

*Give us this day our daily bread:
Praying and Reading the Bible, at Church or at Home*

The *Book of Common Prayer* offers us a rule of life, a kind of guide that helps us to order how we pray and live. St Paul exhorts us to “pray without ceasing.” This does not mean that we spend all our time reading prayers, but that our life becomes a kind of prayer: “we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee”. Prayer includes much more than asking for things or even giving thanks. Prayer is a movement toward God and a way by which the life of the Spirit is shaped in us.

Prayer at Home

The life of prayer includes not only prayer in Church, but also how we pray at home, in a group or by ourselves. There are many guides to prayer and ways to pray. At the Lenten Retreat two years ago, we considered contemplative prayer. Some people find the PACTS formula helpful (Pause, Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication or *Asking*).

The Prayer Book offers services that can help us pray at home also. Some people follow the daily offices of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer at home. This is a way to join in the daily services of the Church even when you cannot be there. The “Forms of Prayer to be used in Families”, pages 728-731, are short services that can structure and guide your prayers. You can use these services as they are, or add spaces for silence or for your own prayers (see also the prayers for “several occasions” ages 37-61). Compline, or even parts of Compline, can also offer a kind of personal or family prayer at nighttime (page 722). If you use any of these services with children, they will quickly learn the responses and prayers by heart.

Whatever form you use, it is important to find some time for daily prayer. Prayer shapes who we are and how we live. That which we can do at any time, we may find that we do at no time. This is why people often find it helpful to choose a regular time of day for prayer.

Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer at Church

If you are able to come to one of the Offices on a regular basis, even once per week, you will help to support the life of prayer in the parish and feed your daily prayer. The offices are a vital part of the life of the parish, one of the springs of life that nurtures our common life and that serves as a beacon of life, even when we are just two or three in number.

Reading the Bible

Daily reading of the Bible is a source of guidance, inspiration, and instruction. The Prayer Book and the Anglican tradition is sometimes described as a way of reading the Bible. Some people simply like to dip into their Bible and explore. On page xvi and following, the Prayer Book offers a guide for reading the Bible. These are the readings for daily Morning and Evening Prayer. If this is too much reading, you can select one of the books being read. For example, you could choose to read the Old Testament lesson (either as two readings or combined in one long reading) or the daily Gospel reading. Alternatively, you could read the selection from the Epistle. If you do this, you can go at your own pace and still follow along with the public reading of Scripture at Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer.

To help make sense of the readings and to see what they teach, you can pick up one of the photocopies of the commentaries on the daily office readings printed by St Peter’s publications. These are available at the back of the church each week. You may also find it helpful to buy a study Bible, the kind of Bible that has notes at the bottom of the pages and introductions to the chapters. These simple aids can make a big difference to what you discover when you seek to “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” the Holy Scriptures (see the collect for Advent II, page 97).

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