



## **"Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17)**

By The Rev. Jarrett Kerbel (3/13/26)

During Morning Prayer last week God graciously opened up my mind to his ongoing invitation to intimacy with him. While we prayed the beautiful and familiar words from the Book of Common Prayer and heard scripture read, I felt a door swing open under each word beckoning me into God's near presence.

God is so present in each moment, opening up our hearts, minds, souls and bodies to a wholeness and abundance we glimpse only fleetingly in our distraction, narrowness, rigidity and preoccupation. God is present. We are absent.

In God we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:28) In every moment, God is holding us in being and washing over us with the intimate, loving communication we call prayer. When we pray, we are simply joining into the communication of mutual love that makes up God's internal shared life as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are drawn into a roaring river of pre-existing mutual indwelling, permeability, and coinherence.

Occasionally I will spot a young child at play overflowing with pure, innocent joy. As St. Irenaeus said in the 2nd Century, "The Glory of God is a human person fully alive." When I am blessed to encounter such fullness in the radiant face of a child, I almost always begin to pray quietly in my heart.

I pray to God to protect that child and all children. I pray for God to shield the child's joy and innocence from all threats. I pray for God to be manifest to that child as the great source of all joy and love. My heart wells up with gratitude when I pray, for the child, and for God's generous invitation to participate in such moments of blessing.

St. Paul's recommendation to "Pray unceasingly" felt burdensome to me early in life before I understood that prayer is participation in the eternal movement of God's spirit through all God has made. In each moment, God offers us an unseen - but keenly sensed - revolving door that we may enter or not. Or perhaps, if like me you are a fan of the Narnia books, God offers us a doorway at the back of an old wardrobe that passes through to an enchanted land where Aslan is on the move.

Prayer is participation in the life of God. When we turn our hearts to prayer we dive into an everlasting stream of Spirit that is always ebbing and flowing in and around. Our very being is communion with God as the Orthodox priest and theologian John Zizioulas writes, meaning, in part, that when we turn away from God we turn toward non-being, or nothingness.

In Ephesians 5:8, St. Paul writes, "Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light." Not 'once you were in darkness and now you are in light' Rather, the verbs are 'to be' verbs which regard our essential nature, our being. We are becoming luminous beings, lit from within by a light with its source and end in God.

Unfortunately, the western Christian Church lost track of 'participation' in God's life as a primary gift we receive first from Jesus and then from St. Paul's reflections on Jesus. Individualism, a primary side-effect of the Reformation, banished the invitation to mutuality, coinherence, and indwelling to which God invites us.

Thanks be to God that the Orthodox Churches and the early church fathers, like Gregory of Nyssa, are opening up the full and radical invitation we have been given. Immersed in God's love, we are immersed in God's life. Prayer is the breath of that shared life.