

These are the words of St. Basil the Great: “This is how you pray continually, not by offering prayer in words, but by joining yourself to God through your whole way of life, so your life becomes a continuous and uninterrupted prayer.” I’m going to talk about prayer.

In today’s reading, young King Solomon addresses God, seeking help. “I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in.” His father, David, “sleeps with the ancestors,” and Solomon has become the ruler “of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted.” He prays: “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind.”

God is pleased with Solomon’s entreaty and blesses him. “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies . . . I give you a wise and discerning mind . . . I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor.” God then tells Solomon if he keeps “my statutes and my commandments . . . then I will lengthen your life.”

This is an important instruction for those who will follow Solomon in the Judeo-Christian traditions. Through this interaction, God teaches us how to pray.

Jesus also taught us how to pray. Gospel writers Matthew and Luke share the words of Jesus: “Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.” Most of us have known this prayer since early childhood. It is our touchstone. I find myself drawn to its language each time I begin to prepare a sermon. This is a personal prayer, but it is also a prayer for relationship, for community.

The connection between the Lord’s Prayer and today’s Gospel is very direct. From John, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven.” Both the God of the Hebrew Scriptures and Jesus, God who lived a human life, direct us to pay attention to living our lives as loving caretakers of one another. God wants us to be fair, forgiving, and righteous.

A very wise woman, my mother, recently taught me a lesson about prayer. I had to tell her some disappointing news about the sale of her house. “It doesn’t matter,” she said. “I don’t waste my prayers on selling a house. I pray for peace in Gaza and in Ukraine.”

She echoed the prayer that Bob Herdt contributes here at St. Thomas’s, “for the people of Ukraine and the people of Russia, for the people of Gaza and the people of Israel.” Prayer is for people, all the people. Because we are one with God.

How are we joined to God?

The imperatives in today's Gospel, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will have no life in you" are remarkable. They get our attention. Most of us gathered here today have probably grown up with some sort of communion ritual as part of our religious heritage. Here at St. Thomas's the Eucharist is a profoundly communal part of our service. We gather at the altar as the bread and the wine are consecrated. As we each receive the Eucharist, we stand with the congregation.

Today, I am here presiding and preaching. As a lay person, I do not have the authority to offer you communion. So, when I read today's lectionary, I wasn't sure how I would talk about this Gospel on a Sunday when we would not have Eucharist.

This made me reflect on a few things. I remembered the many months of ZOOM church during the pandemic. St. Thomas's was able to provide a comforting and hopeful, holy and communal experience even when we could not gather in person. Jesus was with us, even without physical contact. We were companions during challenging times -- "companions," a word derived from the Latin, "cum pane," with bread. Outside the walls of our sanctuary and without being able to receive the bread and the wine, we were one -- with each other and with God.

In the hymn "Be Thou My Vision," we sing, "Thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee." This is an ancient song filled

with truth – that we are one with God through our hearts, our thoughts, and through the Word. And we can be fed through Morning Prayer as we take in the Word, the music, and the companionship.

We abide in God through our actions, our commitment to walk with Jesus into the world, offering peace, justice, and mercy wherever we are. We abide with Him in our hearts, the place in our selves where we find a way to give love, charity, and companionship. Jesus is with us in so many ways. We can abide in Him and share his life – both on earth and in heaven.

To get back to Solomon for a moment – and his lengthened life. My wise mother, Rosalie Farrell, celebrated her 99th birthday yesterday! My mother has had many pretty tough storms during her voyage, but she has an incredibly resilient and positive attitude. Being ninety-nine years old can be lonely – Mom has outlived the friends and family of her generation. She has outlived two husbands and two of her children. Yet, she shows us her character in her ability to connect with her children and grandchildren and great grandchildren – creating new memories for all of us. Happy Birthday, Mom.

And, although we do not have Eucharist today, I did bring a loaf of challah and some grapes for coffee hour. And please come back next week to meet our new Priest-in-Charge, Alan Murchie, who will bless the bread and the wine, and share it with the congregation. Amen.