

“The Jesus Prayer”

October 9th, 2016
21st Sun./Pentecost
Commissioning
of Shepherds

2 Timothy 2:8-15

Luke 17:11-19

And as [Jesus] entered a village, he was met by ten lepers,
who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices and said,
“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

Luke 17:12-13

Let us pray... O God,

We thank you for help we have received in the past
and we thank you for the help we will surely receive in the future.
Have mercy upon us and grant us wisdom and peace.

Amen

“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us” –

the lepers’ cry for help to Jesus in Luke 17:13 is a variation
of what came to be known as the Jesus Prayer:

‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.’

In Luke 18:13, a Pharisee and a tax collector both pray at the Temple;
but while the Pharisee is very proud to the point of arrogance,
the tax collector humbly asks,

‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner.’

In Mark 10:47,

Bartimaeus a blind beggar cries out to Jesus as he is passing by,
‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’

In Matthew 14:30,

Peter walks on the water, panics and begins to sink, crying out,
‘Lord, save me’ – a different word from ‘mercy’,
but essentially the same message:

‘God, help me.’

‘Help me’ is the most ancient prayer.

It is what people cried out when they had done all they could do.

Where else would ancient people turn when there were no herds to hunt
or no rain to irrigate the fields?

They turned to the unseen powers of the spiritual world

and this was the beginning of humanity’s relationship with God.

‘Help me, Help me, Help me’ was the first prayer

and ‘Thank you, Thank you, Thank you,’ was the second.

Just saying the name of God, alone, is a prayer – an ancient practice
that can be found in other faith traditions as a form of meditation.

In a sense, children calling out for ‘Mom’ or ‘Dad’ is an example
of this as a primal need.

The Jesus Prayer combines the call for help and our need to be connected
with our Creator.

Willard, p.2

Another form of the Jesus Prayer is the Kyrie –

‘Kyrie Eleison’ is a hymn used in the Roman Catholic Mass,
but its origins are Greek.

‘Kyrie Eleison’ is just another way of saying, ‘Lord, have mercy’
and it has served an important role in the Eastern Orthodox Divine Liturgy.

The rough equivalent of Greek Orthodox “Joys & Concerns”

includes the ‘Kyrie’ as a choral response, sung alternately in Greek or English...

‘Kyrie, eleison. Kyrie, eleison. Kyrie, eleison.’,

‘Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.’

I would even characterize the ‘Kyrie’

as a building block of Eastern Orthodox worship.

Another hymn they use has a similar formula: The Trisagion – The Thrice Holy...

‘Ágios ó theòs, ‘ágios ìskhuròs, ‘Ágios àthánatos èléeson èmâs

‘Holy is God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.’

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01211b.htm>

As it turns out, the Kyrie or Jesus Prayer as a practice within Eastern Orthodoxy –
goes back even earlier to the 4th Century CE

when Rome and the Eastern Churches were still unified.

The Philokalia is a 4 volume collection of spiritual writings intended
for teaching monks about contemplative prayer or meditation.

The word ‘Philokalia’ means the ‘Love of Spiritual Beauty’

and these teachings include The Jesus Prayer.

Fr. Alexander Veronis, a Greek Orthodox priest, gave me a copy of another book –

The Way of a Pilgrim which was the chronicle of a Russian peasant

who went on a pilgrimage throughout his land

as he sought to learn what was meant by a certain verse in the Bible.

He felt called to learn more about

what the Apostle Paul said in 1st Thessalonians 5:17, ‘Pray without ceasing.’

This led him to the spiritual leader of a monastery who said to him,

*"The continuous interior prayer of Jesus is a constant uninterrupted calling
upon the divine name of Jesus with the lips, in the spirit, in the heart,
while forming a mental picture of His constant presence,
and imploring His grace, during every occupation, at all times,
in all places, even during sleep.*

The appeal is couched in these terms,

'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.'

One who accustoms himself to this appeal

experiences as a result so deep a consolation and so great a need

to offer the prayer always that he can no longer live without it,

and it will continue to voice itself within him of its own accord.

Now do you understand what prayer without ceasing is?"

Willard, p.3

*"Yes indeed, Father, and in God's name teach me how to gain the habit of it,"
[the pilgrim]cried, filled with joy.*

"Read this book," he said.

*"It is called The Philokalia, and it contains the full and detailed science
of constant interior prayer,
set forth by twenty-five holy Fathers.*

*The book is marked by a lofty wisdom and is so profitable to use
that it is considered the foremost and best manual
of the contemplative spiritual life.*

As the revered Nicephorus said,

'It leads one to salvation without labor and sweat.'"

Under the guidance of his spiritual guide and reading The Philokalia with him,
the pilgrim went from reciting The Jesus Prayer from 2,000 times a day
to 3,000 then 6,000, and even 12,000 times a day
until he was instructed not to bother counting anymore –
because he was already praying without ceasing.

What he learned to do was practice the presence – practice being present with God.
Much like the essays of Sarah Young's devotional, Jesus Calling,
which encourage us as Christians to recognize
our relationship with God through Christ
without being distracted and discouraged by our outward circumstances.

I do not practice the particular discipline of constant prayer,
but I have great respect for The Jesus Prayer which had been given to me
by Fr. Veronis at a time I was in considerable distress.

The Jesus Prayer is there for all of us, helping us remember that
the nature of God is to bring healing and life-giving salvation.

The Jesus Prayer is there for our Shepherds and all of us in pastoral ministry
to use and bring encouragement to those who face any kind of distress.

We are living in a time of challenge to see what we really believe.

We have been told that Protestant Christianity has been in decline
for decades now.

We are faced with unprecedented decisions about the environment,
rules of engagement for law enforcement and modern war,
race relations, freedom of expression, religious freedom
and women's rights – did I miss anything?

So, what do we really believe about a loving God
in the midst of all that is going on?

Willard, p.4

Believe that 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble'
and that we can and must call upon God for help
with the example of Christ to show us that God is a God of mercy
who loves us.

[The Apostle Paul said,]

And because of this message, I am locked up in jail and treated like a criminal.

But God's good news isn't locked in jail,

and so I am willing to put up with anything.

2 Timothy 2:9-10

Let me close with a contemporary version of "Kyrie Eleison" by Nick & Anita Haigh...

Verse 1

Empty broken here I stand, Kyrie eleison,
Touch me with Your healing hand, Kyrie eleison,
Take my arrogance and pride, Kyrie eleison,
wash me in Your mercy's tide, Kyrie eleison.

Chorus: Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison,

Verse 2

When my faith is all but gone, Kyrie eleison,
Give me strength to carry on, Kyrie eleison,
when my dreams have turned to dust, Kyrie eleison,
In You O Lord I put my trust, Kyrie eleison.

Chorus: Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison,

Verse 3

When my heart is cold as ice, Kyrie eleison,
Your love speaks of sacrifice, Kyrie eleison,
Love that sets the captives free, Kyrie eleison,
O pour compassion down on me, Kyrie eleison.

Chorus: Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison,

Verse 4

You're the voice that calms my fears, Kyrie eleison,
You're the laughter dries my tears, Kyrie eleison,
You're the music, my refrain, Kyrie eleison,
Help me sing my song again, Kyrie eleison.

Chorus: Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison,

Verse 5

Humble heart of holiness, Kyrie eleison,
Kiss me with Your tenderness, Kyrie eleison,
Jesus, faithful Friend and true, Kyrie eleison,
All I am I give to You, Kyrie eleison.

Chorus: Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison, (x2)

[http://www.thelyricarchive.com/song/2258792-376352/Kyrie-Eleison-\(Love-Have-Mercy\)](http://www.thelyricarchive.com/song/2258792-376352/Kyrie-Eleison-(Love-Have-Mercy))

Amen

*In our lesson today from 2 Timothy 2:8-15,
we hear the Apostle Paul urging Timothy, to remember Christ.
He even uses a primitive faith statement to re-emphasize
the basic message of Jesus as savior...*

[The Apostle Paul said,]

⁸ Keep your mind on Jesus Christ!

He was from the family of David and was raised from death,
just as my good news says.

⁹ And because of this message, I am locked up in jail and treated like a criminal.

But God's good news isn't locked in jail,

¹⁰ and so I am willing to put up with anything.

Then God's special people will be saved.

They will be given eternal glory because they belong to Christ Jesus.

¹¹ Here is a true message:

"If we died with Christ, we will live with him.

² If we don't give up, we will rule with him.

If we deny that we know him, he will deny that he knows us.

¹³ If we are not faithful, he will still be faithful.

Christ cannot deny who he is."

¹⁴ Don't let anyone forget these things.

And with God as your witness, you must warn them not to argue about words.

These arguments don't help anyone.

In fact, they ruin everyone who listens to them.

¹⁵ Do your best to win God's approval as a worker

who doesn't need to be ashamed and who teaches only the true message.

Let us be challenged and guided by these words...

Luke 17:11-19

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem

[Jesus] was passing along between Samar'ia and Galilee.

¹² And as he entered a village,

he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance

¹³ and lifted up their voices and said,

“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

¹⁴ When he saw them he said to them,

“Go and show yourselves to the priests.”

And as they went they were cleansed.

¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice;

¹⁶ and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks.

Now he was a Samaritan.

¹⁷ Then said Jesus,

“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?”

¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”

¹⁹ And he said to him,

“Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”