

CATHOLIC CHURCH OF EASTERN MONTANA DIOCESE OF GREAT FALLS-BILLINGS

How we Catholics Worship: What we do and why we do it. Prayer of the Faithful/General Intercessions #12

The Prayer of the Faithful, also known as the General Intercessions, in our liturgy has the potential to make a holy, welcoming, and inclusive people. Prayer as hospitality and mercy calls believers to heal the wounded and alienated. The Gospel impels faith communities to look inward and outward and to reach beyond limited perceptions of who merits the good news and who are welcome: to reach out to all those who are marginalized, for example: gays and lesbians, divorced and separated persons, persons with disabilities, the stranger among us, the abandoned, and the homeless. Becoming, welcoming, and inclusivity are the hallmarks of the Christian community's home between the present and the promised future. Becoming, welcoming, and inclusivity are the characteristics of the *now and not yet* of the kingdom. Becoming, welcoming, and inclusivity are rooted in and spring from hospitality. Jesus' ministry was first about a hospitality that honored the dignity of all. Can Christian communities become anything less than hospitable, welcoming, and inclusive? It is only from this place of welcoming that faith can do justice. An inclusive community more clearly points to the obligations of a priestly people to work for social justice and recaptures the practice of a journey through the faith with another sojourner.

In crafting the weekly Prayers of the Faithful, faith communities should examine three questions of inclusion: 1) Are we the people God calls us to be? 2) Who is not at

the Table? 3) Does our current practice of Intercessory Prayer help the reign of God? The goal is to assist in the creation of welcoming and inclusive prayers for the transformation of the community in becoming a holy people: a church whose faith does justice.

The General Intercessions, part of the Liturgy of the Word, are closely linked to the Lectionary readings of the day. Thus, the church is challenged by the Gospel to go beyond its own limits of inclusion and justice-making.

Today as yesterday a cultural and religious crisis of sinfulness pervades the world and injustice is experienced throughout. As a "feel good" society we in the West never seem to want to acknowledge or talk about the other side of the "good life," the painful things. However, the individual members of the Body of Christ must ask the tough questions of our culture and our religious shortcomings. How do I contribute to injustice in the world by my decisions? How is sin active in my own life? Am I aware that many decisions I make are moral decisions? How have my preconceived ideas about others prevented me from seeing, knowing, and loving them? Who is missing from our assembly? Who have we excluded from the Table? These questions have the power to open the meaning of sin, especially exclusion, to the community so that not only can sin begin to be thought of differently, but also so that the

community can begin to form their prayers differently. Faith that does justice requires a direct correspondence between the public worship of the Church and the prayerful consciousness of the local *ecclesia*. With consciousness raised we become more attentive and intentionally welcoming and inclusive.

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* states that the liturgy is the “summit” toward which the Christian life is directed as well as the “fount” from which that life flows. The relationship between liturgy and life is the profound and incarnate expression of our faith. Liturgy is not where we go to avoid the world, retreat from the mundane, or recoil from life. Liturgy is where we bring our shattered dreams of crushed lives, our lamentations of loss, our sorrows, and the pain of a broken world. Liturgy is where we also bring our joys and hopes knowing that all is transformed into the reign of God through the Paschal Mystery. The General Intercessions, which after Vatican Council II punctuate the Service of the Word in every liturgy of the Church, is the place where the community connects consciously and unconsciously to the *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*. The General Intercessions clearly connect liturgy and life; this is what Fr. Karl Rahner meant by the liturgy of the world. In the General Intercessions the community exercises its priestly role to name what we have done, what we have failed to do, and what God has done for us. It is in the General Intercessions that our lives are shared with the community of all believers present and far away, and far removed.

When we name someone, we give them a place in our consciousness. Conversely, to fail to name someone makes them invisible, in other words, not present to us. When we name something, we recognize its importance. To fail to name a thing evil or sin makes it more ugly, more rampant, and more deadly. To name someone in liturgy is to give them a place in our assembly and a claim to our care and concern. To name something evil or sin

gives us an opportunity for conversion.

Basically, the intercessions are a litany. What makes a litany different than other prayer is rhythm, repetition, flow, and chant. The assembly might chant its part led by a Cantor in our Sunday worship. Intercession is why we are obliged to keep our eyes open and see who we need to lift up in our prayer. We do not pray for what we think God should do or what is supposed to happen. It is okay to repeat for several Sundays, that is what litanies do. Let our prayer be formed by the Scripture readings for the day, what is happening in the world, and for who is not present in our faith community.

If we work at it, our intercessory prayer can become a strong vibrant energetic prayer which will build a welcoming and inclusive community where faith does justice.