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To All Members of the Fellowship of St. Augustine:

The Weapons of Warfare: Equipment for Prayer

By Philip H. Pfatteicher

Elisha's servant was terrified. Waking up to see an army with horses and chariots surrounding him and his master and their city he cried, "Alas, master! What shall we do?" The prophet was unperturbed. "Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them." Then Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes that he may see," and the servant saw the mountain "full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." A huge army of angels was there defending them (2 Kings 6:15-17).

Most of us are at least sometimes like that servant. What we see with our mortal eyes is overwhelming. We seem to be utterly alone in what appears to be a hopeless situation. In desperation we cry out in what seems to be a lonely prayer. We need an Elisha to open our eyes to see a larger reality and to help us to see that we are not alone. We have been baptized and are therefore part of the body of Christ, united to a great company of believers, some here, the far greater number there in the heavenly city. And that vast company is supporting us with their fellowship and their prayers.

That is where we ought to begin when we think about prayer. We never pray alone but always as part of the body of Christ. So the practice is in some places, even when praying by oneself, to say before a prayer "The Lord be with you," addressing the unseen company who are there with us, reminding us of their presence, acknowledging their support.

To help us understand the corporate nature of the Church, to open our spiritual eyes to see the presence of the mighty army that surrounds us, we do well not to make up our prayers as we go. We do better to join the ancient pattern of prayer, prayer in the morning (as the sun rises) and in the evening (as the sun sets), joining our prayer not only with the vast

communion of saints but also with the praise rendered by the natural world in proclaiming hope in the darkness and resurrection and new life with the coming of another day. There in the ancient pattern is available to us the accumulated wisdom of the ages, the discoveries and practices of our ancestors in the faith, "a chain of prayer across the ages" (the title of a useful early twentieth-century collection of prayers), that seeks to join our earthly prayer with the constant prayer and praise of heaven, uniting our mortal praise with that of the vast army of angels.

Since ancient times morning and evening prayer have been regarded as the two hinges on which daily devotion turns. Making time for both is important, but the pattern can be altered, for example by praying near sunrise and praying Compline before going to bed when the turmoil of daily life may wind down. Or one may perhaps during a season such as Advent or Lent or Easter add Compline to the regular round of Morning and Evening Prayer.

In the twentieth century the Church began to recover this sense of the prayer of the Church, not just as forms to use in a congregation from time to time, but also as the pattern for individual daily prayer. The basic elements are these: a psalm, reading from the Bible, the Gospel canticle (Magnificat in the evening and Benedictus in the morning), a prayer or collect, and the Our Father as the summary of everything we should pray for. With the words, space should be made for silence, listening. Do that much, and your prayer will already be clearly and consciously part of the prayer of the whole Church in heaven and on earth.

At least at certain times during the year some may want to expand these elements. The psalter is the heart of daily prayer. Instead of praying one brief, familiar psalm every day, one could follow the pattern

provided in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and use two in the morning and two in the evening on a monthly pattern. Or one could follow the Book of Common Prayer division of the psalter reproduced in *For All the Saints* in which one prays through the entire psalter every month.

The Reformation made the reading of the Bible central to the Christian life, and following a lectionary can serve that intention well. Again, the Book of Common Prayer daily lectionary, shared by the *Lutheran Book of Worship* with but very few alterations, and given with the lessons printed out in *For All the Saints*, covers nearly all of the Bible (including much of the Apocrypha) in the course of two years. (When one reads attentively, questions naturally arise, and having a study Bible at hand is helpful.)

The prayers and intercessions that conclude the office can be ordered according to a pattern that insures broad coverage of concern. Such a pattern could be this: Sunday the Church, her unity and renewal; Monday the ministry and one's own parish; Tuesday all people in one's community; Wednesday all in civil authority in city, nation, world; Thursday spiritual gifts and the right use of the sacraments; Friday family, friends, and our enemies; Saturday the needy, the sick, the aged, the dying.

Finally, hymns have been a part of the daily office at least since the time of Benedict and are an almost essential element of worship generally, especially in the Lutheran tradition. Therefore a hymn text could be read (or sung) after the psalm(s). An adaptation of the ancient course of office hymns is provided on the Lutheran edition of the liturgical calendar published by the Ashby Company of Erie, Pennsylvania.

Spiritual reading also has a place in our life of prayer. The Roman Catholic Liturgy of the Hours in addition to the biblical lessons provides a reading from non-biblical sources. *For All the Saints* follows the custom and after the Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel provides a fourth, non-biblical, reading for each day. These readings function as a kind of sermon to those who pray the daily office.

In all this the goal is not to add more and more items to what one reads every day. The primary purpose is to join our individual prayer to the unceasing prayer of the whole Church. When family members are included in the daily prayer one or two items may be added (or subtracted) from the basic outline, and when a congregation gathers for occasions like mid-week services, the office of Vespers, Evening Prayer, can be more elaborate, and when the occasion is festive still

more elements (antiphons, responsories) can be included. Thus all of these occasions can be seen and understood as instances of the great and continuing prayer of the whole people of God. The point to be clearly understood is that, simple or elaborate, it is all one prayer.

All this is difficult to maintain. Life and its obligations keep intruding and interrupt our effort and even tempt us to abandon the whole project as utterly impractical. It is essential to keep at it. All who take up this duty and responsibility need to renew our intention frequently, again and again. It requires discipline and, more than once, starting again.

There are three books that can help us in offering our daily prayer. *For All the Saints*, four portable volumes published by ALPB is a rich collection. The Lutheran liturgist Maxwell Johnson and the monks of St. John's Abbey in Collegeville have a simplified version of the Benedictine form of the daily office, published by Liturgical Press as *Benedictine Daily Prayer: A Short Breviary* (2nd ed. 2015). I have edited *The Daily Prayer of the Church* (Lutheran University Press, 2005) as an enrichment of Morning and Evening Prayer and Compline and other elements in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* and earlier books; it can be used in conjunction with *For All the Saints* which can serve as a lectionary. Allow your eyes to be opened to the size of the company of believers, pray with the whole Church, remember in prayer St. Augustine's House and the recovery of life in community in the Lutheran churches.