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# Penitential prayers

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## Penitential Prayers

Collected by Egil Grislis

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*For help in temptation*

Lord, for tomorrow and its needs  
I do not pray,  
Keep me, my God, from stain of sin  
Just for today,  
Let me both diligently work,  
And duly pray.  
Let me be kind in word and deed,  
Just for today.  
Let me be slow to do my will,  
Prompt to obey.  
Sustain my courage to obey your will,  
Just for today.  
For tomorrow and its needs  
I do not pray,  
For I trust in your future,  
And believe in your grace.<sup>1</sup>

*For delivery from sin*

God in heaven,  
You have helped my life to grow like a tree,  
Now something has happened,  
Satan, like a bird,  
Has carried in one twig of his own choosing after another.  
Before I knew it,  
He has built a dwelling place.  
Tonight, my Father,  
I am throwing out both,  
The Bird and the nest.<sup>2</sup>

*For the experience of forgiveness*

O Thou before whose eyes  
 All human hearts lie bare and open,  
 Forbid that I should seek to hide from Thee  
 Anything that I have this day done or thought or imagined,  
 That must forever be hidden from the knowledge of others,  
 That let me now openly acknowledge in Thy presence.  
 What no proper shame kept me from committing,  
 That let no false shame keep me from confessing.<sup>3</sup>

*For compassion of Christ's suffering*

O Thou whose eternal love for us weak and struggling people,  
 Was most perfectly shown forth.  
 In the blessed life and death of Jesus Christ our Lord,  
 Enable me now so to meditate upon my Lord's passion that,  
 Having fellowship with Him in His sorrow,  
 I may also learn the secret of His strength and peace.

I remember Gethsemane:  
 I remember how Judas betrayed Him,  
 I remember how Peter denied him,  
 I remember how *they all forsook Him and fled*,  
 I remember the scourging,  
 I remember the crown of thorns,  
 I remember how they spat upon Him,  
 I remember how they smote Him on the head with a reed,  
 I remember His pierced hands and feet,  
 I remember His agony on the Cross,  
 I remember His thirst,  
 I remember how He cried,  
*My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken me?*

Grant, O most gracious God,  
 That I who kneel before Thee,  
 May be embraced in the great company of those,  
 To whom life and salvation have come through the cross of Christ.  
 Let the redeeming power,  
 That has flowed from His suffering through so many generations,  
 Flow now into my soul,

Here let me find forgiveness of sin,  
Here let me learn to share with Christ,  
The burden of the suffering of the world.<sup>4</sup>

*For gratitude of the suffering of Christ*

O Lord, let me rest the ladder of gratitude against Thy cross,  
And, mounting, kiss Thy feet.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus now has many lovers of his celestial kingdom,  
But few bearers of His Cross.  
He has many who are desirous of consolation,  
But few of tribulation.  
He finds many companions at His table,  
But few of His abstinence.  
All desire to rejoice with Him,  
Few wish to endure anything for Him.  
Many follow Jesus to the breaking of bread,  
But few to the drinking of the cup of His Passion.  
Many reverence His miracles,  
Few follow the shame of His Cross.<sup>6</sup>

*For faithful living*

O Lord, support us all the day long of this troublesome life  
Until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes,  
And the busy world is hushes,  
And the fever of life is over,  
And our work is done.  
Then in Thy mercy grant us a safe lodging  
And a holy rest, and peace at the last.<sup>7</sup>

Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties,  
The grace to ask for what Thou would have us do,  
That the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices,  
And that in Thy light we may see light,  
And in Thy straight path may not stumble,  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,<sup>8</sup>

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
The courage to change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.<sup>9</sup>

Make us worthy, Lord,  
 To serve our fellow human beings,  
 Throughout the world who live and die,  
 In poverty and hunger,  
 Give peace and joy.<sup>10</sup>

*For resisting Satan*

Be off, Satan, from this door and from these four walls,  
 This is no place for you; there is nothing for you to do here,  
 This is the place for Peter and Paul and the holy Gospel,  
 And this is where I mean to be, now that my worship is done.<sup>11</sup>

*For continued service*

Teach us, good Lord, to serve Thee as Thou deservest,  
 To give and not to count the cost,  
 To fight and not to heed the wounds,  
 To toil and not to seek for rest,  
 To labour and to ask for no reward,  
 Save that of knowing that we do Thy will,  
 Through Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>12</sup>  
 As the hand is made for holding and the eye for seeing,  
 Thou hast fashioned me for joy.  
 Share with me the vision that I shall find it everywhere:  
 In the wild violet's beauty,  
 In the lark's melody,  
 In the face of a steadfast man,  
 In a child's smile,  
 In a mother's love  
 In the purity of Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace,  
 Where there is hatred, let me sow love,  
 Where there is injury, pardon,  
 Where there is discord, union,  
 Where there is doubt, faith,  
 Where there is despair, hope,  
 Where there is darkness, light,  
 Where there is sadness, joy.  
 Grant that we may not so much seek

To be consoled, as to console,  
To be understood, as to understand,  
To be loved, as to love.  
For it is in giving, that we receive,  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.<sup>14</sup>

*For understanding oneself*

O God, what would we be if You were to forsake us?  
What can we do if You withdraw your hand?  
What can we know if you did not enlighten?  
How quickly the educated become infants,  
The prudent, simple, and the wise, fools!  
How terrifying You are in all your works and judgments!  
Let us walk in the light while we have light,  
So that we may not be caught in darkness.  
Many renounce their faith,  
And become careless and weary in Your grace.  
They are deceived by Satan into thinking they know everything,  
And have no need,  
They feel satisfied,  
And become slothful and ungrateful and are soon ruined.  
Therefore help us to remain in the fervor of faith,  
That we may daily increase in it through Jesus Christ,  
Our real and only helper.<sup>15</sup>

*For continuous protection*

Dear Jesus,  
As a hen covers her chicks with her wings to keep them safe,  
Do Thou this dark night protect us under Your golden wings!<sup>16</sup>

*For continued faithfulness*

Bestow on me, o Lord, a genial spirit and unwearied forbearance,  
A mild, loving, patient heart, kindly looks,  
Pleasant, cordial speech and manners in the conversations of daily life,  
That I may give offence to none,  
But as much as in me lies, live in charity with all men and women.<sup>17</sup>

*For understood presence of Christ*

Save us while walking,  
 And defend us while sleeping,  
 That when we awake,  
 We may watch with Christ,  
 And when we sleep,  
 We may rest in peace.<sup>18</sup>

O Lord, who art as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land,  
 Who beholdest Thy weak creatures,  
 Weary of labour,  
 Weary of pleasure,  
 Weary of hope deferred,  
 Weary of self,  
 In Thine Abundant compassion and unutterable tenderness,  
 Bring us unto Thy rest.<sup>19</sup>

*For present help*

Like an ant on a stick both ends of which are burning,  
 I go to and fro without knowing what to do,  
 And in great despair,  
 Like the inescapable shadow which follows me,  
 The dead weight of sin haunts me:  
 Graciously look upon me –  
 Thy love is my refuge.<sup>20</sup>

*For a look in the mirror*

Lord, Thou knowest that I know myself,  
 I know that I am getting older,  
 And some day I will be old.  
 Keep me from getting talkative,  
 And particularly from that fatal habit  
 Of thinking I must say something,  
 I must say something on every subject and on every occasion.  
 Release me from craving to try to strengthen out  
 Everybody's affairs.  
 Keep my mind from the recital of endless details –  
 Give me wings to get to the point.  
 I ask for grace enough to listen to the tales of other's pains.

Help me to endure them with patience.  
 But seal my lips on my own aches and pains –  
 They are increasing,  
 And my love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter  
 As years go by.  
 Teach me the glorious lesson  
 That occasionally it is possible  
 That I may be mistaken.  
 Keep me reasonably sweet;  
 I do not want to be a saint –  
 Some of them are so hard to live with –  
 But a sour old person is  
 The crowning work of the devil.<sup>21</sup>

*For the future of Thy church*

O great Lord of the harvest,  
 Send forth, we beseech Thee,  
 Labourers into the harvests of the world,  
 That the grain which is even now ripe,  
 May not fall and perish through our neglect.  
 Pour forth the sanctifying Spirit on our fellow Christians,  
 And Thy converting grace to all who are faint in heart,  
 Unsteady in faith and fascinated by denial.  
 Raise up, we pray Thee, a devout ordained and lay ministry,  
 That all Thy people may be knit together in one body,  
 Through Him who died and rose again for us all,  
 The same Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>22</sup>

May the Almighty and merciful Lord,  
 The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
 Bless and preserve us. Amen.

## Notes

- 1 *Saint Augustine's Prayer Book*. New York: Holy Cross Publications, 1949), with changes, p. 17.
- 2 Desmond Tutu, *An African Prayer Book*. (New York: Doubleday, 1995), p. 44.
- 3 John Baillie, *A Diary of Private Prayer* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), p. 23.



- 4 Baillie, *A Diary*, p. 71.
- 5 George Appleton, *The Oxford Book Of Prayer* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), p. 143.
- 6 Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., *A Companion of Prayer for Daily Living* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1978). Prayer by Thomas a Kempis, p. 68.
- 7 Donald Aldrich, *The Golden Book of Prayer* (New York: Gosset and Dunlap, 1941), prayer by John Henry Cardinal Newman, p. 111.
- 8 Shepherd, *A Companion*, prayer by William Bright, p. 32.
- 9 Prayer attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr.
- 10 Thomas McNally and William G. Stolly, eds., *Lord, Hear Our Prayer* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1978), prayer by Mother Teresa of Calcutta, p. 48.
- 11 F. Forrest Church and Terence J. Mulry, eds., *Earliest Christian Prayer* (New York: Macmillan, 1980), prayer from Euchologium, p. 74.
- 12 Shepherd, *A Companion*, prayer by Saint Ignatius Loyola, p. 9.
- 13 Appleton, *The Oxford Book*, Gaelic Prayer, p. 138.
- 14 Shepherd, *A Companio*, prayer attributed to St. Francis, p. 9.
- 15 Herbert F. Brokering, ed., *Luther's Prayers* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1967), pp. 67, 68.
- 16 Appleton, *The Oxford Book of Prayers*, "A Prayer from India," p. 27.
- 17 *Little Book of Prayers* (Mount Vernon, NY: Peter Pauper Press, 1960), prayer by Johann Arndt, p. 12.
- 18 Appleton, *The Oxford Book of Prayers*, Antiphon of Compline, p. 102.
- 19 *Little Book of Prayers*, prayer by Christina Rosetti, p. 16.
- 20 Appleton, *The Oxford Book of Prayers*, "A Prayer from India," p. 27.
- 21 *Little Book of Prayers*, prayer by an Aging Church Administrator, pp. 17, 18.
- 22 *St. Augustine's Prayer Book*, prayer for Missions, revised, pp. 35, 36.