concrete blocks of my set ways and established routines:

that your joy may be in me and my joy complete.

Lord, pierce the armour of sought solitude, my all-inclusive deal to avoid other people. Open my heart to the traffic around me. Prevent me from building bigger walls, growing higher hedges and buying stronger padlocks:

that your joy may be in me and my joy complete.

Lord, prise open my silent lips and my mouth shall declare your praise. Breathe new harmony into my song. Grant fresh strength to these tired limbs. Help me to dance when you play the tune. Help me to proclaim from the rooftops when you send the words:

that your joy may be in me and my joy complete.

Lord, open my tear ducts. Raise my gaze to the needs of others. Alert my eyes to a bigger world. Come into the upper room of my heart and break open the doors of self-infatuation. Propel me beyond myself:

that your joy may be in me and my joy complete.

Lord, crease the smooth skin of my face into laugh lines. Reveal to me the joy of Mary's "Let it be done to me" which awoke in her the Magnificat. May your joy spill out of me like it did from the shepherds at your birth, from St. Philip Neri, St. Thomas More and St. Vincent de Paul:¹¹

that your joy may be in me and my joy complete.

I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

John 15:11



Personal reflection

- What does it mean to be joyful?

◆ Prayer for a community
at the beginning of the week

God our Father,
at the beginning of another week,
help us to remember why we are here
and not to be tempted away from our mission
by what is expedient.

Help us to remember especially our mission to those
who are vulnerable and marginal,
those who most need our help.

As we look ahead to another week,
we pray for the intentions of the community –
for the grace to meet the particular challenges we face,
for the generosity to remember the needs of others,
to make room for each other.

Let us never become so busy that we overlook
the human need in front of us;
that we look after the brother or sister in our midst
who is struggling, who needs to be carried for a while.

Help us to be wise
in our use of authority,
to be civil and respectful in all our encounters.

And when disagreements arise
may we use patient dialogue, empathy and imagination
to resolve our differences.



We commend our work to you –
keep us humble, keep us mindful,
that any good that comes of what we do
is your work in the world, not ours.
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We are the workers, not the master builder.

St. [patron], pray for us.
Our Lady of Perpetual Help, pray for us.

We make all our prayers through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Colossians 3:12-13

A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us.

St. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*
("At the Beginning of the New Millennium")¹²