

# St. Demetrius Orthodox Church

March 2016

## Why Should I Pray?

By Fr. Michael Keiser

The other Sunday, a friend of mine who is a pastor took an informal survey of his congregation during the homily. "How many of you struggle with your prayer life?" he asked. Every hand in this parish of nearly three hundred shot up! The priest admitted that prayer was his own greatest spiritual struggle. The fact is, practicing effective prayer is like fighting on the front lines in a war. Our greatest challenge is to pray!

This is an interesting time to be Orthodox. Our secular world provides little certainty for people's lives, and the Orthodox faith issues an unchanging message of truth and stability. Orthodox Christianity may be the last firm footing on which to stand, yet it would be fair to say that very few Orthodox Christians are aware of the depth and richness of the Church's spiritual tradition when it comes to personal devotion. We Orthodox are big on externals. Our liturgical worship is a drama of striking beauty and color, of scent and sound. But besides being beautiful, icons, vestments, chanting and incense together constitute an important statement about God. He has created us as physical beings in a material world and we approach Him using the elements of that material world. The way in which we Orthodox worship involves all of our senses and physical nature, so that we may respond to God with all our being—our bodies as well as our minds and souls.

However, there is something else that is as essential to our spiritual growth as outward worship, and that is personal prayer. Anyone who wants to grow closer to God must develop a disciplined prayer life.

### What is Prayer?

Public worship and personal prayer are the twin support beams of the spiritual life for any believer. All our growing will take place within the framework they provide. But they are not the same thing; and they are not interchangeable.

Certainly we pray when we come to church, but we do others things as well—we sing, we learn, we offer. Worship is what we do as a group, when we gather as Christ's Body. The prayer that is offered by the Church is a united offering of prayer, "on behalf of all and for all," to the Father, in Christ, by the Holy Spirit.

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**This newsletter is sponsored in memory of brother-in-law and our uncle;**

**John Psychas, who passed away March 2, 2006.**

**Offered by Donna, Ted, Greg, Chris, Tim Psychas and families**

***May His Memory Be Eternal!***

**This newsletter is also sponsored in loving memory of our mom,**

**Nora Christoff who passed away one year ago on March 6, 2015.**

**Offered by her children Craig and Denise and Families.**

***May Her Memory Be Eternal!***

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## Why Should I Pray?

### One-On-One

Personal prayer is just that, personal and individual. It is my own personal conversation with God, in which no one else will be involved. In personal prayer, I will pray for others, but not with others.

Jesus' teaching about prayer makes it clear: "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6:6)

Personal prayer is our own private time with our Father. Everyone feels the need for a little personal attention at times, and in prayer we get that; but it never replaces our worship in church. The oneness of being in the Body of Christ, united in faith and love with other believers, is both glorious and necessary. But an individual relationship with God is just as important. In order to be a complete Christian one must relate to the members of the Body of Christ together, and relate to God as a person. St. John of Kronstadt (1829-1908) wrote, "Why is it necessary to pray at home, and to attend divine services in church?" Well, why is it necessary for you to eat and drink, to take exercise, or to work every day? In order to support the life of the body and strengthen it." Worship and prayer are the food and drink, the work and workout, of our life with God.

Your relationship with a personal God is what private prayer is all about. There are many things required for our growth, such as reading, study and good works. But they will bear no real fruit unless they are supported by the life of worship and prayer.

### Good Tools for an Effective Job

Why should we be concerned about being effective? Because we do not want to waste time when it comes to something as important as prayer. God has given us a job to do, and the job description is a dandy. "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). What could be simpler? We just have to be perfect!

If we are to meet such a challenge, we cannot waste time spinning our wheels. We must do the most efficient job of prayer that we can. Being concerned about efficiency does not mean only making decisions about style and technique. We will deal with those things in the course of this article, but to be effective we must also be concerned about results. Is your prayer life helping you to reach the goal of Christian perfection? If not, then it may be worse than no prayer at all, because it is a waste of time! Prayer is not an end in itself, but a means by which we draw closer to God.

Jesus said, "if you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is gloried, that you bear much fruit" (John 15:7,8). Our Christian growth can be measured, just as you would measure the quality of a vine by the fruit it bears. Our grapes are our thoughts and actions. Are they like Christ's thoughts and actions? Are we becoming more Christlike? The more Christlike in action we become, the more fruit we will bear.

Being concerned about the effectiveness of our prayer also prevents, or at least helps us avoid, misdirection, and it allows us to correct mistakes as they occur. The problems we will encounter will not be new problems, untold numbers of people have faced them before us. We have good directions: in Holy Scripture, and in the writings of holy people who have cultivated God's Word abiding in them and have borne much fruit. We call these holy persons "saints." They are our fathers and mothers in the Faith, and their experience can prevent us from fumbling around if we pay attention to it.

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