

Prayer for others.

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This document is at:

http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters_2015-12-18+prayer-for-others+prayer-for-the-whole-world.pdf
http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters_2015-12-18+prayer-for-others+prayer-for-the-whole-world.doc

The essential skill

Prayer for others is the most critical skill in prayer you will learn. We cannot learn any higher form of prayer unless we learn to pray for others. I say this because ardent, frequent prayer for others embodies two great virtues: love and faith. We are self-centered creatures, and rarely think of others and even more rarely feel their pain, but our Lord knows all of it. We are called to become like our Lord, to have His heart. He cares for everyone, all the time. We cannot claim to know God if we do not love, and according to the Apostle, we cannot love God unless we love our neighbor:

“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1 John 4:20)

We also express faith when we pray for others, because we are poor, weak creatures and are afflicted with the delusion that we somehow can control things. Only God can heal; without God nothing is good. Praying for others contradicts and rebukes our foolish self-reliance.

There are untold benefits that befall a Christian who ardently prays for others. They are literally untold, because when God lives in the human heart and reveals Himself to man; no one can tell of the experience exactly. It is perfect peace, and righteousness, stability, happiness. It is heaven.

Our self-interest is Hell. It brings us anxiety and conflicts, and unhappiness. A philosopher who is no longer an atheist (since he is dead!) wrote something like this: “My neighbor is my hell”¹. The opposite is actually true. “My neighbor is my heaven”. Praying for my neighbor (the scripture is clear – all men are our “neighbors”) releases us from our captivity to self-interest and all of its awful, malformed children. Our heart enlarges, and God reveals Himself to us, as we are able to see Him.

How do we train ourselves to pray for others?

There are practical and spiritual considerations.

Make a commitment to pray for others.

The most important consideration is that we make a commitment to pray for others, and value doing it as much as breathing. It is not always easy, and our passions and the Evil One will continually try to distract us. If we do not have a resolute heart, we will make very little progress.

The person who prays for others knows the great value in this practice, by experience. Those who have not acquired this habit, whether because of ignorance, or unbelief, or laziness, or the haze of the passions, will need to enter into this battleground with faith that their prayer will be rewarded and answered.

There is no advice that I give more often as a pastor than telling a person to pray for others. Even if we have a resolute heart, when doing something difficult we need a plan, and need to acquire skills. Here are some practical things to help you.

Pray for your enemies.

This² seems obvious, since our Lord commanded us:

“... Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you’ (Matthew 5:44)

In my experience as a pastor, this idea does not always occur to us, or we are resistant to it.

It is IMPERATIVE that you pray for your enemies, or those of whom you have any bitterness, towards, remember wrongs, etc. You know the people of whom your soul feels darker and colder and angry when you think of them or encounter them. Listen to your soul! Sometimes this coldness is disguised from us, but if you are attentive to yourself, you will feel when your peace is disturbed by the thought of or interaction with someone. This is always

¹ Jean Paul Sartre: “Hell is other people.”

² This was originally at: http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters_2015-07-09+hindrances-to-prayer+how-to-pray-for-others.doc http://www.orthodox.net/prison-ministry/prison-ministry-letters_2015-07-09+hindrances-to-prayer+how-to-pray-for-others.pdf

your fault! There is no keeping score here – it does not matter if “he/she/they” were at fault too. You should not dare to disobey a direct commandment of the Lord.

We cannot love as God loves without learning to forgive our enemies. Don't think of an enemy as only someone that you might come to blows with or are in some kind of open conflict with. Learn to feel the chilling darkness from that dark shadow that blocks out the warmth of the sun from your soul.

It is more important to pray for your enemies, those who curse you, and hate you than yourself or your loved ones. God hears our prayer when it is pure. Bad feelings about others make us impure. It is as simple as that, and besides, the Lord commanded us.

Just do it; make a list of people you have problems with. Don't write a novel – there is no need to include biographical information!

Pray for these people every day, simply, resolutely, and even if your prayer is accompanied with anger and clenched teeth.

It is MUCH better to pray and fight against anger than to be angry and not pray. You need to fight off the anger, and the only way is to forgive, and the best way to forgive is to pray.

Do not let yourself be fooled – the snake in the grass that we see is less dangerous than the one we do not see. Just because we do not feel anger when we do not think of someone does not prove anything! Just try thinking of those certain people in your life and see if you feel any darkness. And then try praying for them – any anger or any kind of darkening of the soul during this time is a sure sign that you must pray for them – for your sake as well as theirs.

Make a list of people to pray for.

I recommend that it be an electronic list if possible. I utilize technology so that I can print my diptychs (lists) of people to pray for or read them on my phone or computer.

Who is on this list? Your family, friends, your pastor. Absolutely, *all* of your enemies, and *everybody* you do not like, or have any estrangement with. Certainly, the sick, and those whom your church has asked you to pray for. All of these are necessary. You could add more, that you will pray for if time permits, such as everybody, or at least everybody you know, in your parish.

I have a document I use every day that has people in groups, based upon how I encounter them in my life: Family, Parishioners, Prison Ministry, Former Parishioners, others I know whom I wish to pray for, the sick, those in crisis.

Pray for everyone on the list, at least once every day.

How to do this?

Do not rush this, and do not just rattle off a bunch of names after saying a few quick prayers in the morning or evening. This should be a focus of your prayer. You must give it the time and the environment it deserves. A quiet

place is best. Alone is best.

If we were holy, we would not need to “get ready” for prayer, since we would be obeying the commandment: “Pray without ceasing”. Since we have not reached such an exalted state, most of us need to prepare ourselves for prayer. My routine usually includes the Jesus prayer with the prayer rope and reading the Psalter and usually the Gospel. Yours may include the Morning or evening prayers, or whatever gets you in a prayerful frame of mind.

Make your prayer simple.

All we need do when we pray for others is ask for God’s mercy. We must understand what “mercy” is when we pray. For too many people, “mercy” means that we are guilty before God, and He forgives us, like a judge. This is merely a legal viewpoint, and not the truth. God’s mercy is His love for us, and because of His love, He will help us in every way, but only if we ask, and if we try to live according to the commandments. We need God’s mercy to pray, to repent, to understand anything important, to be safe, and everything else in life.³

You can say “*Lord have mercy on N*”. I think it is better to say a modified Jesus prayer for each person: “*Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on N*”.

I often say a greater or lesser number of prayers based on how some of these people are in my “orbit” (for instance, my wife and children, those who are very sick or in crisis). I may use my prayer rope, and say 10 prayers for each, or maybe a whole prayer rope sometimes. If you do not have a prayer rope, get one! Use it for counting. I have a 100-knot prayer rope with hard beads at intervals of ten, that makes counting very easy, without needing to think about it.

Sometimes I use the following prayer for some people:

To pray for someone more diligently:⁴ from Old Believer Prayer Book, with lines 4, 5 added

Save, O Lord, and have mercy on **Thy servant(s)** _____, [bow]

Deliver him (*her, them*) from every tribulation, wrath and need [bow],

From every sickness of soul and body, [bow]

Forgive him (*her, them*) every transgression, voluntary and involuntary, [bow]

Teach them to pray and to live with purpose. [bow]

And do whatever is profitable for our souls. [bow].

Pray for everyone in the whole world.

A distinguishing characteristic of the holy is that they pray continuously for all men, everywhere. We sinners rarely have a heart that aches for all the suffering of the world, but this is **not** an excuse to not pray! We cannot learn to love everyone without praying for them. There are wonderful prayers that the saints have composed for all men in the world, in all their various conditions. I recommend that you say one or more every day.

3 Taken from : http://www.orthodox.net/full-voice/prison-ministry-letters_2011-03-04+how-to-think-about-personal-intercessory-prayer-praying-for-enemies-the-jesus-prayer.doc

4 See <http://orthodox.net/trebnic/old-believer-to-pray-for-someone-more-diligently.html>, <http://orthodox.net/trebnic/old-believer-to-pray-for-someone-more-diligently.doc>, <http://orthodox.net/trebnic/old-believer-to-pray-for-someone-more-diligently.pdf>

There is one by Saint Paisios the New, of Mount Athos, that he gave to his nuns.

To give you a taste of it, here are a few of the prayers:

“Our Lord Jesus Christ:

Do not abandon Thy servants who live far away from the Church. May Thy love convict them and bring them back to Thee.

Lord have mercy on Thy servants who are suffering from cancer.

Lord have mercy on Thy servants who suffer either from small or serious ailments.

Lord have mercy on Thy servants who suffer from physical infirmities.

Lord have mercy on Thy servants who suffer from spiritual infirmities. ...”

One may simply say the prayer of St Silouan of Mount Athos, as many times as desired:

*I pray Thee, O Merciful Lord, for all the peoples of the world, that they may come to know Thee by the Holy Spirit.*⁵

I made a very comprehensive prayer for people all over the world with various critical needs based on this prayer.

Here is a little taste of it:

“I pray Thee, O Merciful Lord, for all the peoples of the world, that they may come to know Thee by the Holy Spirit.

I pray Thee, O Merciful Lord, that Thou wouldst relieve the suffering of the hungry, and that they may come to know Thee by the Holy Spirit. ...

I pray Thee, O Merciful Lord, that Thou wouldst relieve the sickness and suffering of those who are ill, especially those who suffer because of civil war, oppression, neglect and poverty, and that they may come to know Thee by the Holy Spirit.

I pray Thee, O Merciful Lord, that Thou wouldst comfort and make safe those who are suffering from war, and killing, and civil unrest, and that they may come to know Thee by the Holy Spirit.”

Another useful list I use every day and update often, is a list of general categories of “conditions” and sins. I use it to somewhat comprehensively pray for all the living and the dead. Everyone has certain things that “resonate” with them. My list has the things that resonate with me.

Here are the main categories for the living that I have, each with several lines:

- Persecuted because of their faith
- Illness
- Grief and loss
- Personal trials – Personal History
- Personal trials - thoughts
- Mental and Spiritual illness
- Sexual & sexually related sins

5 This is St Silouan's original prayer, quoted in Archimandrite Zacharias, “The Enlargement of the Heart”.

Secular – in the church
Secular – not in the church
Priests
Monastics
Personal sins
My personal ministry

I have them listed for the Jesus prayer (or other prayers, see below – the one I usually use is the first listed, because it is an adaptation of my favorite verse, John17:3) in the morning.

“Lord, have mercy on ... and grant that they may know Thee, the only True God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent.”

Or:

“Lord, have mercy on ... and grant that they may know come to know Thee, by the Holy Spirit.”

Or:

“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on ...”

Or:

“Lord have mercy on ...”

Here is the complete (at this moment, since I add things occasionally) list of “categories” of the reposed I pray for:

1. All who died today.
2. All within their 40 days.
3. All who died suddenly.
4. All who died violently.
5. All who died unprepared.
6. All who died of overdose
7. All who died while intoxicated.
8. All who died in despair.
9. All who died in bitterness.
10. All who died in anger.
11. All who died w/o asking forgiveness of those they wronged.
12. All who did not have a burial.
13. All whose family do not pray for them.
14. All who died w/o repentance.
15. All who died by suicide.
16. All who died estranged from the church.
17. All who died unbaptized.
18. All who died throughout the ages.

For this list., I generally just say the Jesus prayer for each category (e.g. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on *all who died by suicide*”, or something like this: “Lord Jesus Christ, grant rest to the souls of Thy servants: *all who died in anger*”.

The things that resonate with me and you may be different. Use this list as your own, or make a different list, but, without fail, make a list! Make it small in the beginning and increase it as more things resonate with you. Look to your own experience for the things that resonate. Do you know someone who committed suicide, or is mentally ill, or in prison, or a drug addict? Perhaps you have personally experienced something and know how terrible it is.

The world is full of terrible things, but also the beautiful One, Who abides in our hearts. We must pray about these

terrible things, and in so doing, we emulate the Beautiful One. You may find my list at <http://www.orthodox.net/trebnic/general-categories-for-personal-prayer.pdf> OR <http://www.orthodox.net/trebnic/general-categories-for-personal-prayer.doc>

Resources:

To pray for someone more diligently:

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General prayer of St Paisios for others:

<http://orthodox.net/trebnic/of-elder-paisios-for-the-whole-world.html>

<http://orthodox.net/trebnic/of-elder-paisios-for-the-whole-world.doc>

<http://orthodox.net/trebnic/of-elder-paisios-for-the-whole-world.pdf>

Prayer for others, based on the prayer of St Silouan

<http://www.orthodox.net/trebnic/prayer-for-all-peoples-of-the-world-according-to-the-model-of-the-prayer-of-saint-silouan-of-mount-athos.doc>

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We would love to hear from you with comments and questions.

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