

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and ever-living God, you hate nothing you have made, and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and honest hearts, so that, truly repenting of our sins, we may receive from you, the God of all mercy, full pardon and forgiveness through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Because of the coming Day of the LORD, the prophet Joel calls the people to a community lament. The repentant community reminds God of his gracious character and asks God to spare the people, lest the nations doubt God's power to save.

¹Blow the trumpet in Zion;
 sound the alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
 for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near—
²a day of darkness and gloom,
 a day of clouds and thick darkness!
Like blackness spread upon the mountains
 a great and powerful army comes;
their like has never been from of old,
 nor will be again after them
 in ages to come.

¹²Yet even now, says the LORD,
 return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
 ¹³rend your hearts and not your clothing.
Return to the LORD, your God,
 for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
 and relents from punishing.
¹⁴Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
 and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering
 for the LORD, your God?

¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion;

sanctify a fast;

call a solemn assembly;

¹⁶gather the people.

Sanctify the congregation;

assemble the aged;

gather the children,

even infants at the breast.

Let the bridegroom leave his room,

and the bride her canopy.

¹⁷Between the vestibule and the altar

let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep.

Let them say, “Spare your people, O LORD,

and do not make your heritage a mockery,

a byword among the nations.

Why should it be said among the peoples,

‘Where is their God?’ ”

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:20b--6:10

The ministry of the gospel endures many challenges and hardships. Through this ministry, God’s reconciling activity in the death of Christ reaches into the depths of our lives to bring us into a right relationship with God. In this way, God accepts us into the reality of divine salvation.

^{20b}We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{6:1}As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ²For he says,

“At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! ³We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of

righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commends almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, but emphasizes that spiritual devotion must not be done for show.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

²“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁶“And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Prayers of Intercession

Drawn close to the heart of God, we offer these prayers for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

Renew your church, O God. When we have drifted from our call to proclaim repentance and to guide your people toward justice, lead us back to you. Encourage believers who hold the church's doors open to those who have felt excluded. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Renew your creation, O God. Transform parched places into watered gardens and preserve every creature that awaits the arrival of spring. Turn each of us from practices of environmental exploitation to become responsible stewards of all you have made. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Renew our civic life, O God. Teach those in authority to advocate for the liberation of all who are oppressed and grant them courage to make difficult decisions. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Renew our lives, O God. Spare your people from diseases of the body, mind, or spirit and send healing to those overcome by illness or grief (*especially*). Restore to us the joy of your salvation. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Renew this congregation, O God. During these forty days of Lent, confirm our sense of mission and expand our imagination for ministry. Deepen our faith, increase our love, and draw us into your unfolding work of healing and restoration. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Let us pray for our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, our Bishops Elizabeth and Michael, the Erie Lutheran Parish, our rostered leaders, the people of St. John's, and our mission and ministry. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

We thank you for your joy that fills us, your comfort for those struggling with grief and despair, your nurturing of those who are lonely or isolated, and your sustaining of those who are hurting in body or spirit: Gayle Matthis, Joan Wheeler, DustiRose Richards, Laurie Sanders, Lynn Schrimper, Jeff LaLonde, Robert Schlaufman, Kellie Montifiori, Ryan Meyers, Sami D., Audrey Boam, Richard D., Joe Crilley, Jamey Price, Ken Marshall, Judy Crissman, Amanda VanLoon, Sharon Hetrick and Michelle Malone; For effective treatments with minimal side effects for those undergoing treatment of cancer including Bishop Michael Lozano, Phyllis Seggi, Pastor Ken Larson, Denny Sanders, Lee S., Janie G., Karen B., Norm S., Tony Paggio, Ellen Stevens, Vicki Hanson, Edward Scarpitti, Beaty Emch, Ruth Stiles, Barb Clark, Kris Taylor, Admiral Brent Scott, Gerrie Sellers, Katrina, John Honecker, Becky, and Nicole C.; For those suffering from anxiety and depression; For the newly pregnant and those struggling with infertility and loss; For those who find themselves unemployed, underemployed, or malemployed. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

For what else do the People of St. John's pray? (*other petitions can be added here*).
Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

As we mark ashes on our foreheads, we give you praise, O God, for all the saints who died and yet are alive with you (*especially John Wesley and Charles Wesley, whom we commemorate today*). Receive us with them into your eternal embrace. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Accept the prayers we bring, O God, on behalf of a world in need, for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Amen.