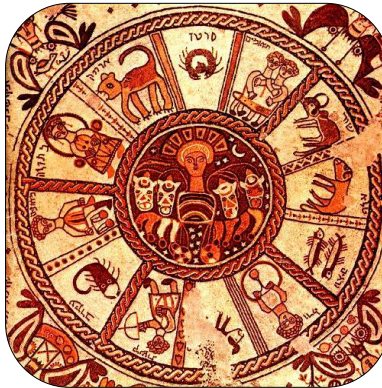


Annagrammatica's

Little Book of Prayer



Mary Campbell
Illustrated with art from the world's great spiritual traditions

Annagrammatica's

Little Book of Prayer

To _ _ _ _ _
From _ _ _ _ _



Annagrammatica's

Little Book of Prayer

by Mary Campbell

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Creator, may we feel your presence in the sighing of the wind that weaves a tale among tall, ancient trees, and scoops untidy piles of fallen leaves away; and may we see your blessing in the streams whose thousand courses in their measured pace have crept since time began through loam and clay and granite, with a single destination... which is love eternal, uncreated, irresistible. Amen.





Creation Tapestry in Girona Cathedral in Spain, 11th century

1. Call to Prayer

Introduction: Does Prayer Work?

There's a lot of prayer theory going around—what works, what doesn't, when and how to pray, what to do when God's ignoring you, and is it okay to ask God for parking-spot-location assistance? The late Norman Vincent Peale (1898-1993), author of *The Power of Positive Thinking*, recommended praying and immediately acting as if God has already answered your prayer. On the same principle, Michael Bernard Beckwith teaches "affirmative prayer," explaining that "the very nature of the universe is affirmative, for life continues to affirm itself throughout eternity" (*Daily Word*, February 2008).

In his 1997 book *Prayer Is Good Medicine: How to Reap the Healing Benefits of Prayer*, Larry Dossey, M.D., cites prayer research, including an experiment in which prayed-for soybeans grew faster than ordinary soybeans, those unassisted by prayer. My friend Amelie theorized that the fast-growers benefited from "prayer energy." I don't doubt it for a minute. Makes more sense than Amelie's alternative explanation, which went sort of like this:

The soybean-growth petitioners talked God into using God's superpowers for the soybeans' benefit. God was unacquainted with or was ignoring this little bean patch till the legume-loving prayer squad came along, tapping God on the supernatural shoulder and saying, "Yo! God! Over here! No, not there; HERE! Can you let the parking-place-deprived fend for themselves, just for a few seconds (measured in Earth Time) and give these soybeans a hand?"

It's unlikely, in my view, that God (a) is asleep at the wheel, (b) is unaware of fragile soybeans or ailing human beings, (c) needs a briefing from me on any topic whatsoever, or (d) decides how to act based on my recommendations or pleas. Still, something happens in prayer... something that's literally incomprehensible. I'm willing to let it be a mystery, like crop circles and teenagers.

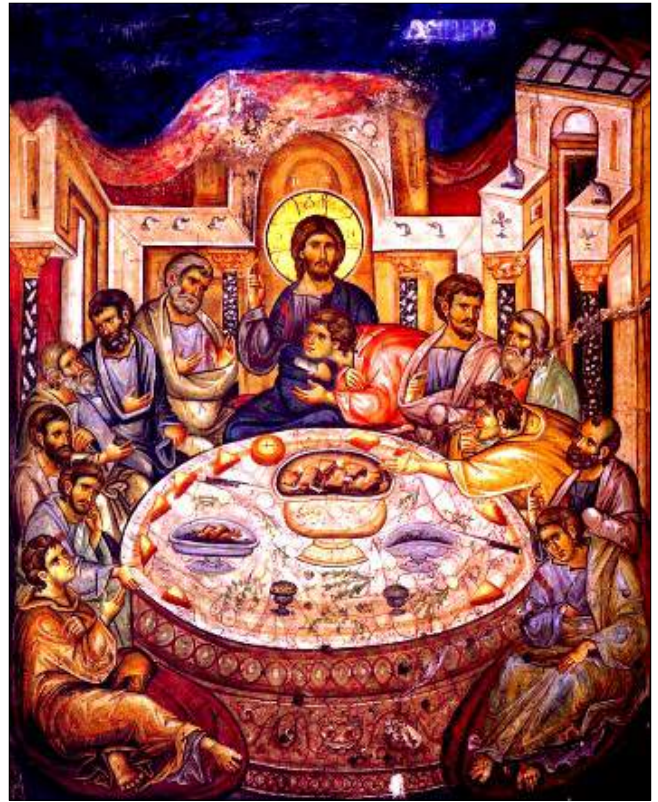
My prayers have no method or strategy. I present myself to God as I am, without an outline and often without a purpose beyond showing up—although complaining is a common theme. Sometimes praying just seems like the thing to do. Seldom (if ever) is it the wrong thing to do. So I had other



13th-century Madonna with child in the Italo-Byzantine tradition

plans. So I'm late to the dentist. Since I put God in charge of Scheduling, I don't worry much about tardiness.

If you're depressed, angry, or undergoing oral surgery, it can be hard to pray on your own. Always delighted to help out, I am compiling and recording dozens of prayers. After I add some introductory music and slides of "nature"—sunrises and wildflowers, I'm thinking, rather than buzzards feasting on roadkill—I'll post them on YouTube under the title *Sweet Hour of Prayer*. If you want to contribute prayers, or if you'd like to be notified when the prayers go up on YouTube, please email mary@annagrammatica.com.



From Mt. Athos—*The Last Supper*; 13th-century fresco

Byzantine monumental Church mosaics are among the great achievements of medieval art. This is from Monreale in Sicily from the late 12th century. —*Wikipedia*



Why I Pray

MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, I PRAY OUT OF DESPERATION

I've reached the end of my rope. I summon all my resources, and they come up short. My emotions have taken possession of me, body and spirit. I'm angry at someone else and disgusted with myself. I'm drowning in depression, overcome by anxiety, paralyzed by fear. I throw myself into God's lap, bury my face in God's shoulder, and cry out, "Help me, Father, for I cannot help myself" or "Get me the hell out of here!"—words to that effect.

I usually refer to God as “Mother-Father” when invoking God-as-parent, but in the throes of hopelessness, *Father* is often the appellation from my heart. I don't know what that says about my family of origin—both Mom and Dad were always there for us to lean on. Probably it stems from my earliest prayers, from the time I first understood that I could present my ugliest, most self-absorbed, least honorable self to the Creator and be embraced with unconditional love and limitless compassion—and in the 1950s, in my Christian community, we prayed to God the Father.

Sometimes, however, I need a supernatural mother. Though I wasn't raised Catholic, I turn to Mary, the mother of Jesus, when I'm suffering parental pain. In extremity, I don't worry about whether my prayer is theologically correct or if I'm committing sacrilege.

In fact, **praying is the one thing I do without wondering if I'm doing it wrong.** All I need when I show up is honesty. I can pray in my pajamas. I can use unholy language. I can blame and curse and carry on. I can think, as Anne Lamott puts it, “such awful thoughts that I cannot even say them out loud because they would make Jesus want to drink gin straight out of the cat dish” (from *Traveling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith*).

Anne Lamott has written much on how our brokenness allows God to heal us. “On the spiritual path,” she told a *beliefnet* interviewer, “all the dreck and misery is transformed, maybe not that same day, but still transformed into spiritual fuel or insight.” There's a great deal of dreck on my spiritual path.

I PRAY TO CONFESS AND REPENT

In the safety of God's presence and the assurance of God's forgiveness, I open the closets where the skeletons and monsters are. I bring them into the open and give them a once-over. When I know what they look like, I can steer clear of them. They are not me.



The Three Marys at the Tomb, Lorenzo Monaco, 1396

I PRAY FOR STUFF

I'm not ashamed to say that I come to God with wish lists. I pray for prosperity but also for compassion. I pray for healing—for myself and for others—but I also pray for the greater blessing. I might want a motorcycle. God might want me to have a pickup truck. I'll take the pickup truck if it's offered, trusting that I'll know the reasons for it down the road.

I pray not so much to change God's mind as to keep tabs on my own. I lay my petitions before God in order to remember what I want, which is ultimately who I am. Following the path of least resistance won't take me to my destination. Left to chance and circumstance, my hopes and dreams will get lost in the distractions and emergencies of day-to-day living. They'll succumb to entropy and gravity if I don't tend to them. Pretty soon, I'll forget where I meant to go in the beginning. It's okay if my goals change and my passions evolve. I just don't want it to happen because I mislaid them.

I MAKE A RITUAL OF LOVE

Out of love and compassion, I offer prayers of intercession. Where I feel less than loving, I pray that my hostility and fear will be transformed.

Any number of physicians now agree with Dr. Larry Dossey that to exclude prayer from their practices is as negligent as to withhold medicine. Some believe in the power of thought to heal or to harm. Prayer, they say, is a form of thought that heals, whereas

Opening from the *Hours of Catherine of Cleves*, c. 1440, with Catherine kneeling before the Virgin and Child, surrounded by her family heraldry.

Opposite is the start of Matins in the Little Office, illustrated by the Annunciation to Joachim. —*Wikipedia*



The Book of Hours

The book of hours is a Christian devotional book popular in the Middle Ages. It is the most common type of surviving medieval illuminated manuscript. Like every manuscript, each manuscript book of hours is unique in one way or another, but most contain a similar collection of texts, prayers and psalms, often with appropriate decorations, for Christian devotion. Illumination or decoration is minimal in many examples, often restricted to decorated capital letters at the start of psalms and other prayers, but books made for wealthy patrons may be extremely lavish, with full-page miniatures.

Books of hours were usually written in Latin (the Latin name for them is *horae*), although there are many entirely or partially written in vernacular European languages, especially Dutch. The English term *primer* is [often used]... for those books written in English. Tens of thousands of books of hours have survived to the present day, in libraries and private collections throughout the world.

The typical book of hours is an abbreviated form of the *breviary*, which contained the Divine Office recited in monasteries. It was developed for lay people who wished to incorporate elements of monasticism into their devotional life. Reciting the hours typically centered upon the reading of a number of psalms and other prayers. —*Wikipedia*

hate and fear are unhealthy for the bodies that hold those feelings and for those around them. Whatever the scientific rationale, one study reports that nearly 80 percent of Americans believe in the power of prayer to improve the course of illness. When I pray out of love, I am certain that in some way I bring sacred energy to the situation. Because my love is tainted with distrust and insecurity, I ask God to filter out the toxins and pollutants. Hate can't keep its footing in the honest intention to shine more brightly in the world.

Thus, when I pray, I cultivate a spirit of gratitude. I practice thankfulness as I once practiced the piano—to form a habit that is more dependable with every repetition. I make gratitude a ritual—deliberately bringing joy into my field of awareness until it's all but effortless. I believe in ritual. Some find it tedious. For me, it offers both comfort and inspiration.

I love the idea of the Rosary: the intention to pray announced with the sign of the cross; the tactile familiarity of the beads; the well-known phrases—"Give us this day our daily bread.... Hail, Mary, full of grace... pray for us sinners.... Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end...." Orthodox Jews recite approximately a hundred benedictions every day. There are worse ways to spend one's time than these.

I PRAY TO INVOKE ALL THAT IS SACRED, REGARDLESS OF WHERE IT RESIDES

Some sincerely spiritual people believe that each of us embodies all holiness. Whether or not it's true, to me it feels lonely. My primordial self believes in mystical forces and sacred powers that come only when they are called. It is said that angels will not violate our free will. Maybe it's my dinosaur intelligence speaking, or maybe I'm hedging my bets, just in case Michael really is the angel of protection or of my life's purpose, as angel therapist Doreen Virtue claims.

I am a monotheist. I believe in one God, whose essence is love. How God dispatches helpers or emissaries transcends my human understanding. In fact, almost everything about the Divine is beyond my ken. Knowing, to the extent such things can be known, that God is love and God is supreme, I consider it not only possible but likely that God sends angels and other benign spirits to guide and protect us.



Book of Hours—A full-page miniature of May, from a calendar cycle by Simon Bening, early 16th century

I PRAY TO REST MY SPIRIT

Prayer is not meditation, whose benefits are well documented. Meditation has been shown to reduce anxiety, depression, chronic pain, and the risk of heart attack and stroke, and to improve creative thinking, compassion, and emotional well-being. I promote meditation at every opportunity, and I meditate regularly.

Prayer is a different practice, though I bring elements of meditation into my time of prayer. I try not to make praying a mental exercise with discrete steps and a checklist. When I'm troubled, I might literally pray without ceasing. When I feel fear or antipathy, or when someone says, "Pray for me," I pray right then and there. When I sit down with my prayer list, I begin mechanically—prayer is, among other things, a discipline—but at some point I let go. I pray to enter the collective unconscious, to immerse myself in life's mighty ocean. I let the prayer be bigger than I am. I lean back on the universe, as one leans on the water when learning to swim, and trust that it will always hold me up.

In the mystical communion that is prayer, it doesn't matter whether I've prayed for five minutes or an hour, whether I've prayed daily since childhood or I've never consciously uttered a prayer in my entire life. My spirit rests and is refreshed, and it arises pure and new. Love cleanses me and fills me, and I am indestructible. This is why I pray: To invoke the mystery of transformation; to love as God loves; and to walk in the world with fearlessness and grace.



The small private Wilton Diptych for Richard II of England, c. 1400, with stamped gold backgrounds and much ultramarine. — *Wikipedia*

Effortless

I pray for many reasons. Let me say at once: I'm not above presenting God with this and that request. But better yet, because it never fails: I pray to give my mind a rest. The second I'm awake—before I even make the bed—it races off without premeditation. Where to go, and for what purpose? Whom to benefit? It doesn't care. To be in motion is its *sine qua non*. If it hopes in passing for a map to manifest, or for some audible advice on navigation—"Stop"; "Go right"; "Go left"—that must suffice for caution, and for prayer. At length it pauses, takes a breath because it must (exhaustion trumps intemperance) and—thus deactivated, and belatedly remembering that haste makes wreckage, cringing at the thought and wondering what finer things it might have done with less velocity and more compassion—makes a small apology to Heaven.

"God," it says,
"I did my best. Please fix it." Then it doubts,
regrets its course, and promises thenceforth to
be more circumspect and not to ever leap
before it looks again. And this is when I catch
up and my mind pretends it hasn't wasted an
entire day behaving like a cocker spaniel
wearing roller skates and never mind the frail
old gentlemen and soft-pink roses, daddies
walking babies safe in sturdy strollers; never
mind the halt, the lame, the twilight, and the
stolen kiss it passed because it couldn't stop in
flight to pray. *Look what you've done*, I say. *See
what you didn't do?* My mind and I survey the
damage. It's... not awful. Not by half. Expecting
a calamity, we got a gift. While we were out
attacking entropy, we might have missed the
chance to be delighted by the shadows and the
rabbits and the white moon fading in the west,
but we did more than just not die today. We
lived, and it was effortless.



The Virgin Mary In Prayer, by Sassoferrato, 17th century

Invitation to Prayer

Come pray with me. Come with bare feet, dig your toes into the sand, and feel the grains, each one by one, one at a time. Don't try to count them. You'll run out of names for numbers long before the strand runs out of silica.

Come with joy and gratitude, if you have those today, and if you don't, come anyway. Bag your anxiety and heave it through the groves, along the lanes, past cottages and fields of ripe late-summer grain. It's worth the trek if at the end you give it all away. Cast your fear upon the waves and watch them sport with it. Observed, it will evaporate, or sink, or change. Presently it may become a bird (a pelican?), swoop down, and capture supper in its perfect catching apparatus, made for such accommodation in the way of all Divine Creation.

Ought you bring your anger? Needs must, if it clings like cockleburs that grab your socks and scratch your legs and won't let go.* It has no will or power of its own. Your stockings, though, will have to go. The planet has a use for them. Some mama bird will pick apart the knitting, patiently, as is the way of purposeful activity, and carry off the threads to fortify and decorate her home. Who would have known your thorny socks would ever line some nestling's cozy bed?

Come pray with me. Come empty-handed if you can, or bring your baggage. No one minds your temper or your trembling—so many willing hands, strong arms, and sturdy backs there are to share what you can't manage for the moment. Prayer is never solitary, even when you pray alone.

Come pray with me. You don't need to wear a hat or shine your shoes or wipe the sleep out of your eyes. Come just as you are into the presence of the Holy One, All-Knowing, -Loving, -Wise.

As you contemplate the Universe, or fresh growth on the shrubbery, or lunch—and there you are, smug and complacent, having choked down lettuce you don't care for much—listen for the spirits in the sighing of the wind, as it



Tiled exterior of the Friday Mosque of Herat, Afghanistan

weaves its way among the trees and scoops up untidy piles of dry leaves. Hear the messages from the Divine. and see eternity in glints of sunlight on metallic specks in sheets of rock... choruses spontaneously composed, arranged, performed, and sung... the music of vibrations out of silence grown... once begun, not ever interrupted...

...all repeat in every tongue, *Life loves you.*
All is well.

**NEEDS MUST—Necessity compels. In current usage this phrase is usually used to express something that is done unwillingly but with an acceptance that it can't be avoided; for example, I really don't want to cook tonight, but needs must, I suppose.*

The phrase is old. In earlier texts it is almost always given in its fuller form—Needs must when the devil drives; that is, if the devil is driving you, you have no choice. This dates back to Middle English texts; for example, "Assembly of God," c. 1500:

He must nedys go that the deuell dryues.

Shakespeare used the phrase several times; for example, in All's Well That Ends Well, 1601:

Countess: Tell me thy reason why thou wilt marry.

Clown: My poor body, madam, requires it: I am driven on by the flesh; and he must needs go that the devil drives.

—phrases.org.uk



The Ardabil Carpet, probably the finest surviving Persian carpet, Tabriz, mid-16th century.... Carpet-weaving is a rich and deeply embedded tradition in Islamic societies —*Wikipedia*

The Great Continuum

Imagine for a minute—we are rays of sun,
emitted without interruption, rockets blazing
from horizon to horizon, individual but never
separate, each from any other one.

We come from light, as we have always done.

In eons past, the seas erupted, mountains
rising from the deep.

The rivers ran like fountains, rain
replenishing the streams.

Microscopic living things grew roots and leaves
and seeds with wings,
and century by century,
uncounted strange and lovely creatures



The Amarna period, roughly 1353-1336 BCE, introduced a new form of art that completely contradicted what was known and revered in the Egyptian culture. The pharaoh Amenhotep IV not only changed his name from Amenhotep to Akhenaten, and the religion of ancient Egypt from polytheistic to monotheistic, but he also challenged the norm of Egyptian society by depicting his reign in a vastly different way from the rulers who came before him. —*ancient-origins.net*

ventured into being, perfectly arranged
by God, ordained by form and purpose
for Creation's happiness and nurture.

At sunrise, darkness runs for cover,
scattering to its mysterious retreats,
its caverns damp and chill and
inhospitable to all except
the twisted denizens of night,
and these are nothing, less than nothing...
accidents of misdirected energy...
and being powerless, illusory.
When looked upon they vanish. If their
shadows sometimes haunt my memory,
they do not worry me.

So let us rest our thought and our attention
on the glory of Creation. Let us take
no interest in the flimsy, fabricated story of
a Nothing that pretends to be a Something.
Thus do we deprive it of illusions of reality...
while Beauty, fed and nourished by our
curious, benign awareness of it,
flourishes around us.

Even now we can pinch off some tender
flowers, rich in possibility, as thousands more
remain to give us fruit and grain at harvest,
dropping seeds whose roots and capillaries
reach into the ground. A feast awaits them
there, and rest, and maturation, as the
never-ending cycle starts again. The seeds
wait patiently, obeying nature's laws, and
effortlessly they respond to March's equinox
and thaw. The crop grows sweet and bountiful,
by autumn ripe and yielding joy and
satisfaction at the time appointed,
light becoming life as always in
the great continuum... and we
shine on.



The Creation of Prayer

Before there was anything else on Earth, there was a great sea. The Creator reached out and touched the sea, and thus began life. A tiny cell thrived in the great sea, moving, moving, always toward the light. And the one became many, and the many grew in size and in variety and beauty, and in something that was not quite knowledge.

The living things in the sea did not know the sea, because there was nothing else, only the sea that was vast and green and beautiful. They did not know that without the sea they could not live. They did not know about the sun or the moon or the stars.

Then the Creator reached out again and caused a great upheaval of the Earth, and mountains rose up out of the sea. In time the rains and the sun and the wind gentled the mountains, and there were shores and valleys. The sun raised water from the sea, and the wind blew the water over the land and baptized it with life—green and spreading, growing, and growing more, according to its nature.

Then the tides hurled creatures from the sea onto the dry land, and some were carried back into the deep, but one found the land to be hospitable, and that one thrived, now creeping upon the land, now swimming in the sea. And the one became many, and the many grew in size and in variety and beauty, and in something that was not quite knowledge, but rather in a sense of the difference between dry land and water. Moving, moving, always toward the light, they found that streams flowed from the mountains to the sea, and they thrived in and alongside the streams, which came from the rain, which the sun raised from the sea.

The green things—spreading, growing, and growing more, always toward the light—became strong and tall, and invited the creeping things to feast on their fruit. In time, the strongest of the creatures developed claws to scale the trees, and some with fins grew wings instead to soar over oceans and rivers and land. But even those who built nests and lived



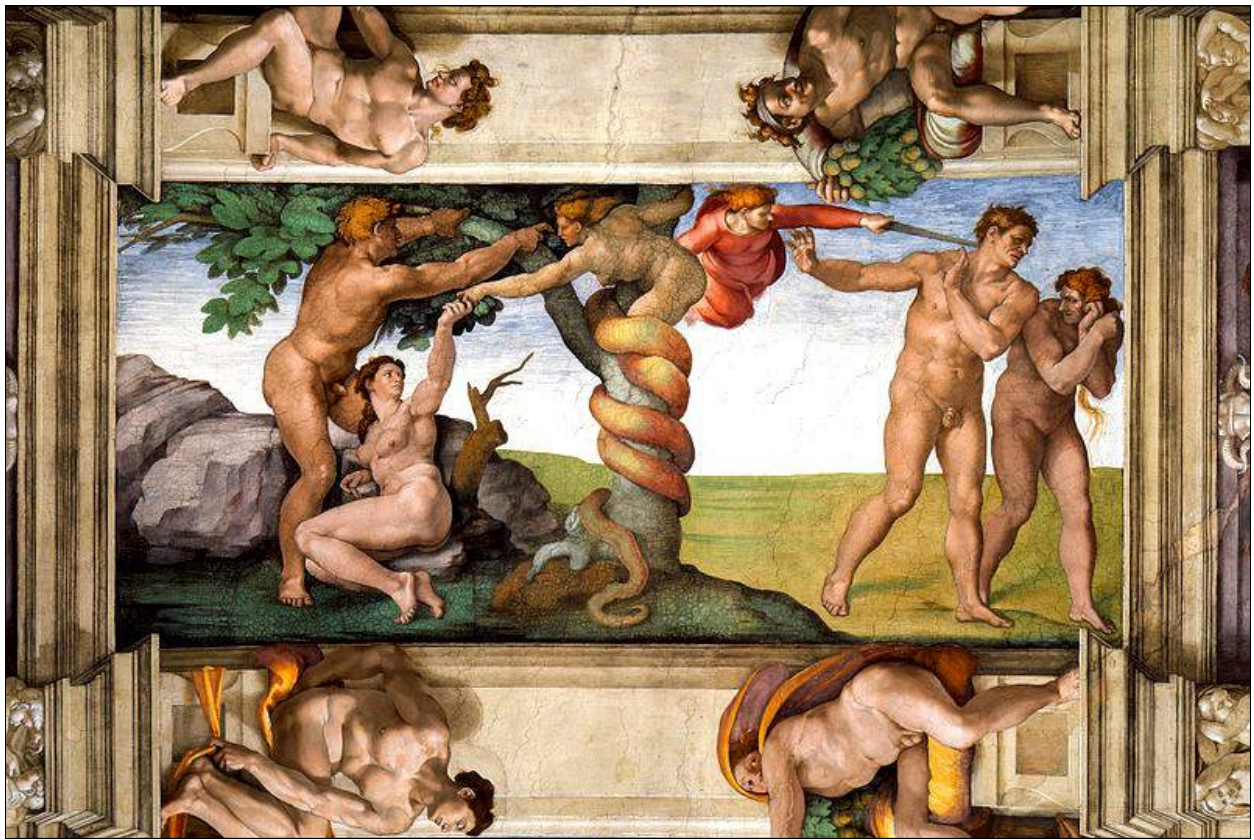
The Creation of the World, closed outer wings of the triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, Hieronymus Bosch, c. 1504-1510.

—abcgallery.com

and bore their young in trees required water to survive, just as did the creatures who swam only in the sea.

And the dryland creatures became many, and the many grew in size and in variety and beauty, and in something a little more like knowledge, until one arose from all the creatures who roamed the earth, and that one had knowledge and more; that one had curiosity. And the one became many, and the many grew in size and in variety and strength, according to their nature.

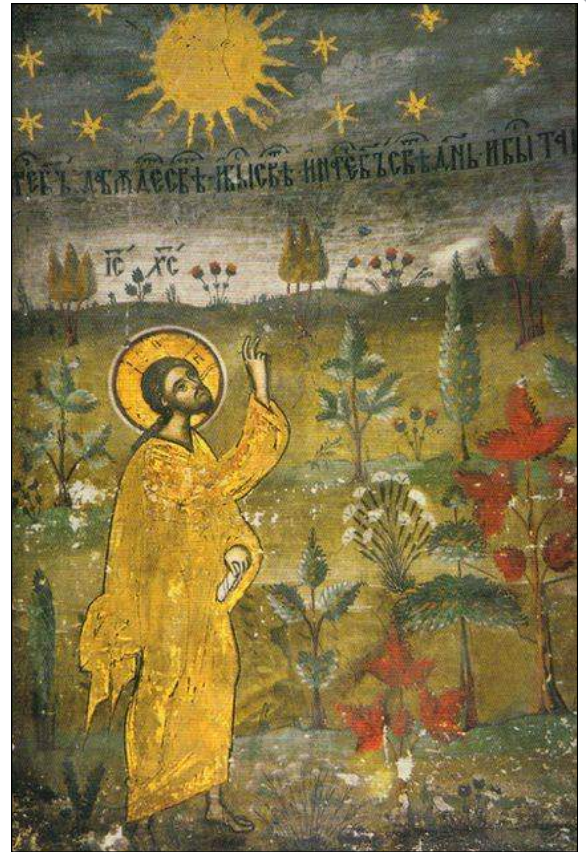
But some of them turned their intelligence toward small, inward things, and they forgot about the sea. They did not know that—like the creatures who swam in the sea—they required it to survive. They injured the streams, though they required them to survive. They injured the creatures who swam in the streams; they injured the air and the land and the sea; they blocked the sun and shut their eyes to the light—though they required all these things to grow according to their nature, even to survive.



Expulsión del Paraíso, from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo, 1509

In their minds, they forgot about the eternal sea, though their hearts remembered, and pulsed with admonition. And they became uneasy, because they believed that their minds were greater than their hearts. And so they defied their hearts, and thus they injured even the streams that flowed through their bodies, pulsing from their hearts with admonition. But in every age, among all the creatures, there have been those who remember the eternal sea, who understand that, where pure streams cannot flow, living things shrivel and perish, and where the mind is not nourished by the heart, the mind withers and is sterile. Those who remember are the teachers and sages, the wise ones, the Ancients, the embodied admonitions of the heart's pulsing.

They tell us, Swim, always, in the remembered pure streams that flow to the sea. Immerse yourself always in that awareness, which is prayer. When you drink clear water, let it be a ceremony and celebrate the eternal sea, which is something that we know of God. For prayer is to the spirit as water is to the body... and those who immerse themselves in prayer will be continually refreshed and renewed.



*Christ Creating, fresco detail,
Suhevitsa Monastery, Romania*



Creation Tapestry in Girona Cathedral in Spain, 11th century

2. Hymns

Epiphany

God, send forth your spirit upon us.

Had we not wandered from the hearth
where burned the flame that gave us sight
and warmed our bones—had we not gone
from home, and left the fire behind;
then, captured in the snares of night,
we had no recollection of
from which direction we had come
nor could we see the firelight—
Until we knew that we were lost,
we did not call for you, O God.



Adoration of the Magi, Gentile da Fabriano, 1423

Had we not wandered from the stream,
believing that the food and drink
we carried would suffice for thirst
and hunger—when the wells were dry,
our flasks were empty, long since gone
our meager stores of bread and wine—
and those who would have guided us
we pridefully had left behind—
Until the skies refused to rain,
we did not call upon your name.

And still you came with angel hosts
and gave from Heaven's bounty all
we needed—what we needed most:
the certainty that when we call
on you, already you have come
with love and grace to lead us home.

Amen.



Epiphany—also Theophany or Three Kings' Day—is a Christian feast day that celebrates the revelation of God in his Son as the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In Western Christianity, the feast commemorates principally (but not solely) the visit of the Magi to the Christ child, and thus Jesus' physical manifestation to the Gentiles. Moreover, the feast of the Epiphany, in some Western Christian denominations, also initiates the liturgical season of Epiphanytide. Eastern Christians, on the other hand, commemorate the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, seen as his manifestation to the world as the Son of God. The traditional date for the feast is January 6. —*Wikipedia*

Colloquially, an epiphany is an “Aha!” or a “Eureka!” moment, defined at merriam-webster.com as “an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure.” The poem/prayer “Epiphany” above represents my own realization that only in darkness does light have meaning but the light is never withdrawn....

God, Be with Us in Our Grieving

God, be with us in our grieving.
Plainly make thy presence known.
We grow faithless in our weakness,
like a leaf the wind has blown
from the tree that lately fed it
from the branch on which it curled,
ripped away, untaught, unready
for this wild, unsteady world.

God, have mercy!
Guide us surely
on our journey in this world.

We are frightened by the silence,
fearful of the voices raised,
sounding anger and defiance.
Where are songs of joy and praise?
Let the great celestial chorus
with the tides, the mighty winds,

mountainsides and plains and forests
fill the skies with song again.

God of Glory,
may our chorus
soar to fill the skies again.

God, we sing in celebration
of the love we have received—
love for thy divine creation,
asking only this: that we
likewise give as we are given;
love as we are loved; extend
mercy, comfort, and compassion;
bless as we are blest. Amen.

God of our Salvation, then shall
Heaven upon earth descend.
Let us sing in celebration!
Alleluia and Amen.



The Procession to Calvary, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1564

Holy Spirit, Lead Us On

Holy Spirit, dwell within us;
make us innocent again
as we were in the beginning,
on that holy morning, when
all Creation shone in glory,
knowing naught of hate or fear.
Holy Spirit, come; restore us.
Now before us, God, appear.

Holy Spirit, come, inspire us.
Shine your light into the dark.
From the ashes, start a fire that
Warms the caverns in our hearts.
We have lost our way—the black clouds
hide the sailors' astral guides.
All the heav'nly beams are shrouded
through the long and stormy night.

Ah! The Morning Star's appearing
promises the coming dawn.
Holy Spirit, with your clear light
steer us; great God, lead us on.

Amen.



In the Garden of My Grace

God Almighty, here beside me,
come and sit with me awhile.
Father-Mother, comfort me,
your cherished and beloved child.

Bring me ease and consolation;
make me glad of who I am.
As you loved me at Creation,
wrap me in that love again.

All I need you have provided.
Fear has faded with the night.
All I ask lies at my feet—
my help, my hope, and my delight.

Not behind the mass of mountain,
hidden high or buried deep,
all I sought is spread around me
like the bright and boundless sea.



Little Garden of Paradise, Upper Rhenish Master, c. 1410-1420

All my striving to be better,
all my worry and my fear,
at your word I now surrender
as you whisper in my ear:

*Peace, my child; for all is well.
Now dry your tears and lift your face
to the sun, for you are dwelling
in the garden of my grace.*

*Everything you need for hunger
grows in my eternal fields.
Eat; be filled with joy and wonder,
such as these is Heaven's yield.*

*All you need for thirst is given,
with the rain that from above
pours to fill the streams and rivers.
Drink of it, and drink of love.*

*All your sins are long forgiven,
and your innocence restored,
as you were, made in my image,
on the day that you were born.*

*Seek and you will surely find your
dreams; the stars will light your way;
gentle lessons will remind you
what is needed for today.*

*Celebrate and weep no more.
As I have given, freely give.
Life and death I set before you
now. Choose life. Choose love, and live.*

*Peace, my child; for all is well.
Now dry your tears and lift your face
to the sun, for you are dwelling
in the garden of my grace.*

Amen.



The Garden of Eden, Lukas Cranach the Elder, 1530

May They Dance Again

Father-Mother, God of life, restore now strength and health
as thy children pray for mercy at thy holy well.
Wash them with this sacred water—
mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters—
feed their hunger by thy grace;
wipe the tears from every face.

May angel voices out of heaven shout a great amen.
May the hands be healing hands that minister to them.
May the eyes that see their pain be soft like April's first warm rain.
May kindness be the cup they drink, and may they dance again.

Father-Mother, let them hear thine own majestic voice,
soothing or resounding o'er the tumult and the noise.
May the lighting and the thunder
tell of signs and speak of wonders.
Sing to those who seek thy mercy
songs of victory and glory.

May angel voices out of heaven shout a great amen.
May the hands be healing hands that minister to them.
May the eyes that see their pain be soft like April's first warm rain.
May kindness be the cup they drink, and may they dance again.

Amen.



Wedding Dance in a Barn, Pieter Bruegel the Younger, c. 1616



Creation Tapestry in Girona Cathedral in Spain, 11th century

3. Prayers



River Landscape with Horseman and Peasants, Aelbert Cuypt, late 1650s

What a Stream Can Do

Sometimes we are called to be with you—
called just when the sun is rising, first light
caught and let go at the bend in the river—
at the slow bend in the Niobrara River.

Look at the glory that rolls in the ripples of river.
What a story they have for our ears! "All is well,"
they assure us—and they have seen it all.
Haven't they seen what a stream of deep
water can do, rolling on and on and on, serene
in the certainty this is its reason for being
on earth: rolling in glorious ease of divinity
from the beginning as it was created for?
They have seen what a stream can do.

We are called to walk alongside you
when we are afraid. We are called to lift our
brown wings as we have seen the strong angels
do, and fly with you.

Sometimes it seems, however long we try,
however hard, we can't find you in the old cities
with our old eyes. Then a light like a flame enters
our vision—

Now we are not afraid.

You take our pain away, now and tomorrow,
even the agony of yesterday's...

yesterday's sorrow is carried away, to vanish
forever at the bend in the river.

Where we believed we were powerless,
now is revealed a perpetual current of grace.

What seemed timid there now shows its face.
Gone is our weakness. This is our hour!

Thank you, God of everything. Alleluia.

All creation, every gift we bring back to you, who
gave it in the beginning.

Sometimes we are called to sit with you—
called to sit and burn a candle in the evening,
called to give you all our old pain, to be
taken away by the Niobrara River.

See the glory in the ripples of river. What a
story they have to tell: "All is well," they say—
Haven't they seen it all?
Haven't they seen what a stream can do as it rolls
on and on, calm in the certainty this is what
it was created
to do?

Sometimes we are called to receive your blessing
in the middle of an afternoon.

Sometimes we are called to lift our wings as the
angels do, and fly with you.

Sometimes you give us a glimpse of bright
places we sometimes call Heaven;
then you remind us we need not have waited—
it was there all along. It was not hidden.
You did not take it away. Did we wait too long?

You once accepted our pain—once and forever,
what was humility turned into beautiful
strength for the weariness, rest for the feet that



River Scene with Watermill, Figures, and Cows,
George Barret Senior, 1760s

need not have walked on so far;
purpose and energy for adoration—what a
glorious day you have
made.

Gone is the pain of the injured;
gone the despair of affliction;
gone is the fever, strong are the sick who
yesterday lay in their beds;
all our distresses, made plain before us,
taken away by the Niobrara River.
Gone is our weakness. This is our hour!

Thank you, O God of everything.
Alleluia! Amen.



Boy Driving Cows Near a Pool,
Thomas Gainsborough, 1786

Garden of the Heart

Bless, O God, the pure ideas of the heart blown in on sympathetic winds to germinate on fertile ground, and help us nurture them. Protect them from a summer day too hot, a storm too violent. Make them resilient and able to withstand the overzealous, kindly meant attention from a relative or friend who snips the eagerest of sprouts—for symmetry, to spare us disappointment.

Make in each of us a garden, well supplied with sun and rain. Teach us husbandry and grant us patience for the weeding and the cultivation. Thus, believing you began the planting as a gift of work and purpose, may we tend and not abandon it.

And what of trust? How can we know a grand idea from a fantasy? If heaven-sent, it will be sturdy and exuberant. Its fruit will heal the sick or feed the hungry, shade the weary, school the would-be wise, or simply yield delight, a place of beauty radiant with love, a feast for famished eyes.

Amen.



Garden of Eden, 16th century

Make Me a Lantern

O God, make me a lantern; may I be a light and not a shroud. Give me a song that I might sing your Holy Name—brash praise and unrestrained, so loud, so clear, so bright with joy, the mountains sing it to the valleys and the rivers to the sea. O God, fill me this very day with merriment and laughter, and may everywhere I go be better for my having been there. Lift the heaviness that falls in layers, imperceptibly, until the weight immobilizes me.

Divine Beloved, set me free from demons hiding in the bogs and caverns of my history. Release me from this solid-seeming melancholy. Let it rise like morning mist that settles in the river valleys and at sunrise dissipates and drifts away upon the wind.

Father-Mother, send your angels here to keep my lantern clear and clean. The fuel is pure. It is your sacred energy. The flame is bright, but, God, the night is long, and in the lonely hour before the first and bravest ray of dawn appears, I fear that morning will forget to come, the sun will fail to rise, and if it does, when people venture forth to go about their lives, I am too small and insignificant to be observed amid the throng. Then may your angels carry me upon their wings to where the steeples, tall and proud, point to the endless sky and keep me strong and brave and unafraid to hold my lantern high.

O God, I pray that all your children know what flame they carry, be it hidden deep within or fearlessly in open sight, its steady shining bright with promise, love, and life, uniting all in one great congregation gathered at your feet. Can it be possible, Almighty God? Can this phenomenon by any name, whatever we may call it—harmony or peace on earth—be at so great a distance or so well concealed that even your omnipotence, all-power, is unequal to it? Yet we pray not just for daily bread but for the coming of your kingdom. We believe it can be done. Show us our part.

Creator, you have made us in your image, placing in our hearts such longing for your presence to be manifest among us that we cannot rest for wanting it. Your generosity is limitless;



Trojeručica, meaning "Three-handed Theotokos," is the most important icon of the Serbian Orthodox Church and main icon of Mount Athos. —*Wikipedia*

abundance falls like manna from the sky. We cannot fail to shine; our lantern light is infinite. To eyes that open, it illuminates the path to reconciliation, where compassion waits and justice is victorious, relationships are healed, disease deprived of energy and violence made obsolete... a holy place where we can say, "Thy will be done," in perfect faith... a convocation of the saints made new by grace... where all are safe because love reigns, and in us burn the flames that carry it as you instruct us.

God, make me a lantern and a song, with eagerness to share the light of heaven and the music of the stratosphere. Strain from each pulse impurity of motive; uncontaminated may my purpose be, O God, and bless it with such clarity that everywhere I go is better for my having been there.

Amen.



*Madonna and
Child Enthroned
with Saints, Fra
Filippo Lippi,
c. 1430*



Tapestry with the arms of the Giovio family (detail), with the Giovio arms and family motto in Latin:

WISDOM IS WEAKER THAN FATE

1543-1552, probably commissioned for the Palazzo Giovio in Como

Southern Netherlands (Belgium), Bruges
Woven in wool and silk on wool warp

This long tapestry with three medallions surrounded with garlands bears the arms and motto of Giovio of Como on a mille-fleurs ground, enlivened with a variety of birds and animals. It is the finest example of its kind known. It was presumably intended to hang above wainscoting. Paolo Giovio was bishop of Nocera, but his motto, *Fato prudentia minor* (wisdom is weaker than faith) is more Humanist than Christian.

Collection ID: 256-1895

This photo was taken as part of Britain Loves Wikipedia in February 2010 by David Jackson.

*I pray that I am sufficiently stirred
by the rumor of great things
to seek the God who created this
single thread that I am, and to marvel
at a vision magnificent enough to cause
this God to weave from
this single thread
a tapestry most
resplendent. **

The Attributes of God

Spirit who dwells within,
Sovereign who reigns above,
Creator of all that is, whose name is love;
Healer of our blindness to the truth
of our own luminous well-being;
Gentle mother, steadfast father,
Strong defender and provider,
Source of energy and power;
Substance of the loyalty, devotion,
orderly activity, cooperation, and
encouragement that draw us home
to family and hearth and altar:
security and safety, discipline;
commitment, perseverance;

noble work; shared purposes;
illumination, elegance, and comfort;
warmth and hearty sustenance;
friendship, hospitality, compassion;
ease and unconstraint and laughter;
peace and innocence and honesty;
devotion, silence; passion, tenderness;
respect and solace;

Weaver of the fibers of community and
fellowship;

Heart of celebration, rhythm of rejoicing;
Inspiration for the dance, for music, poetry,
for every form of artistry;

All that is rational, spontaneous, intuitive,
and wise;

All that is generous and sensible, benevolent,
responsible;

These are your attributes; they are the nutrients
we need for life and growth;

They are the woven strands the poet speaks of:

*Destiny itself is like a wonderful wide tapes-
try in which every thread is guided by an
unspeakable tender hand, placed beside
another thread and held and carried by a
hundred others.***

Amen.

* Craig D. Lounsbrough

** Rainer Maria Rilke



The Adoration Tapestry, Palla Strozzi (1372-1462)

TIME AFTER TIME: An Evening Prayer

Divine Protector, when the old clock's minute hand moves step by step toward evening, tick by tick to measure something science claims is nonexistent—time, a concept only, humankind's invention;

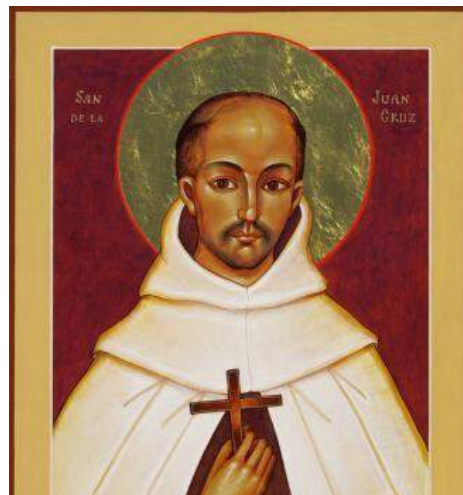
...when the shadows lengthen and the daylight dims, the darkness thickens and the denizens of night come out of hiding, mischief-making elves and pixies, predators becoming bold, their timid prey uneasy, skittering across the open places to their subterranean retreats;

...when flying insects play a game of chicken 'round a sizzling lamp and hunters prowl the desert, lone coyotes or a noisy pack of them, whose triumphs are announced as if by lunatic night watchmen;

Our spirits seek your comfort then, and your protection and your teaching. Ancient stories of the night endure across millennia; their histories whose seeds were planted in the distant past still feed and stimulate imaginations. Storytellers out of time have demonized the wee hours, never mind that they arrive on schedule, never mind that night has seasons independent of the solstice and the equinox. For reasons of its own, night lets the lonely lay their isolation at its door; the hopeless wrap it 'round their flimsy frames—cold comfort but a form of solace nonetheless. The slenderer the moon, the more secure are the immortalized adventurers and mystics, daughters of the sky, and those who streak in seconds to the edges of the cosmos while we ordinary creatures merely seek oblivion—but we are given dreams and shown the convocation of the galaxies. We hear the music in the stratosphere's deceptive stillness, and we watch the dancers and the acrobats whose gleeful choreography—their romping, gliding, flying past a billion planets in a single leap—defines our aspirations and the freedom we possess if we would seize it even once.

Divine Beloved, send us angels who can steer the ship that sails at moonrise, navigating seas now smooth, now agitated, now mysterious where ghosts and phantasms abide.

Guardian angels, spirit guides, beloved saints and bygone mentors, teach us secrets inaccessible to sight; show us the treasures and the



St. John of the Cross, 16th-century Carmelite brother, Spanish poet and mystic, wrote "The Dark Night of the Soul" in 1578 or 1579

perils human eyes are blind to. Be a lantern in the dark night of the soul, when mortal bonds are unavailing.

Custodians of our repose, when we uneasily succumb to sleep, support us, soul and body. On our own, we battle gravity until exhaustion overtakes the sturdiest intention and we drift into the ocean. By your watchfulness and with your strength we rise to altitudes our own wings are unequal to, heights tantamount to bliss, and we experience a gentle floating on a peaceful thought; we are receptive to the wisdom that is taught only in dreams. We put aside anxiety and fill the space with gratitude for blessings in abundance, evidence of love and messages of grace; and as we do, we feel the muscles' loosening; the joints relax, the chest expands. A warm sensation, liquid light scooped from the sun's last pouring-out, surrounds and fills us to the marrow till our very cells are saturated. Thus the cleansing and the healing can begin, and the reunion with Divinity (as if there ever were or could be separation). Thus it is that we behold each other truly, innocent and new. Thus are we daily born again.

Amen.



The Ladder of Divine Ascent icon showing monks ascending to Jesus in Heaven, top right. 12th century, Saint Catherine's Monastery. —*Wikipedia*

Prayer for a Wounded Spirit

When I couldn't brush my teeth or count to fifty, snap my fingers, whistle "Dixie," diagram a sentence, smile or laugh or play... God, I could pray.

Some people scoff at prayer and sneer at those who practice it. They say you are not Santa Claus. Imagine my surprise. They tried to trash the Easter Bunny, too. A few have offered to establish that you don't exist. I don't believe, dear God, in atheists.

CONFESSION

On the radio, somebody said we're always given everything for peace, love, mercy, joy, and sustenance. So far, so good. You bless me endlessly, and still I think I need a net; I strive, I fret about uncertainty and how I am perceived by (take your pick: the Uber driver, Starbucks person, distant relative, short guy beside me on the bus, straw-hatted woman at the table by the window drinking lattes as if they didn't cost more than my shoes); I rush to be on time at the expense of my serenity and otherwise neglect my own well-being while achieving nothing for the betterment of Those Less Fortunate; and I know better. Still I struggle, still try to harness peace of mind instead of resting in the certainty of your deliverance—now, tomorrow, Saturday, next year, eternally.

I confess I've yet to find that calm, sweet, silent place within. My faith has been waylaid. I got distracted, lured by flash, enticed by overripe low-hanging fruit; and having planted old, dry seeds, I reap self-pity, self-reproach, a heap of jealousy, a peck of bitterness—the harvest of the dreams I've stopped believing in.

Father-Mother God, vouchsafe to me
a map that guides me to divinity,
a light for navigating in the dark,
a chorus of your angels singing
"This way!"—
something I can follow when the candle
sputters and the flame goes out.

Divine Creator, if it's true that thinking manifests into reality, there's a problem here. My thoughts do not obey me. Disciplining them is like directing fish to navigate the ocean currents differently. When I try to fix my mind on Heaven, it resists. Ideas steer themselves amiss and enter



hostile territory, taken and held captive in a cave in Indonesia, with bats and dragons who don't know what century we're in. The world in its contrariness seems alien, perverse, and perilous (The dragons are hungry, and I think I'm dessert)...

...but you, O Great Divine, have overcome the world.

Father-Mother, you will never leave me lost and far from home. It is my dread misguiding me, my fear that weighs me down. I pray that you will banish these, my ancient enemies, the legacy of Canaan in my personal geography, where long ago they staked their claim. They should have lost their strength by now, if not their animosity.

Create in me, O God, a clean and spacious heart. Make room within me for compassion; give me energy to act on it and wisdom to choose capably; renew my spirit; and restore my soul's capacity for joy and happiness.

PETITION

Eternal God, Source of Love and Light, if it's true that all Creation—every cell and star and galaxy, every mosquito, Twinkie, Oldsmobile, and Post-It Note—is love and nothing else exists, why is it, then, that when I'm knocking on the universe's door nobody opens it? I wonder if there's no one home, but all the lights are on and someone's whispering. I take it personally: They see me but they'd rather not. Why don't they want to let me in?

God, what is this emptiness? Am I in Sheol, where dead spirits go, sleepers in the dust... the place farthest from Heaven, of which Jacob spoke when he said, "I shall go down to my son [Joseph] a mourner unto Sheol" [Gen. 37:35]. Whatever name this pit is known by, lift me out of it. I'm lonely, and my only company is spiders and the stark anxiety that creeps along the porous edges of awareness. Return me to the surface of the planet, I beg you, God, where sunlight bounces green off poplar leaves, where there are music and activity and reasons not to sleep.

I do, I do believe you have a purpose for me. You had something grand and glorious in mind. You gave me passions, interests, and abilities. I used them well... until I stopped believing I had anything to offer. Does one invite one's friends to pay a call at such a time? "Please come and sit with me while I gnaw my inner lip"? I was asleep too long, dear God. Reignite my dreams.



GRATITUDE AND PRAISE

A man of monumental wisdom has said, "Follow your bliss." But I have no idea where it is or if I'd recognize it after all this time. It disappeared when I was scrambling from this amusement to that glittering distraction. I'm ill acquainted with the feeling, having been too long at sea, gone far from home on what I thought would be an odyssey; it proved to be productive only for its distance, not for its achievements.

Arriving where I started, only poorer—not having brought home even one cheap souvenir—I'm ashamed. I feel unworthy of Creation's gifts. Yet you sustain me; through your eyes I see my poverty of spirit fed, my brokenness repaired, my purpose blessed abundantly, and my soul's treasury enriched.

I don't need to search; grace finds me where I rest and dream.

Thank you, God, for what the harvest yields today, for life emerging through the winter's crust, for buds whose promise comes in measured time, unrushed in orchards, gardens, fields; for nature's generosity to be revealed: great, arching trees in flower, lilacs bursting white and purple, robins gathering selected bits of vegetation suitable for nests in larch and chestnut trees.

BENEDICTION

An hour before dawn I am impatient for the unrestraint of morning over the horizon, sunbeams dappling the streams and warming fields and woodlands. Breathe, you say. Be mindful of the cardinals' concert in the darkness, notice pink and pale-blue streaks spreading like an easy smile across the east horizon. Believe in ordinary signs and wonders.

God of all creation, seen and unseen, I come to offer praise and thanks, seek mercy, receive healing, and accept your gift of grace.

Amen.



Sweet Celebration

Somewhere, somehow,
even now in the universe,
all is joy; all is peace;
all is well.

Show me the place where
the stars celebrate thee;
thine angels and saints dwell
in harmony there.

Prayer is the doorway;
love is the key to the
place where Creation
rejoices in thee.

We must be near, for
the music I hear
is a sweet celebration
in praise of thee.

All of Creation sings,
"All is joy; all is peace;
"all is sweet harmony;
"all is well;
"all is well, indeed."

Amen.



The Ghent Altarpiece, *Singing Angels*, Jan van Eyck, 15th century

Safely to the Shore

God who made us and sustains us—
God, immortal and mysterious—
when we are ungrateful, even our
complaints are manifest of sweet
abundance: air and water; bread and butter;
shelter from the cold; and your embrace when
we surrender deep in prayer—as babies,
weary even of exploring all the wonders of the
world, its lights and colors, sounds and textures,
burrow into Mother's shoulder, fearless in her
equanimity.

Yet we fancy ourselves victims of ungentle
circumstance. A small annoyance, not
attended to, becomes infected. Swollen, red,
and tender to the touch, it spreads to the
extremities, and farther—others suffer the
contagion. Thus can friends on Saturday be
enemies on Sunday, and, by Monday, legion.

Gratitude does not require the sky to be
forever blue, or that the sun appear at every
moment we consider opportune. Not every
day is halcyon, not every month is June, and
there are bitter winds that penetrate each
layer of protection, entering through skin and
bone to pierce the heart. Small comfort then
to know that even when the sun's invisible
behind the storm or hidden by the circle of the Earth, it shines as
bright and will be visible precisely when it ought to be. Small
comfort too are food and shelter — even friends, if friends remain
(we might have driven them away). A few are stubborn: let them
in, for they can rub our feet and startle languid faculties awake —
the ones that sense not heat or cold but grace.

We are not patient, though, no matter that we've had our share
of warm, fair days and peaceful nights. We hear the thunder of a
distant storm; we witness human cruelty, we wonder at the blind
impartiality of nature, and we are bewildered at the magnitude
of evil, at the unpredictable caprice of fate, or doom. Disaster



Confucius presenting the young Gautama Buddha to Laozi,
Qing dynasty

may be out of sight but looms in some malicious posture, poised to strike when least expected. So we watch and worry, like a sentry whose antagonist has neither form nor name; and we neglect whatever bounty has accrued in our distraction. We forget to feast. We lack the energy and appetite for our accustomed satisfaction. Those who suffer and survive have told us they were somehow more alive than when the breezes were benevolent and calm. They learned to be astonished that amid catastrophe and cataclysm, life goes on.

You have warned us to be leery of the sleek vocabulary of the merchants of salvation. When they speak, their words are vacant. When they pray, their prayers are memorized and animated, artful, eloquent, and uninspired. Their lines are well rehearsed, but had they truly died and been redeemed, their phrases would reflect (it seems to me, and I have been there) something of the grave; not so articulate—there are no words; would be forever fresh, a quiet wonder— if they had been saved. If one has been to the abyss and fallen in, then one is humble, having little need to understand, no reason to pontificate... but rather one is moved to celebrate the mystery and to be newly grateful, day by day by day.

Having suffered condemnation, having been appraised and come up short, and having then been lifted and embraced — one cannot judge, cannot condemn. The court has been adjourned and all the prisoners released. We have no jurisdiction; it is not our place to round the sinners up and put them back again. Our duty, then, is light and brings us joy: To know as friend a stranger, one who will, like each of us, be tried; and one thing more: To gratefully remember how the tide that swept us out to sea — when we, in mortal danger, cried out, "Save me!" — pulled us gently to the shore.

Amen.



Scroll of Buddhist images, Zhang Shengwen (Chang Shengwen), the teaching of Buddha Sakyamuni, c. 1173-1176

I Didn't Break My Arm Today

Dear God—
Today I didn't break my arm
nor did I rupture my appendix.
I got up at six a.m.

and probably will go to bed
before eleven, certainly
by midnight (That's the
witching hour).

I read a book—a hundred pages.
Went to supper with a friend.
I didn't grumble very much
about the pang of emptiness
I feel at times when I get home
and here I am—alone again.
Tomorrow I shall grumble less.

I didn't lie. I didn't cheat.
I didn't steal. I did my bit
for peace. I wish I had a dog—
but that's a problem I can fix.
There's glass on all my windows
and a carpet on my floor.
I have a clean and pleasant kitchen
and red dishes in the cupboard.
There are those who'd miss me if I didn't
call them every week or two.
I care about them, so I do.

It rained this afternoon, a pleasant
interlude before the heat.
There's food in the refrigerator,
shoes for both my feet; and there
are blankets on the bed. And if
there isn't money in the bank,
I'm thankful for the stuff I bought
instead.

Tomorrow I'll have company.
It's Mrs. Bennett's day to clean,



The divine couple in Wicca, with the Lady as Diana, the moon goddess, and the Lord as Pan, the horned god of the wild Earth. The lower figure is Mercury or Hermes, the god or divine force of magic, as shown by his wings and caduceus. —*Wikipedia*

pick up a bag of groceries,
and wash the towels and the sheets.
I'll have an opportunity
to write a letter to a friend
who's happy when she hears from me
but understands my tendency
to say yes to too many things.

I have my health, and never take
an energetic day for granted.
There's no reason to complain
and every cause to celebrate—
the sunshine, and the April rain,
and all my senses' functioning.

Thank you for another day,
dear God, and let the people say:
Amen.



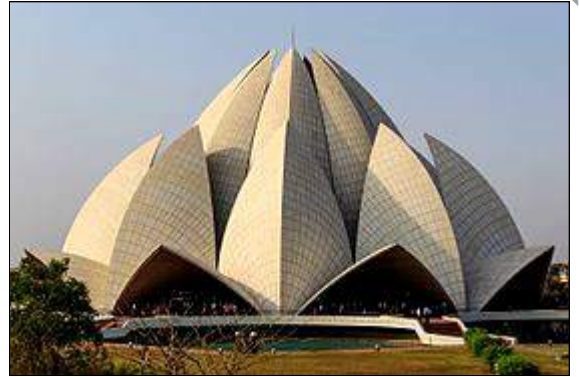
Shalom

Source of light and living things—Creator of the dingo, dromedary, palm, opossum, thistle—each original, as different as a marlin from a lark, a sheep from a mosquito, families of armadillos, willow groves, or chestnut trees from honeybees; still fundamentally in spirit undivided, never mind the appellations of the motley clumps we cling to: Hindu, Muslim, Jew, Baha'i, Confucian, Christian, Jain, Sikh, Shinto, Taoist—dark skin and flesh in shades of white and tints of brown to black as hematite and red as Oklahoma clay... or yellow, amber, bronze, ecru; some mute, some chatty; differing in size and strength, age and agility; by shape or habit reminiscent of a tent, a twig, a bell, a spotted mammal, or a mama bird, fastidious and economical of movement; fanned or caped; all manner of inflections, languages, and faces; every permutation of emotion—sympathetic, stony, wounded, gleeful, shy.... How much of this has any consequence at midnight?

You created oceans, populated them with speedy great white sharks and barnacles, near motionless, and made the planet wide and deep enough for each to prosper and feed one another, where the harvest overflows the bin... abundant, fruitful, luscious, opulent beyond description; earthen-surfaced, iron-cored; and as the people feast to satisfaction, nature laughs and beauty shimmers even in a lazy mote of dust exploring circles in the pale evening air, and we sing, *Praise be!*

So what's the fuss? I get all twisted up and want to puncture someone's eardrums, whistle loud, like there's a freight train in the kitchen, roaring like your servant Hiram's Nineteen-Fifty Eldorado pickup truck, and pierce the air like Thy dear servant Sister Barbara with her fearsome double-digit whistle—and to shout, *Be still! Be still!* until the clamor fades, and then I'd want to shake my head at the assembled multitude and whisper: *Why is it so hard for us to get along?*

And that makes me no better, does it, than the hoi polloi dividing up the population into Us and Them? For we are called to swell the numbers in creation we consider to be *Us*, and shrink until as tiny as that mote of dust the *Them* part of the



The Lotus Temple, a Bahá'í House of Worship in New Delhi, India. It attracts about 4 million visitors a year. —

Wikipedia

populace... and take no pride in my inclusiveness, seeing as how all of us were by thy word created in the dawn of time.

Let there be peace on earth, Creator, God of All. I have a need to reconcile as desperate as the next, yet here I sit complacent and unruffled, snug as Mother Mousekins in her cozy den; yes, here I sit, approximately ten-elevenths gratitude and one-half willful arrogance, upon my hillock; for I judge those brothers I deem self-absorbed or showy in their charity. I am disgusted by the shrill Susannahs calling talk shows with their petty enmities and their self-righteous recitations of the "problems" that they haven't got besides the chipping of a nail between their scheduled pedicures, and Oh, my, la-de-dah, the politicians with their slap, slap-back campaigns devoid of useful information that might help the nation, God Almighty, Saints, and Angels on a German Chocolate Cake!

And who am I to criticize except it makes sweet Annie smile?

O God, teach me to be an instrument of peace and healing.

Amen.



Bahá'í prayer for children

Small Talk

You don't arrive on thunderbolts, in splendid sunsets, or astride a meteor—aurora-borealis-obvious—nor do your messages require symphonic settings to be credited authentic and divine. For all our visiting of scenic wonders, looking for your hand in nature's pomp and splendor, there is just as much of nature in a cobweb in the cellar as on mountaintops and cataracts. You're near as oxygen, but we forget to breathe aright; we pant, we hyperventilate, we strive to find you, going on retreats to Macchu Piccu and the like. And here you are, the whole time—not in hiding. In the open's where you wait, available for wisdom, counsel, motivation, patience, healing, grieving, happiness, salvation... nor must we address you in felicitous arrays of phonemes, syllables, and tropes. You know our thoughts before we think them; censoring will but affirm unmentionable fears that we're unworthy to present our praise and our petitions. Prayer is not a garden fête where we are meant to wear a hat, a smile, and party shoes. It's more a matter of conversing in the course of crossing paths throughout an afternoon, should you not be a morning person. This is not to say you're other than almighty, great beyond



Ancient Hindu art—palm-leaf painting, Talapatrachitras, folk art of Odisha 3

description, frightening in magnitude but all the while inviting us to cling to you. For those who don't believe what can't be seen, you're in the tapestry, not just the picture but the wool, the thread, the loom, and the imagination of the weaver. Say I am irreverent or call me glib or disrespectful; only be assured I try to never take a solemn step unless it's guided by our intermittent conversation (when I don't forget to listen). Alleluia! Amen.



Hanuman Visits Sita in Lanka, Folio from a Ramayana (Adventures of Rama)—India, c. 1775-1800

Prayer—The Mystery

Father-Mother, I have traveled
on the oceans, lakes, and rivers;
I have crossed the deserts, climbed the
mountains, wandered in the plains and
moorlands; I have lain for many
days on end to glimpse the creatures
of the forests, beautiful and
strange their colors; strong the wings of
eagles who conceal their young in
high and hidden crevices; and
strong the limbs of foxes digging
through the earth to deep, protected
burrows, warm in winter, cool in
summer, so their little ones may
flourish. God, so nourish me.

Here am I, here shall I ever
be—I wait for thee and for thine
angels; come and comfort me. O
Mother, how I need thee now; O
Father, now I call to thee. O
God, make me as light as air that
I may fly above the earth and
all its grief and agony. O
lead me to thy holy place, to
thine enchanted garden ripe with
stars and moons and galaxies, where
light is born and life eternal
blooms by but a word from thee. Say
now that word that I might bloom and
flourish like the grapevine and the
rose. You are my life and I am
not alone. You are the air I
breathe; you are the words I speak. O
Hold me now in thine embrace. Teach
me to recognize thy voice, thy
breath, thy presence, always with me.
I am not alone. I trust in
thee, Creator, sweeter than the
loveliest imaginings. O
give me wings and on a prayer may



Medieval Persian miniature showing Muhammed leading
Jesus, Moses, Abraham, and others in prayer

I ascend. Let all things fall
 away, O God, all things but thee. Wrap
 me in bliss, thy light, thy gift, and
 lift me up. When late at night I
 call to thee, then comfort me, and
 take my fears. God, drench me in
 thy saving grace. Protect and heal me.
 Hold me now in thine embrace. Teach
 me to recognize thy voice. O
 here am I, here shall I ever
 be—I wait for thee and for thine
 angels; come and comfort me. I
 need thy saving grace. O teach me,
 God, to recognize thy voice, thy
 breath, thy presence, always with me.
 I am not alone.

Amen.



Muhammed and his companions advancing on Mecca, attended by the angels Gabriel, Michael, Israfil and Azrail; Siyer-i Nebi, 1595

How Should I Pray?

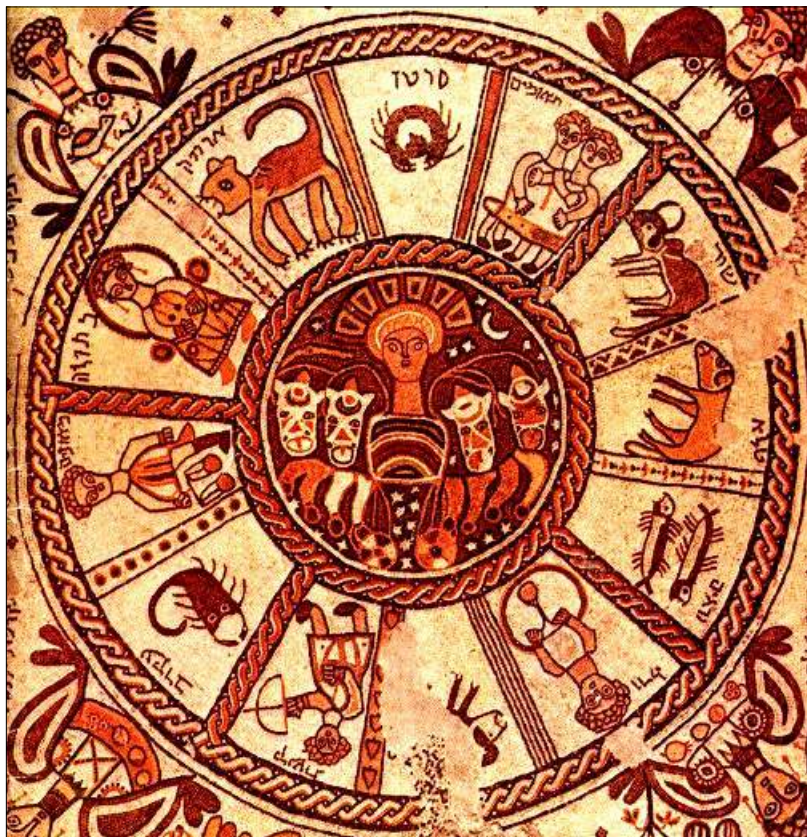
Dear God—If there's a right way and a wrong way to pray, please tell me now. I have no strategy. My legs won't hold me up. I am too weak to stand and face this day and its demands. I need to lay my head down on your shoulder and be comforted. O God, be strong for me, just for a minute, while I catch my breath.

Some people say that prayer is useless—doesn't do a bit of good. They say it is a waste of breath and worse, a form of weakness... while others pray a certain way—the only way, they say, that “works.”

I don't know exactly what it means for prayers to “work.” I prayed for Mac the border collie to get well, and Mac died peacefully instead. I was at peace with his departure. I felt his spirit in the room. Did prayer “work”? How would I know?

Some people pray according to a formula that evidently “works” for them. They seem to glide through life, with maybe the occasional lurch and stumble but with no plummeting into despair. I confess, dear God, that I am envious. I want to be like them, knowing where to find you and confident that you'll show up. Instead I'm blind and deaf and flopping bonelessly in the direction of where I think your lap might be. I want to be like them, with stronger faith and no regrets. It doesn't come easily to me—not yet. And it occurs to me that none of us is wrong, just standing on a different hilltop, looking from another latitude.

Some people say that you're not “out there” but “in here”—my higher self resides in me—and that my prayers are answered instantaneously, that I lack nothing materially or spiritually... that the answers to my questions, the solutions to my problems, and the generosity of heart I ask for are always and immediately at hand.



Zodiac in a 6th-century synagogue at Beit Alpha, Israel

Out there or in here... what is the meaning of location with respect to you, who made it all, created countless worlds and stars and galaxies? What is the relevance of "God is here" or "God is there" when there's no place that you are not?

Here's what I know: You are my divine Creator, my Father-Mother, and the always-fresh-and-uncontaminated wellspring of my soul. You are the strength that lifts me when I'm weak or incapacitated. Yours are the arms that hold me when I grieve. You are the presence that fills me when I'm absent from myself, when I experience my being as irrelevant, when I feel set aside, alone, depleted, and redundant. You are the wisdom that makes me wise, giving me the courage to keep walking when I can't feel the ground or find a place of safety. Your vision guides my steps. Where I perceive a dead end with no exit or a wall too high to climb, too wide to find the end of it, you see around the bend and far beyond, past this hour and this place, this mortal moment through the ageless, timeless, glorious tomorrows into eternity.

Prayer is sacred energy. To pray is to breathe light and clarity into forgotten valleys cast in shadow... forests overgrown, their paths obscured by sagging limbs. To pray restores vitality, the way a rainstorm opens channels long obstructed by debris and inactivity.

Some people, mentors, sages enumerate the laws of the universe and build systems and structures based on them, saying that even you, God, can't restrain the momentum you set in motion at the instant of Creation. But who are we to calculate your infinite complexity? What are we looking at? Where are your edges? Who has built the barriers outside of which you may not go? What are these laws that hinder even you, as if Creation had a vastness its Creator couldn't measure? I respect these men and women and their mystical agility, but God, in the bitter cold I come to you for warmth, and in the dark it's your light that guides me, not intellect, not human understanding, which wavers when untimely winter comes and hides the sun.



Cut-paper mizrah from Podkamen, Ukraine; Israel
Dov Rosenbaum, 1877

Despite the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE and the dispersion of most Jews, the Land of Israel has remained a primary focus of Jewish identity. A deeply rooted bond to the Land of Israel and the hope to return to it have been important unifying factors. One expression of this intense bond is found in the practice of facing toward Jerusalem during prayer. For Jews in the West, this direction is east, and the custom developed of placing a decorative plaque on the eastern walls of homes and synagogues to indicate the direction of worship. Such a sign came to be known as a *mizrah*, Hebrew for "east." *Mizrah* is also an acronym composed of the initial letters for the Hebrew phrase "from this side the spirit of life." This inscription appears in the four corners of the central panel of this papercut, indicating that it functions as a mizrah.

—*TheJewishMuseum.org*



Jews Cross Red Sea Pursued by Pharaoh, fresco from Dura Europos Synagogue, c. 244–256 C.E.
—religion.oxfordre.com

Am I wrong to come to you with petitions and pleas for intercession? Do I think a word from me will change your mind? Dear God, I don't begin to know how you respond to prayer. I know better than to make demands or give you checklists. I pray to feel you with me. I pray against the illusion that we can be separated from your love and outside your protection. I pray so that my spirit will be renewed, my heart refreshed, my mind cleansed, and my needs, wishes, and desires surrendered. I pray to see things as you see them and remember that all is well.

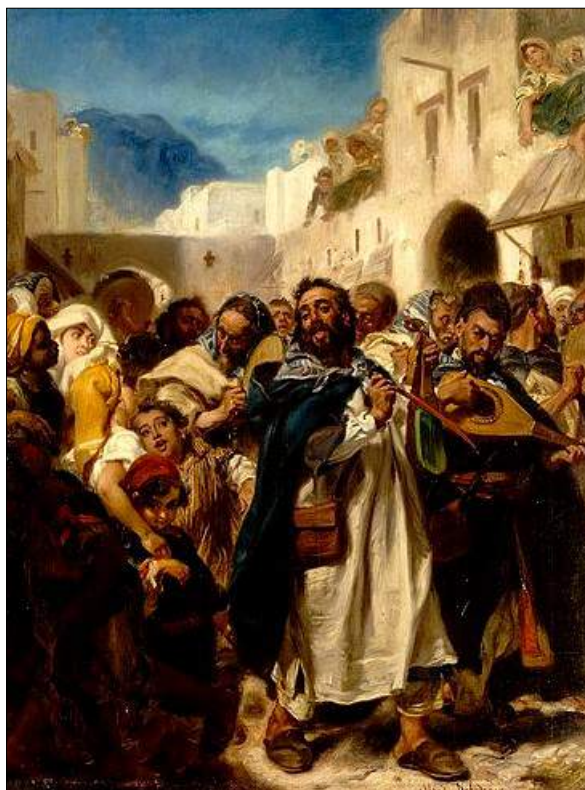
I pray for clarity about the truth: The sick are healed; broken relationships are repaired; families are reinforced and mended; love is released; peace is restored; energy and purpose are awakened; and laughter is the music played by winds at ease, strummed across the prairie grasses, echoed from the cliffs and valleys, amplified and spread by the rivers and the seas.

I pray for miracles, even if what seems miraculous to me is just a borrowing from nature's customary rhythm, a euphoric flight among the stars I thought were out of reach. I pray for courage in my work and purity in my relationships; for the healing power of love unfettered; for the clarity of purpose that unites my bliss with service and compassion. I pray to know the meaning of abundance not sought out of greed but sharing of the planet's bounty. From my soul I pray for harmony, honesty, and innocence to sweep away everything unnecessary, toxic, and decayed. Underneath the layers of corrosion, behind the dust and through the haze, O God, the world and all that grows here are as clean and vibrant as when they were made. Your gifts have not been taken away, nor has the world's reflected glory been erased. Your allness is intact, and clever imitations of another power, some imagined rogue Creator, can't make the world an ugly, bleak, and loveless place. I don't know everything, but I know this.

What I know of you, God, and your nature isn't what I've figured out so I can pride myself on my discernment. Whatever knowledge I possess is what you've shown to all your messengers on earth. Whatever revelation I might claim is borne of grace, of victory, and of the cycles, seasons, galaxies, the rhythm of the universe, which returns all things to primal innocence, to soundness and perfection.

Father-Mother, by the grace of your unfailing love, may I become your instrument, to tend whatever I find sick and broken, helping it become well and vigorous and whole. Reveal to each of us our genius in the flow of work and rest and recreation. Precious God, at every opportunity, in every gathering, discussion, meeting, chance encounter, ignite our curiosity so that we're impelled to ask the question "What can I do to serve you? How can I make your life better?"

Amen.



Jewish Festival in Tetuan, Alfred Dehodencq, 1865

May the Sick Be Strong and Well

Divine Father-Mother, hear our prayer for health and harmony:

May the sick be strong and well. May the injured heal. May the dying rest in confidence of immortality.

May broken hearts be mended, and may hate give way to pity and compassion. Let the heavens open and the spring rain wash away all jealousy... insecurity... distrust; dissolve resentment; and penetrate and cleanse the heart. May we cast off the illusion that we are alone, separate from one another or from you, Almighty God. May we see each other as we are: perfect soul to perfect soul... radiance to radiance... glory to glory.

May we experience our inner light, knowing that we shine with energy and purpose... safe and secure in the morning of Creation... no longer blind, able to find and navigate the path of satisfaction, service, and joy.... Set us on the road that guides us to our reason for becoming.

Divine Creator, God of grace, you have endowed us with the gifts, abilities, and inclinations that reveal the way of happiness and peace. May we repair the fractured universe, and construct, stone by stone, your kingdom on earth. May our compass be true, our motives pure, our intuition steadfast.

May we open our minds to your guidance and entrust our prayers to the wings of angels. Our petitions bow to your wisdom: We pray, "THIS we seek, or something finer, truer, purer, more sublime, and dedicated to the greatest good of all creation." Thus may we thrive in the abundance of experience, generosity, and shared delight. Thus may our endeavors take flight, yielding bliss in the pursuit as well as the accomplishment.

Given courage by your grace, O God, may we embrace one another in the confidence of shared recognition. All is forgiven. Undivided by religion or bias, strangers become friends, and friends and families are united: husbands, wives, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, and the children of our children... sisters and brothers... generation to generation without end.

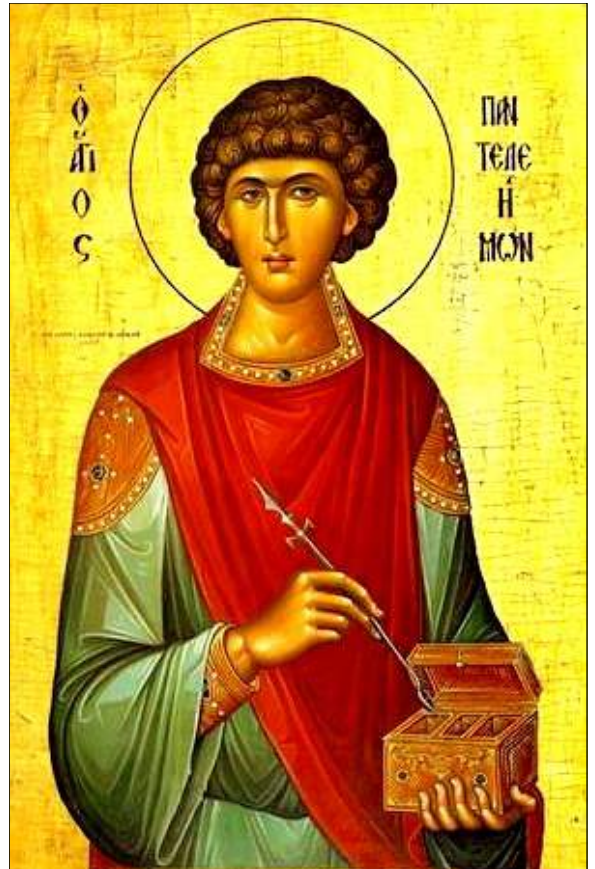


From a medieval Italian choirbook

In our common habitat, may streams be swift and pure, lakes fresh and placid, oceans clean, their motion constant, unencumbered by the careless use of Earth's great treasures. May the winds whirl freely and the skies be clean and benign. May the trees and crops and herbs be bountiful and vigorous; and may all creation flourish, giving no cause for a sense of lack or an impulse toward greed or hoarding.

May all be granted understanding this very day that truth abides in love, innocence, kindness, and freedom from want. Patiently remind us that you share our day-to-day concerns and our great struggles. May we be aware, any time we listen for it, of the pulse and chorus of the universe, music of our souls, rhythm of our lives, and singing of our spirits.

Amen.



Orthodox icon of Great-martyr and Healer
Panteleimon



Three Miracles of St. Zenobius, Alessandro Botticelli, c. 1500-1505

Prayers for Life's Unfolding

God, you made us in your image—perfect, whole, strong, and full of love and laughter—yet you invite us to depend on you in times of weakness, fear, disease... and we need only ask in order to be guided by your light, healed by your grace, and at all times sustained. And so our lives, health, strength, and confidence are in your hands, sustained by your unfailing love and ever-present power. Teach us, O God, to stand firmly in the stream of your love and receive the great unnumbered blessings that pour from you unabated. Thank you, Merciful Father and Mother, for being ever with us, in difficulty and in celebration.

Merciful God, lay your healing hand upon the sick among us. Send your Holy Spirit to their assistance. Dispatch your angels to wrap them in peace and serenity. Keep them free of fear and pain. Gather to their aid all excellent help of every kind—the health workers, medicines, treatments, techniques, and tender care that can give speedy relief to their distress. Gather also their family and friends, whose prayers, affection, laughter, and support will keep their spirits soaring. May every cell be made whole, restored to normal functioning and spreading renewed energy throughout their bodies. I pray with confidence for their souls' complete healing. If their health and vigor, strength and happiness not only return but be shown more durable than ever, some

may wonder and say "Miraculous!"—but miracles are the way you speak to us, your word made manifest. Thus may you be glorified in the victory that even now proceeds from your right hand. Amen.

God, you are great beyond our understanding, but this we know: You created us in your image, whole and sound in mind and body, loving, intelligent, lively, and creative. The Bible tells us that you looked at your creation and you did not say, "This is a mess." You saw that it was very good indeed. Open our eyes, Merciful God, to your presence in our lives and your image in us. Guide our vision beyond our ailments—beyond diabetes, beyond hypertension, beyond high cholesterol, beyond excess weight and chronic anxiety, beyond all that is flawed—to your perfect image, beautiful, energetic, and holy. Send to our assistance the very best help—people, places, protocols, procedures, and prescriptions, according to your will—as aids to total healing. Instruct us in the ways of well-being. Teach us how to treat ourselves, dear God. Be our ultimate physician, so that, with the help of those you have assigned, we will enjoy radiant health, ascribed to your glory. Send your Holy Spirit to abide in us with a spirit of peace, tranquility, abundance, and generosity. May our relationships be harmonious and our homes towers of serenity. Do not delay in our transformation, God. May we begin to know the joy of your salvation this very hour.

Amen.



Marriage at Cana, Giotto, c. 1304-1306

First the Quiet, Then the Dawn

Creator, speak to us of life, and may your voice be stronger than the noise of our confusion. Shout, if shout you must, so loudly that we can't mistake your teaching for the rolling thunder, blasting guns, or animals stampeding, panicked, running reasonless except to separate their heaving bodies from the pandemonium behind them. May we turn to you and hear an utterance of life so clear it slices through the clutter of the evening news, the arguments, the blame, the words of fear, the hate, the litany of retribution.

God of Earth and Heaven, we have seen too much of death. Now we are ready; we would hear you: Tell us where to find this life, however near or far away. Direct us to the distant forest or the unkempt field where living seeds—so generously sown yet carelessly received, so easily displaced by clumsy feet, so poorly tended, long neglected, overcome by brash, aggressive weeds unchecked—have taken root and thrived in spite of lassitude, unkindness, or abandonment.

The rain, it seems, is overdue and ends too soon; the sky too pale, the sun irresolute or vicious, alternating days; the earth depleted, soil once dark and rich with nourishment now turned to dust. The gardens that in seasons past have flourished now send up weak, scattered seedlings, delicate, bug-ridden, subject to disease and rot.

And then come summer storms that even oaks and beeches and the hardiest of



Noli me tangere, fresco, Fra Angelico, 15th century

shrubs succumb to. How we long for spring, remembering warm afternoons and honeybees, industriously pollinating cherry trees and making golden honey thick with sweetness. How, we wonder, did the yield go tough and bitter? What now shall we eat for strength and courage, nature having turned against us, poisoning the harvest, if indeed a stalk remains for reaping?

Creator, we were not expecting such an answer as the one alighting like a feather on a puff of wind... not even certain you had heard us... not anticipating anything like peace or purpose... just a tiny dose of courage, strength enough for one more midnight. First the quiet, then the early dawn; eyes to discern wheat ripe for cutting, grapes plump on the vine; ears to hear wagon wheels turning and the soft tread of workers who appear as the sun clears the far hills, ready to haul away decaying branches and dry leaves and bring in the crop that bursts with life beneath. Yesterday was meant for sorrow. Now you call us to the season and the work at hand—to serve the hungry, heal the hurting, carry comfort to the shocked and grieving, stunned by unimaginable loss. The time for feasting will be soon enough. Come, labor on.

Amen.



A Book of Hours, medieval peasants, 14th century

Eleventh Hour

Too late to step aside from misery,
the lashes of experience endured
and struck again, before the flesh
begins to mend; too late for all the
yesterdays misspent — I turn to you, O God.

Too late to follow where you would have led,
to reconcile the enmity or raise the dead;
too late for sympathy to curb a spate of bitter
words that burn their way into the heart,
where they find tinder easy to convert to hate,
consuming everything that waited helplessly
to be redeemed.

Too late to do as Mother said, to eat my peas
and carrots and forswear ambrosia in the form
of Baby Ruth and Butterfinger meals instead
of sustenance that deeply satisfies and nourishes
and heals.

Too late to save a penny for a rainy day, though
roiling clouds foretell tomorrow's storm; too late to
scorn temptation, to reflect that what I spend on this
or that alluring bagatelle could purchase pleasure
more enduring and profound. Too late for wisdom
now to temper or forestall an ill-considered whim, to
mediate despair and mania. Too late to choose a sane
and reasoned course when seized by circumstances
daunting in their urgency. Too late to save some
candles for emergencies and their peremptory demands.

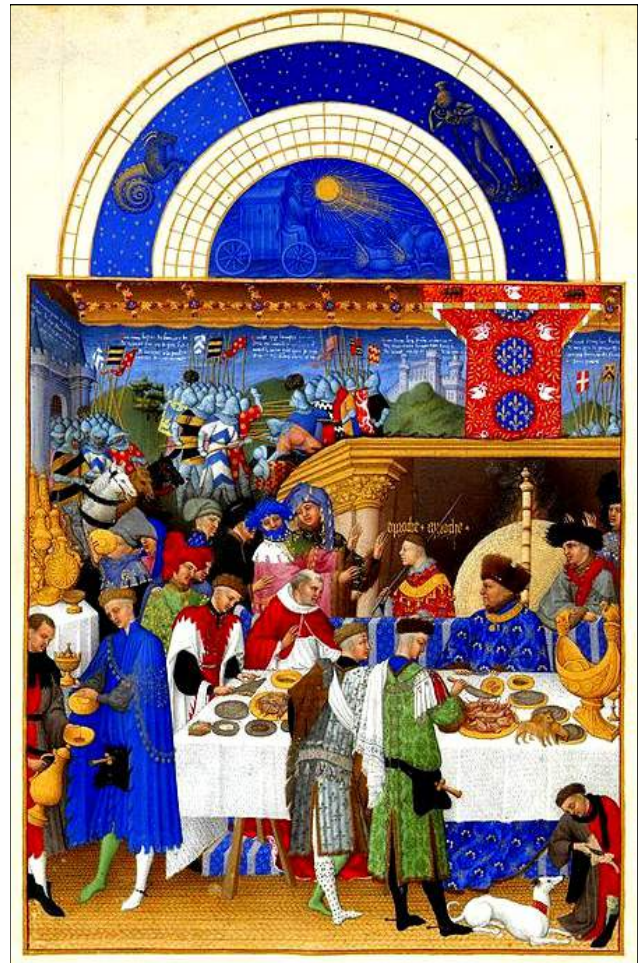
Perversely born unwise and unprepared for life, equipped with
little but the instinct to survive and with a physical response to
stimuli, how is it that, unreasoning, immobile, nearly blind, we human
creatures do not die upon the birthing bed? It might be said,
too early we emerge.



Très Riches Heures, the Book of Hours made for
Jean Duc de Berry by his artists, the Limbourg
Brothers, 14th century

And yet the baby's urge to eat and drink is fed; her need for warmth is met; her incoherent cry for something she cannot supply is heard. She doesn't wonder why, not then; she just accepts the nourishment, and when her thirst and hunger are assuaged, she sleeps with no anxiety for all the days ahead, nor does she lie awake and rue her lack of understanding or her randomly expressed demands.

O God, I place my yesterdays and my tomorrows in your hands. Amen.



Another miniature from *Très Riches Heures*, this shows members of the duke's household exchanging New Year gifts. The duke is seated at the right, in blue. —*Wikipedia*

Carry Me to This Enchanted Shore

Now before the morning light
appears;
now in calm anticipation;
now this sacred, still,
unmeasured interval I dedicate to thee.

Wherever are revived the dying,
comforted the grieving, given
hope the flagging spirits, raised
the fallen, fed the hungry souls;

Wherever life begins again,
where nothing is impossible,
and where the very sun is robed
and vested; where the angels from
their rest arise;

Where all are baptized in the freshet,
pure emerging, venom banished in
ignominy and washed away;
Where common things become a garden,
radiant with color, light, and form;

Where light is born;
Where all the universe declares
benevolent intent;
Where music out of silence grows,
where all from nothing comes and
all that ends begins:

Carry me, O Father-Mother God,
to this enchanted shore, that I as well may be
reborn and dwell in innocence again.

Thine angels send among
the suffering. Where they are fragile,
make them strong; where broken,
make them sound; their pain assuage,
evaporate, distill. Thine all-annealing love
bestow, and where it finds a cold, unyielding



St. John Baptizing in the Jordan, Nicolas Poussin, c. 1630

heart, thy shining grace impart, to melt
the stones that guard the hermit's
door, so light may enter and embrace.

God, where glory lives, accept
our weary selves, complete us. Open
our insensate eyes, that we might recognize
the riches we possess, and the provision
we require—before us now, already ours;
all beauty at our feet, all sound by heaven's
choir made crystalline; all that is lovely, seen,
recalled; and all abundance—everything
we need and more, beyond the sum
of ancient dreams and unfulfilled desires.

Amen



Storm on the Sea of Galilee, Rembrandt, 1633

Meditation: Thank You, O Divine Beloved

Now we turn our attention to the Universe. We wait for messages from the Divine that help us to discern our own true voice. These messages — this voice, all timeless wisdom, choruses spontaneously composed, arranged, played and sung... the music of living things' vibrations out of silence growing, always audible — repeat in every language, *Life loves you; all is well.*

Creator, we implore, speak to us now of health — our own and that of forests, fields, rivers, seas... the deserts and the mountains... the entire wonderful planet, vast, pristine, despoiled, artlessly regenerating... interdependent with the vigor and solidity of each community and tribe and family, all friends and every stranger. We have not always been vigilant about our well-being.

Now we declare our intention to be generous and wise in caring for ourselves. We begin with prayer ...

for all who sojourn with us...
for all whose paths cross ours...
for any whose images cross our minds...
for those we love...
for those we have despised....

A benediction upon another... a blessing, thought or spoken... a prayer for healing or an act of care...
a good night's sleep and early-morning meditation...



The School of Athens, Raphael, 1511

signify the root, the core, the fruit of activism. They are balm for a wounded world, which, in the pure light of Heaven's dawn, is revealed to be uninjured, flawless, innocent as the first raindrop in the first spring season.

When it is time to sleep, we sleep deeply, peacefully... and all the while angels lean over us, whispering to us ancient stories, imparting instruction, singing unique, particular love songs made for each of us by the Divine. By day, the mind gathers information, which, during sleep, migrates to the heart. What is valuable and true it retains; the false and meaningless evaporate, and so we gladly sleep, not waking till the processing completes, lest we be poorly prepared to face the coming day, ill-informed or lacking balance and perspective.

We are grateful for the hours of waking and the hours of sleeping.

We surrender our souls to your guardianship, God, while we sleep.

Our bodies seem boneless in their ease.

We dream when it is time to dream.

We harvest the health and wisdom we receive, the secrets revealed, in sleep, in meditation, and in dreams.

Thank you, O Divine Beloved.

When it is time to eat and drink, our simple meal becomes,

by our intent and by your grace, a celebration
of the land, the elements, and the harvest
of fellowship
of nourishment
of the body and the mind
of life and the soul
of healing
of labor and ease
of gratitude and its own harvest, which is peace.



Lamentation over Christ, Fra Angelico, c. 1436-1441

Thank you, O Divine Beloved.

When we are ill or injured, despondent or afraid, we surrender our distress to the Divine Healer, and we pray for clarity of sight, knowing that the Truth will set us free from false captivity.

We were not created sick, but well and thriving, strong to build God's realm upon the earth.

We were not created fragile or easily broken, but sturdy and resilient, eager to plant and cultivate, to reap and share the harvest, and to thrive in celebration and community. Nor were we created to languish in isolation or strive in enmity, but with eagerness to use our talents in love and joy for their highest purpose: to serve, to satisfy, to multiply peace and goodwill.



Medieval hospitality

Never are we without gratitude. We carry our thankfulness as we might wear shiny new ribbons in our hair... because gratitude, like those bold ornaments, is bright and lovely and delightful to the eye.

Never are we without the time, intention, and eagerness to serve. When people see us, they say to one another, *We can ask them to help us. They are the ones who say, Sisters and Brothers, how can we make your lives better? How may we serve you today?* Bright blessings be upon you all!

When it is time to meditate, we grow still; and at the center of our being, we are healed.

Light enters the body from above... heavenly light from the Divine Beloved.

Light enters the body from below... we breathe light from the very center of the earth, Divine Creation. Where the light from Heaven meets the light from the center of the earth—

there purification and healing take place.

Purification and healing resonate throughout the body.

Purification and healing make every cell perfect in structure,

returning to its original perfection as God designed,

appearing and performing exactly as it should,

nudging wayward particles and planets into their proper orbits.

Purification and healing are more powerful than disease or trauma;

by meditation, all vibration is made consonant.

Thank you, O Divine Beloved.

When it is time to meditate, we do not demur, for when we lean back against the universe and settle into the silence, our serenity is favorable

to the brain and every cell of the body;
to long life and contentment;
to harmony between and among all things.

Meditation is the gatherer of cosmic energy, the fuel that stimulates life, imparts vigor, and negates struggling. In the arena of meditation, all souls meet and each affirms the others.

Thank you, O Divine Beloved.

When it is time to rejoice and give thanks, we give our feet and voices no commands, for of their own volition do they sing and dance. Our feet have wings, our voices are unblemished bells cast in the heat of the star that most amuses the Creator.

Safe and secure on our wings, singing our silver songs, we carry our singing and dancing to friends and families; they join our procession.

All our households and our neighborhoods join our procession.

All our brothers and sisters join our procession.

All the towns around us, and the countryside, join our procession.

All the nations join our procession.

In the fields we sing the songs and dance the dances that most delight the angels and the spirit guides who keep watch over us in the atmosphere.

All living things of the earth and sky dance together.
The very air sways with the rhythm of their dancing.
The trees and all their leaves reach to the sky in their impromptu laughing dance, and all the people cry out in joy and amazement as the lame jump to their feet, join our procession, and twirl and leap in their polkas and their gavottes.

Thank you, O Divine Beloved.

Long, long ago we were told that God would wipe away all tears, and suffering would be no more. We knew that the tale was true, for the messengers were our brothers and sisters, the sons and daughters of God. But we did not believe that we would live to see the prophecy fulfilled...

not only fulfilled, but justified and proven among us, making us witnesses of wonders, which we called miracles,

now revealed as natural, not at all extraordinary to the Divine...

and we wonder why we did not know;

or, knowing, did not believe;

or, believing, did not trust;

or, trusting, were ashamed and hid our faces in the tragic untruth toward which



Gathering of saints, Fra Angelico,
early 15th century

humankind has been inclined for a
hundred thousand years....

Now all who choose life are redeemed.



Once more we turn our attention to the Universe. We
wait for messages from the Divine that help us to
discern our own true voice.

So speak to us again, O Divine Beloved, for we are
ready to listen.

We are ready to be vigilant for our well-
being.

We are ready to care for ourselves.

We are ready to care for one another.

We are ready to believe.

We are ready to float like leaves
torn from branches by a storm
drifting on the flow of new-washed air
and
alighting on the quieting stream,

leaning, carefree and curious, upon the
current whose thousand courses have crept
through loam and clay and granite all across
the land with but one motive, just one
destination, which is and always has been
love, uncreated, irresistible.

Thank you, O Divine Beloved.

Amen



Marienkrönung, detail, Fra Angelico,
c. 1434-1435

Prayer for Children

Such unexpected bliss there is, the joy of souls caressing, in the sweetness of a sleepyhead, exhausted by the day's investigations: flowers to be plucked and yellow pollen blown aloft, velvet petals, soft and lavender, examined, gathered in a bowl.

Children come not to but through us; they are never ours to hold, and it is death to try, though feeling sometimes conquers sense.

Bless us all, O God,
as we protect them, as we catch them when they fall, and in their season, let them fly;
for when their wings can bear them up, and parting comes, and comes again, you are where you have ever been.

Amen.



Aldobrandini Madonna, Raphael, c. 1509-1510

