

BASIC CHRISTIANITY

Lecture Number 20

CORPORATE PRAYER

Revised 5/30/06

INTRODUCTION

There is a commonly heard notion that “canned prayer”, that is prayer out of a book, is not really prayer at all, but just “vain repetition.” Real prayer we are told is spontaneous, and it comes from the heart.

However, the first time a person is asked to pray spontaneously in public, he is likely to feel embarrassed. One is reluctant to share one’s deepest thoughts and feelings with relative strangers. The temptation is to rehearse so that when called upon, one has something to say.

But when you do that and know that your heart is empty, you feel ashamed and guilty and resentful. And if you suspect that others are doing the same thing, you will be inclined to despise the whole business.

Under such circumstances, one’s real spontaneous prayer from the heart might go like this:

“Good God! Dammit! How do I manage to get in such situations? I hate the leader for calling on me. I feel like these other people are judging me and snickering at me for my clumsy and ridiculous praying. I know I was when they were praying.

“Some of them may be feeling sorry for me. None of us is honest enough to admit it. So we keep up this hateful pretense of being pious.

“God, if you can hear me, help me get through the next two or three minutes without making too much of an ass of myself. Let me remember those phrases I rehearsed. Dammit! Amen.”

It is not easy to learn to pray spontaneously. Some people learn to do it with eloquence. But if you analyze the free prayer of the preacher, you will discover that he uses many standard phrases out of his experience of other people’s prayer, as well as out of his own thought and prayer on previous occasions.

Once he has learned how to say some particular thing well, the next time he wants to express the same thing he will probably say it the same way.

THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN PRAYER

While God is surely pleased when any of his children turn to him in prayer, the fact is that you and I have a claim on God’s ear only because we are part of his Church.

My prayer is the prayer of Jesus—just as yours is—so I must pray for what he wants, or else it blows a fuse and nothing happens.

We belong to a praying community. Fr. A. G. Hebert tells the following story:

At the conclusion of the first World War a young Englishman was doing Red Cross work in Greece. He had a few days off so he took a trip to the famous Mt. Athos and visited a Greek Orthodox monastery.

When the time came for him to leave, it happened that one of the monks had to go to the same city, so they traveled together. The first night when they stopped at an inn, the Englishman knelt down and said his prayers before he got in bed. But the monk simply undressed and got in bed.

The next morning, the Englishman got out of bed, knelt down and said his morning prayers, got up and dressed, and got ready for breakfast. The monk simply got up and got dressed. That night it was the same story. And that went on for three days. Morning and night the Englishman knelt down and said his prayers, but the monk never did!

Finally, when the Englishman couldn't stand it any longer, he said to the monk, "Pardon me for asking, Father, but I know your life is dedicated to prayer. But we have been traveling together for three days, and I have never seen you pray. I don't understand."

The monk answered, "Oh, that's simple. I belong to a praying community. When I am there in the monastery, I take my part in the prayers. And when I have to be away, the prayers still go on."

Fr. Hebert said, "God forbid that we should have to choose between the two points of view. But if we had to choose, the monk's point of view comes closer to the truth."

All Christian prayer is first and foremost corporate prayer. And all Christian prayer is worship. There used to be a rule of thumb for newcomers to the services of the Episcopal Church: "We stand to praise, kneel to pray, and sit for instruction."

But that is a false distinction. It is like saying, "We sit to eat and stand up for supper." Even sitting and receiving and attending to a sermon is a form of worship.

WHY CHRISTIANS PRAY

We pray, because prayer is profoundly appropriate to our situation. Consider little Johnny:

Aunt Susie has sent her nephew a bicycle for his birthday. But when she comes on a visit, little Johnny does not thank her. He never even mentions the gift. His mother is deeply embarrassed. So she apologizes for him and thanks aunt Susie on his behalf, because Aunt Susie ought to be thanked!

Let's look at another illustration:

The year is 1870. A little town out west is under attack by the Indians. They are completely surrounded. It seems that all is lost for the people in the town. Suddenly one of the

townspeople spots a tiny cloud of dust on the horizon. And then in a little bit they think they hear the faintest sound of a bugle.

The cloud gets bigger and bigger, until finally Col. John Wayne and the Cavalry ride up to the rescue. The Indians run off and the town is saved!

But then all of the town fathers go about their business of getting things back in order and do not give any sign at all that the Cavalry has done the slightest thing for the town.

This is too much for the ordinary citizens of the town who know too well how close they had come to being massacred by the Indians. They say among themselves, "What if it had not been for the Cavalry!"

So they form a citizen's committee for the specific purpose of expressing to Col. John Wayne and the Cavalry just how grateful to them the people of the town are for their deliverance. For the occasion, they arrange to have the soldiers assemble in parade formation mounted on their horses. Col. John Wayne is mounted on his horse in front of all the others.

As the delegation of citizens are marching up to the formation to make the presentation, one of the members of the committee cannot stand it any longer. He blurts out suddenly, "Oh, Col. Wayne, I'm terribly hungry, I wonder if you've got any oranges in your saddle bag?"

God has sent his Son to rescue us from slavery to lust and compulsions and phobias and all sorts of terrible things. He gave his life for us. Somebody ought to say "Thank you." The Church is the committee which exists to do that on behalf of all creation.

As for oranges, God does care about the little things in our lives, and he does not resent it because we pray for such things. But the more importance we give to the little things, so much more importance we should give to the things which really matter.

Our primary purpose in the Church is not to ask God for oranges, but to praise him for our creation, for our preservation and our redemption, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory, and for all the blessings of this life.

Remember in Lecture three, on Man, we spoke about the hierarchy of being:

Some things are imaginary and some are real. Among the real things, some are alive and some are not. Among the real, living things, some are sentient, feeling, and some are not. Among the real, living, sentient things, some are rational and some are not.

It is better to exist than not to exist. So all created things owe God a debt of gratitude for their existence. But only Man is capable of returning thanks...However, when Man does praise God, all of Creation does, because all orders of Creation are represented in Man. Thus Man is the Priest of Creation, Creation's mouthpiece.

But not all human beings recognize this obligation to praise God.

The Christian Church is the New Humanity which corporately recognizes and accepts this

duty...and privilege. And the Holy Eucharist is the primary, but by no means the only, way the Church carries out that work.

In practical terms it means that when a person joins the Church, he undertakes to be present at and take part in the offering of the Holy Eucharist, every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation for the rest of his life, unless he is sick, doing corporal works of mercy, or prevented by circumstances.

And for us in the Church, there is an added reason to praise God: for the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE PRAYER OF JESUS—AND THE CHURCH

If I went into my closet and wrote a fan letter to Farrah Fawcett, or whoever is the latest beauty queen, and then I sneaked out and put it in the mail box when nobody was looking, that would seem like a very private act. But several days later when it got to her home, it would be only one of thousands from her “public”.

There is no such thing as “private prayer”.

At every moment, day and night, somewhere in the world, the Holy Eucharist is being celebrated. But if that were not so, If I were the only one in the world doing it, the angels and archangels would still be doing it in heaven. And if they were not doing it, Jesus the Word, who never ceases to make intercession for us, would still be doing it.

For the majority of the Christians who have ever lived, prayer has meant taking part in the Eucharist on Sundays and perhaps on weekdays, and then saying throughout the week, the Lord’s Prayer, the Hail Mary, and the Gloria Patri (Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, etc.).

PRAYER OUT OF A BOOK

Why do Episcopalians pray out of a book? Well, we do it for a number of reasons. Some of them are:

- Because our prayer is official. It is like the Sheriff when he bangs on the door and says, “Op
- Because we are making common prayer. And if we are going to make common prayer, we hav

We can pray simultaneously in silence;

We can take turns praying and let one person speak out loud while the rest listen;

We can say in unison prayers which we all know by heart.

Or we can agree in advance on our prayers and have them in a book so we can all pray them out loud together.

- God deserves majesty in our worship and that takes thought and preparation.

- Our private prayer grows out of our common prayer which expresses magnificently all the deepest human concerns. We learn the language of prayer from our common prayer.

What separates Shakespeare and Archbishop Cranmer from you and me is not what was in their hearts, but rather their ability to give expression to what is deepest in the hearts of all of us.

When we hear a good joke, we say, “I wish I had told that joke. I think I will.” It makes just as much sense to do that with prayer. And so the public prayers of experienced educated ministers of free churches often echo the Book of Common Prayer, even when they are not aware of it.

- The great written prayers, when they are familiar, can have the power to put us in the mood to pray.
- We pray out of a book for the same reason we sing out of a book.

Hymns are prayers. What if hymns had to be spontaneous and could never be repeated after we had sung them once? In fact, the more we sing a hymn and the more familiar it becomes, the greater its ability to put us in communion with God. The same thing is true of prayer. The more familiar we become with a particular prayer, the more deeply it becomes our own.

- We need a balanced diet of prayer. The Book of Common Prayer gives us that balance of praise and adoration, thanksgiving, confession, intercession, and petition. But if we pray only what is in our hearts, only what we are conscious of, it tends to be mostly petition and intercession, and the other more important types get left out.

So the Prayer Book tends to raise our consciousness to the praying we need to be doing.

NOT ONLY OUT OF A BOOK

But God forbid we should pray only out of a book! The Prayer Book is mostly for newcomers and visitors.

Book prayers and memorized prayers are really exercises in prayer, etudes, as it were. The branch of theology which has to do with prayer is called ascetics from the Greek word askesis which means “exercise”.

The printing press with moveable type appeared in the west right at the time of the Reformation. The first books which were published were copies of the Bible. The next books were devotional books, collections of prayers designed to prime the pump of prayer. So they were referred to as “primers”.

The leaders of the Reformation had been raised on primers, so they were well primed with the ideas and phraseology of prayer. As a result they were able spontaneously to pray well without using a book, and they urged their followers to do the same.

That emphasis on spontaneous prayer from the heart produced a generation which did not use primers and thus grew up poorly primed. Thus the great tradition of free prayer was weakened. And that was the opposite of what the reformers would have wanted.

An excellent example of a present day primer is St. Augustine's Prayer Book.

NOT ONLY INTO A BOOK

And God forbid that we should pray into a book!

The people's part in the Eucharist changes very little, or not at all, from week to week. Even newcomers quickly learn it by heart. So put the Prayer Book down and pay attention to what is happening in the service. The ceremonies are an important part of the worship.

PRAYER DESCRIBED

The following is a description of prayer by Father Homer Rogers, the late Rector of St. Francis Episcopal Church, Dallas, Texas.

“Man was intended to be at home in the world of the spirit as much as in the world of matter and the animal senses. But, because of that inscrutable event referred to as the Fall, we have lost the natural ability to penetrate and enjoy the world of the spirit.

“That which should be all light has become murky—darkness and shadows. And we are left with the world of animal sense...and heartbreak and yearning for that other world. When the light from that other world breaks through, it hurts our eyes—Jesus the Light of Light.

“We are left with a preoccupation with that world of the senses. We are left without the guidance of the spirit, turned in upon our selves. And things are disordered.

“The point of prayer and of all religion is to lift Man back into the world of the spirit so that he is increasingly at home in that world. Christians believe that this reality, the spiritual, hovers just beyond the boundary of our awareness. It is personal, supra personal, and He is in love with his creation.

“Twenty centuries ago he came out of that world to inhabit this world, by taking our nature in the womb of a virgin girl in Palestine. Even though he lived in this world, he lived with the life of that world. He carried our nature through death into the glare of that world's brilliance and beauty.

“And then he revealed to his friends, in flashes, called post-resurrection appearances, his continuing presence with them just beyond the edge of their bodily senses. He is here, in this room, in all of his glory. If we strain and squint, sometimes we can almost see him. But he continues to abide with his friends, lovingly watching over them guiding them to himself.

“There are certain breakthrough points in which he comes to his friends, called the sacraments.

“Prayer is our response to that unseen and beckoning presence, as we tune in, or open up our minds and hearts to the presence of him who loves us so much.

“It is the Church’s belief that that Holy One from beyond, not only is by our side, but actually pervades us, living in our spirits, uniting us to himself in an intimacy that we cannot imagine, in a kind of mutual indwelling, or mingling of spirits.

“We look outward at distant mountains, or upward at the stars, and we are filled with awe at the mystery of what is hovering over and in them. The same mystery is within us, even more mysterious and beautiful. I am more remarkable than a galaxy or a rainbow. I really am. So are you.

“‘If anyone love me,’ said our Lord, ‘my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him.’ [John 14:23]

“Again, ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and sup with him and he with me.’

“Prayer is the way of opening the door.

“St. Paul says, ‘I live, yet not I—my life is not really mine—but Christ, —the splendor, the majesty, the mystery, the beauty, the beloved,—lives within me.’

“God respects the freedom he has given us and does not overwhelm us.

“Prayer is a kind of rheostat by which we can tune in and yet control the voltage of the supernatural to keep it from blowing our minds.

“In Baptism, the divine indwelling begins and grows to make us more and more at home in the world of spirit, as we yield our unruly and frightened wills and frozen hearts to the presence within us.

“Its gradual and progressive increase of our awareness of the presence of God in us changes us and makes us more and more like the humanity that he assumed, integrating and harmonizing and unifying our faculties, inviting us to love as he loves, planting his virtues in us and in all things, making us, not less, but more our distinctive selves, as we become transparent to the beauty which inhabits us.

“His spirit is in us, inciting, prompting, urging us to yield up our heart to his remaking of us in his likeness. Prayer is our yielding to his rule.”

Thus concludes Fr. Rogers’ description of prayer.

GOD’S INITIATIVE

In every contact between God and Man, God takes the initiative. As St. Augustine said, “Your seeking God proves that you have already found him.”

Let's imagine that I do some good and loving thing, and God sees it. He says, "Oh, my goodness! I wish I had thought of that!" Well, I am not going to think up some goodness which God has not already thought of.

Any such impulse in me is my response to God's prior action in my soul. That prior action is called prevenient grace, grace which "comes before."

Note. As you recall from Lecture 11, there is only one grace. It is God's life being lived in the human soul. But we receive the one grace in various ways, and grace has various effects upon us. The different "kinds" of grace are really references to the way we receive it or to what it does in our lives.

The union of the soul with God which begins at Baptism is called sanctifying grace or habitual grace.

God's actual, personal indwelling is called uncreated grace.

The effect of uncreated grace is to change the character of the soul in response, and that is called created grace.

Created grace is assisted in times of need by actual grace and, when we receive the sacraments, by sacramental grace.

The grace which we receive when we pray, hear sermons, read the Bible, listen to music, have conversation with holy people, is called mystical grace.

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

It is a common mistake to identify the action of God upon the soul with the feelings which may go along with it. Actually, there may not be any special feelings at all.

Emotions are not spiritual at all. We share emotions with dogs and cats. There is no such thing as a "spiritual emotion".

Mystical experience is immediate experience of reality, that is experience of reality which is not mediated. It does not involve or employ the bodily senses.

Mystical experience cannot be verified objectively, because it does not involve the senses.

The great spiritual masters, such as St. John of the Cross, tell us to pay no attention to ecstatic experiences. They usually occur at the beginning of spiritual development and, on rare occasions, towards the end.

Experiences which are indistinguishable from them can be produced by non-spiritual causes.

When ecstatic, or charismatic, experiences are really from God, their purpose is to draw the soul into a deeper life of prayer and worship. And then they usually cease. They are pump primers to get us started. So it is a mistake to try to go back and recreate the experience. That is a little like

trying to go back to one's childhood, or refusing to grow up.

True mystical experience cannot be communicated to another person, because it is not a matter of bodily experience. And so we have no common language in which to talk about it.

From the time of St. Paul to the present, all the authorities on the subject agree that the only test of such matters is whether or not it makes you nicer to your spouse. As St. Paul says, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love...I am nothing...I gain nothing."
[I Cor. 13:1-3]

In true mystical experience, one is oblivious to the passage of time.

Finally, no matter how advanced we get in our prayer life, we never outgrow our need and our obligation to engage in the public prayer of the Church.

THE DIVINE OFFICE

Besides the Eucharist, the most common form of corporate prayer is the Divine Office, also known in the Episcopal Church as Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, or Evensong. Sometimes, for short, it is called simply "The Office".

To understand its origin, as well as that of the Liturgy of the Word in the Eucharist, we must go back to nearly 1400 years before Christ—to the time of the Hebrews' entry into the Promised Land.

At that point they had just spent a generation as nomads in the desert. Before that they had spent centuries in the cities of Egypt. Therefore they did not have the foggiest notion of how to farm. And yet if they were to possess, to occupy, the Promised Land they would have to farm it.

So they carefully observed the way the Canaanites, who were there before them, went about practicing scientific agriculture. The Canaanite theory was that things grew, because the rain god Baal had intercourse with the Earth Mother Ashtoreth (aka Astarte, Esther, Ishtar, etc.). Farming consisted of persuading them to do it.

The technique was this: in the springtime, in order to give the god and goddess the idea, they poked holes in the ground with sticks in those places where they wanted things to grow. Then they scattered some of last year's crop on the broken ground as a sacrifice. And sure enough, in the fall there would be a new crop right where they had performed those ceremonies.

This sympathetic magic really worked. It was the latest thing in "scientific agriculture", and it really impressed the Hebrews. There was only one thing wrong with it; it was idolatry. So it was strictly forbidden by their covenant with the LORD. They were in a real bind.

You will recall the result, which we talked about in Lecture number 5 on the Old Covenant. They went through that cycle of prosperity, followed by disobedience, followed by catastrophe, followed by repentance, by deliverance, by prosperity, by disobedience, etc. But in the process, they finally disentangled farming from idolatry.

Eventually, after several centuries of this and other kinds of idolatry, as an effort to stamp out the idolatry, all sacrifices, except those offered in the Jerusalem temple, were outlawed.

But it was too late. The northern kingdom, Israel, was conquered by the Assyrians in 721 BC and four fifths of its people were relocated in distant lands never to return.

In 587 BC, the Babylonians conquered the southern kingdom, Judah, and carried many if not most of the people to Babylon where they remained for a generation, fifty years. The Jews, the people of Judah, interpreted these events as God's punishment for disobeying the Law of the Covenant.

So there in Babylon they set out to seriously and systematically study God's Law. In the process they pulled together the various writings which make up the first part of the Old Testament. The men met each Sabbath under the leadership of a man schooled in the Law called a "master", in Hebrew, rabbi.

In those weekly meetings, they read passages from the collected writings, listened to a commentary on the passage by the rabbi, sang psalms, and recited prayers.

When, after fifty years, the next generation returned to Jerusalem, they continued those Bible study, prayer, and praise meetings. Thus was born the Jewish synagogue, literally "congregation" or "assembly", in Greek.

The first Christians were converted Jews. They thought of themselves as Jews of the New Covenant, the True Israel of God. So they continued synagogue worship; it would have been unthinkable not to do so. And now the commentary is an interpretation of the Old Testament scriptures in the light of Christ.

But they did not stop with the synagogue service. They celebrated the Lord's Supper which was also a transformed version of a Jewish institution.

The combination of the synagogue service with the Supper is what we know today as the Liturgy of the Word followed by the Great Thanksgiving, or simply the Eucharist.

In the fourth century AD, after the cities of the Roman Empire had largely been converted, many young men felt that the Church was going to the dogs. So they went out into the wild countryside to get away from the corruption of the cities and to spend their lives in prayer and the study of Holy Scripture.

At first they lived as hermits. But soon they began to form communities. And these communities developed a pattern of worship which was an expansion of the Liturgy of the Word. At several set times during the day, they would stop everything and assemble for a brief service of prayer, scripture reading, and singing of psalms.

The names of those brief services are Matins, Lauds, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline. They are derived mostly from the hours of the day.

The Christians in the cities began to feel that the monks out in the wilderness were the "real"

Christians, and so their pattern of worship came to be considered the ideal.

As a result the poor parish priest who had enough to do already discovered that he was expected to live up to the standard set by those monks. He was expected to recite daily at least part of “The Divine Office”, as it was called.

At the time of the English Reformation, Archbishop Cranmer, when he translated the Liturgy into English, had a daring idea. He simplified the eight offices into two, Matins and Vespers.

His idea was that, every morning, all the men of the village would stop by the church for Matins on their way to the fields. Then on their way home, they would stop by for Vespers. It was a great idea, but it never caught on except in a very few places.

However, the priests used the new simplified offices. And on Sunday morning, just before the Eucharist, Matins, or Morning Prayer as it was also known, was read in church. Then that evening, Vespers, also called Evening Prayer would be read. When Evening Prayer was chanted, it was called Evensong. This made for a rich schedule of Sunday worship.

During colonial times, there were no bishops in the American colonies as a result of the pressure put on the English government by the dissenters in the colonies. In order for a man to be ordained, he had to spend a year in an expensive and dangerous round trip to England. This produced a severe shortage of priests in the colonies.

One priest usually served a large number of parishes, which he would visit in rotation. It might be several months before he could get to them all. So the Eucharist could not be celebrated every Sunday in any given parish church.

On those Sundays when no priest was there, Morning Prayer was conducted by a layman. The result was that the people became accustomed to having the Eucharist only once a quarter or so, and at best only monthly. What started out as a necessity, after it was no longer necessary, continued as a bad habit.

There was another factor which discouraged weekly celebrations of the Eucharist both in England and the colonies. Before the Reformation, the practice had developed of “non-communicating masses” in which only the priest received communion. The lay people only made their communions at Christmas and Easter.

The Anglican Reformers knew this was a practice which needed to be corrected. So they decreed that the priest would not be allowed to celebrate without at least one other person to receive communion. Anyone who intended to receive was obliged to tell the priest by the night before. If no one did so, then when the priest had concluded the Liturgy of the Word, he had to stop.

Since old habits, even bad habits die hard, the lay people were not eager to change their old pre-reformation habits. So on most Sundays in many if not most churches, the services were Matins and “Ante-communion (the Liturgy of the Word). That was the situation until the 19th century. As a result of this and the various religious and political conflicts it went through, by the end of the 18th century the Church of England was spiritually exhausted.

But in 1832, at Oxford University, a great revival began in the Church of England. And it quickly spread to America. It is called the Oxford Movement.

As one of the fruits of the Oxford Movement, a great campaign was begun to restore the ancient and once universal practice of having the Eucharist every Sunday. But as we have already noted people are reluctant to change the worship practices they were raised with. They were not willing to give up Morning Prayer.

As the next best thing, priests began adding an additional service at 7:30 or 8:00 a.m. every Sunday which was always the Eucharist. It came to be known as “the early service” or as “the eight o’clock”. Usually only a minority of the parish attended it. The majority continued to come at 11:00 a.m. for Morning Prayer every Sunday of the month except “the first Sunday”, when the Eucharist was celebrated.

The common speculation among historians and liturgical scholars is that the “eight o’clock strategy may have slowed down the restoration of the Eucharist as the principle service every Sunday. Nevertheless, the weekly Eucharist as the main service on Sundays is almost the universal practice in the Episcopal Church today.

There is certainly no debate among scholars, theologians, and bishops as to what the proper practice is. The 1979 Prayer Book also makes it clear.

IDEAL PATTERN OF WORSHIP

The ideal pattern of public, corporate prayer in an ordinary parish would be something like this:

Morning Prayer daily;

The Eucharist daily;

One celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday;

Evening Prayer daily.

In some parishes, daily Morning and Evening Prayer are conducted by laymen on a rotating schedule. This is very helpful, since the time of day when Evening Prayer would be read is usually a prime time for visits by the priest.

At any rate, the daily office will be read in private by the priest if not in public.

DISTRACTIONS

To a newcomer to an Episcopal church, sometimes it seems as if the priest is saying the prayers too fast or without enough “expression”. There is a reason for the way he does it. He must avoid intruding his personality or his feelings on the congregation. That would be a distraction to everybody else, and it would prevent them from bringing their own feelings to the prayers.

He should try to present the text of the prayers accurately so that the sense is clear, but leave the individual participants to supply their own “interpretations”.

There are in general two classes of distractions which one can encounter during worship.

- You can be distracted from the liturgy by your own senses or thoughts and reactions to things going on around you—including the way the service is conducted. For example, “What is that smell?” or “Oh! I just remembered, I forgot to put the roast in the oven.” or “The choir sounded awful on that anthem.” etc.

When that kind of distraction occurs, the thing to do is drag your attention back to the words which are being said in the service. This is a time when you might want to follow the words in the Prayer Book.

- You may find yourself distracted by God.

When that happens, you will be a fool if you try to turn your attention back to the words of the service. The purpose of the service in the first place is to draw your attention to God. The purpose of the words is to form our intention and also to act as a shield against distractions of the first kind, so that we can be distracted by God.

PERFECT PRAYER

A celebration of the Eucharist which was conducted perfectly, and in which you participated fully, would leave you unaware of the passage of time. It would simply be contemplation. And as you left church, you would feel like you had just been in heaven — because that is exactly where you would have been — “with Angels and Archangels and all the company of heaven!”