

Prayer for others.

The essential skill

Prayer for others is the most critical skill 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 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 poor, weak creatures 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 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.

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.

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

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.

1. 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. Since they change rather often, I read them from my phone most of the time.

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.

2. 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 a prayer rope or so of the Jesus prayer, 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.

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 far from 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.²

2 Taken from : http://www.orthodox.net/full-voice/prison-ministry-letters_2011-03-04+how-to-think-about-personal-

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:³ 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].

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

<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>

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.

[intercessory-prayer-praying-for-enemies-the-jesus-prayer.doc](http://orthodox.net/trebnic/of-elder-paisios-for-the-whole-world.html)

- 3 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>

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.*⁴

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

<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>

<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.pdf>

<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.html>

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.”

Priest Seraphim Holland [St Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, McKinney, Texas](#)

This article is at:

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

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

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

Blog posts & local parish news are posted to our email list. Go to here: <http://groups.google.com/group/saint-nicholas-orthodox-church> to join.

Use this for any edifying reason, but please give credit, and include the URL of the article. This content belongs to the author. We would love to hear from you with comments! (seraphim@orthodox.net)

⁴This is St Silouan's original prayer, quoted in Archimandrite Zacharias, “The Enlargement of the Heart”.