A Life of Prayer, A Life of Peace.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, rejoice. Let your moderation be Recourse unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in Everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the grace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians IV. 4, 5, 6

St. Paul, in these words, bids the Christians in Phillippe to carry all their sorrows and fears to the throne of Christ. He specially bids them remember the nearness of our Lord, and the freedom we may use in speaking with Him. And in so doing he has taught us a great and blessed truth, needful for all now, in all ages: I mean, that a life of prayer is a life of peace. It is not in times of persecution only, but at all times, that the presence and fellowship of Christ are the peace and consolation of the Church. We are born into a world of perturbations; we carry them in our own heart. The world is the counterpart of man’s fallen nature, turbulent, restless, and distracted. Every man gives in his contribution of disquietude; and the life of most men is made up of cares and doubts, perplexities and forebodings, of fruitless regrets for follies past, and of exaggerated thoughts of trials yet to come. All men who live without God in the world these things press sorely. They fret and wear them without alleviation. This is the “sorrow of the world” that “worketh death.” It is a bitter, and embittering disquiet of heart. The plague of evil thoughts, inordinate cravings, disappointments and losses, vain hopes and wearing fears, these are the portion of us all. Even religious people have their yoke of cares. But there is this difference between them and others; they
know where to carry the recital of their troubles, where to lay down their burden, and who will bear their griefs and take away their sorrows. St. Paul here tells us, first of all, that there is One, ever near us, who can fulfil (sic) all our desire, and over-rule all things on our behalf. “The Lord is at hand.” How soon He may reveal Himself in person we know not; but soon or late, it is certain that although unseen, He is Ever near us. His presence departed not from the Church, where He ascended into heaven. He is withdrawn from the eyes of our flesh; but in the sight of our hearts He is always visible. Though He be at the right hand of God yet he is in the Church, and in our secret chamber. Though He is the Lord of heaven and earth, yet he is ever in the midst of us, watching and guiding, disposing all things for the perfection of his kingdom, and, in it, of each one of us He is both able and willing to fulfil (sic) all of our hearts desires, and nothing is hid from His sight. He knows all, even our most unuttered thoughts, our most concealed desires; and with this assurance we might lay aside all our burdens. It might seem enough for us simply to cast all our care on Him, knowing that He careth for us, to refer ourselves to His love and wisdom, to his all comprehending knowledge of our wishes and our wants. This would be a sure and sufficient pledge against all the evils we forbode and shrink from. But there is a relief in speaking out our wishes; and even this He does not deny us.

2 Therefore, St. Paul tells us further, that we may make all our desires known unto You. We may speak with Him as a man speaks with his friend. We all know the relief as the joy of unburdening ourselves, and offering our hidden cares, even to an Earthly Companion. We seem to have laid
off a weight when we have told our sorrow. When anyone we love shares our anxiety, and divides our forebodings with us, we seem to have either only half the burden, or a twofold strength to bear it. We feel this relief all the more, in the measure in which our friend is wise and compassionate, loved by us and loves us in return. And yet there is a point beyond which we do not reveal ourselves to our fastest and nearest friend. There is something of imperfection

still in there that makes us lay bare only one side, and lay open only one chamber of our heart. There is always something still concealed, some reserved infirmity, something over which we must-needs draw a veil and silence; which we would not that any fellow-creature should discern; which we can only show to the world unseen, and to the eyes of Him “that searcheth the hearts, and trieth the reins.” But with Him, not only is it impossible to conceal, but we do not desire to hide anything from his sight. Though He is the Holy One of God, and “His eyes as a flame of fire,” so piercing and so pure, yet we do not shrink from making all known to Him: for though He be perfect in purity, He is likewise perfect in compassion. He is as pitiful as He is holy. We may come before Him, and say, “this have I done, and this have I left undone. I am sinful and unhappy, beset by temptations, harassed by myself.” We may make known the facts and particulars of our trial, its circumstances and details, and plead, as it were, against ourselves, praying to be delivered from the power of sin which still dwells in us, and draws us aside into darkness and transgression, overclouding our heart by imaginations and visions of evil.
We may say, “thou knowest what I cannot speak, and why I cannot. Thou knowest all things.” Where we are overcome by a sense of what we are, and for shame or sorrow even fear to speak at all, we may place ourselves before Him, passively, and in silence, casting ourselves down under His feet to be read, searched by His penetrating sight. Though unworthy to ask the least, yet we may make our requests known unto him by silent humiliation, and by secret appeal to His perfect knowledge. Now, this is what St. Paul bids us to do. “Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication and thanksgiving. Let your requests be made known unto God.” And the promise is, not that we shall have whatsoever we may ask, but that we shall have peace. “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through in Christ Jesus.”

We shall, indeed, always have what we ask; but if we ask in faith, we shall always have peace. Of this we shall never fail. First, because whatsoever we ask which is truly for our good, that He will give us freely. No father so much delights to give the very thing his children ask for, as Our Father in heaven. It is well-pleasing in His sight both that we should

know what to pray for as we ought, and that He should bestow the thing we ask. “Truly, truly, Amen, amen, I say unto you, that you shall ask the Father anything in my name he will give it to you.” But it is a high grace to know what things to ask in the name of Christ. Men make strange prayers to Heaven, and couple the Name at which every knee shall bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, with foolish and unreasonable prayers. Whatsoever we desire that is in harmony with t
he Eternal will, with the love of our Redeemer, and with the mind of the Holy Ghost, those things we shall without fail receive. All good things, all good, eternal and created; all blessings, grace, and truth; all the benedictions of the kingdom of God; all the promises of the Gospel, and all the pledged mercies of redemption; all these we may ask importunately, and shall assuredly receive. Even things of this life – solace and deliverance, the reversal of threatened chastisement, the restoration of blessings half withdrawn; these too, and a multitude of mercies infinite as the changes and chances of man’s life, we may lawfully desire. It may be we shall also receive these very things we ask for. At all events, we may make “our petitions requests know unto God:” leaving with Him to open and to shut His hand as He shall see best for us.

I St. John XVI.23. (7)

2 For whatsoever we ask which is not for our good, He will keep it back from us. And surely in this there is as less of love than in the granting what we desire as we ought. “What man of you that is there among you is a father of whom if his son ask for bread, will he give him a stone?” And if he not ask for poison, will he not refuse it? Will not the same love which prompts you to give a good, prompt you to keep back an evil, thing? If, in our blindness, not knowing what to ask, we pray for things which should turn in our hands to sorrow and death, will not our Father, out of His very love, deny us? In this entangled twilight state of probation, where the confines of good and ill so nearly approach, and almost seem to intermingle, there needs a keen and strong spiritual eye to discern and know the nature and properties of all things which encompass us about. They allure us, and we desire them, and
ask not knowing for what. How awful, would be
our lot, if our wishes should straightaway pass into
realities, if we were endowed with a power to bring
about all that we desire; if the inclinations of our
will were followed by fulfilment (sic) of our nasty
wishes, and sudden longings were always granted.
Such a power in an imperfect being, drawn aside,
as we are, by the solicitations of Evil from without,
and hurried away by impulses of an imperfect and
variable heart within, would be an intolerable
misery. And yet what but this would it be
if all our prayers were granted – if there were
no all-wise, all-holy One to review our im-
perfect choices, to life out the poisons, and
to keep back the sorrows which we have ignorant-
ly prayed for?
In the commonest things of this world how valuable
is the counsel of a wise and trusty friend, who
revises and checks our aims and plans. From
what unnumbered errors and falls are we
preserved by taking counsel of some tried and
discerning advisor. How, on the retrospect of
years, we see whole trains of evil consequences
lying hid behind some act we were once
vehemently bent on taking; from which we were hardly turned aside at the very moment of action.
In like manner, what a current of happy and
prosperous events has carried us along, as we
now can see since the day when some decision
was made at the guidance of another, to whose
advice we could hardly be brought, at that
time, to consent. And what but this loving
care, if it may be reverently spoken, is ever
taken for us in heaven? Our vehement, blue,
tumultuous hearts are continually sending up
their wishes and prayers on high all mingled
and infected with our earthliness. In the golden censer of our great High Priest they are purged by the living fire of His love; the Evil separates from the good, and our rash and wayward choices refined till(sic) they unite with the wisdom and will of our Eternal Father.

One day we shall bless Him, not more for what He has granted than for what He has denied. Though now we think our most needful requests are put aside, we shall then perceive the real meaning of what we asked, and the rashness of our prayer. Alas for us, if all our prayers should be given us: if the meting out and tempering of our own lot were thus left in our own house; if the window of heaven were never shut against us. He gave them their desire, and “sent leanness withal fulness (sic) into their soul.” Alas, if health, prosperity, prolonged enjoyment of the bright things of life, and freedom from sorrows and deprivations, were continued to us as long as we desire; if the wholesome sharpness of pain, bodily humiliation, the breaking up of hopes, and the overloading of our happiness were kept back as long

I Ps CV.15

(10)
as we should prescribe. Ours would be a fluid discipline of healing for sinful hearts. We should be poor physicians of our own maladies. And this is the reason why our Father in heaven uses a loving severity and sometimes confounds our wishes with the strokes of his hand. He denies us what we ask, and sends instead what we most recoil from. We ask for bright lights, and He sends us shadows; we
crave for soft things, and He sends us hardness for our portion; we pray Him to take away our anxieties, and He turns them into present sorrows; we ask for the allaying of some instant pain, and He sends us a double share; we desire to be free from chastisement, and He besets us on all sides with His correction; we beseech Him to heal your friend over whom we watch in trembling, or to give back to us one that already hangs between life and death, and he seems to read all our prayers backward, and to answer us by contradictions. Yet in all this, what is there but the order and harmony of the wisdom and the will of God? The confusion and perplexity is all our own. It is not (11) that He contradicts our will, but we are contradicting His. We cross Him, not He us. We would be reigning in His kingdom, and making His sway to follow our choice. We would be the granters of our own petitions - make our will the law of His dealings with us. But He has His own purpose in all refusals; a purpose deeper than we can reach. It was an apostle and a martyr that said, “For this thing, I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from us; and He said, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my power is made perfect in weakness." And He who gave that answer was even the same who in the days of His flesh with a strong cry and tears offered up supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard for his reverence in that he feared;” for though He were a Son, And whereas He was the Son of God, yet learned His obedience by the things which he suffered.”
There was a time where He, too, went apart from His disciples a Stone’s Cast, “and fell on His face, and praying, and saying My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” and even “the third time He prayed, saying the same words.” And yet

1 Heb. V.7.8  2 St. Matt XXVI 3q-44.

(12) the cup did not pass from Him; the Father’s was not so. Nevertheless, “there appeared an 2Ángel unto 1 Him from Heaven, strengthening Him.”

3 But besides this, we know certainly that if He refuse us anything, it is only to give us something better. It may be we asked amiss. We asked for something that would thwart His higher purposes of Mercy to us. We would have, it may be, the fair things of this life; but He has in store for us better things in His kingdom. You desire to be as others, to have what they have, enjoy what they enjoy: but He has chosen you, perhaps, to be nearer to Himself; to sit at his feet and listen, while others go abroad into the mid-stream of life. For a time it may seem to be sadness and a cross; and you are not able to read its meaning, till some better thing begins to shadow itself out before your inward sight; and you see that what you would have chosen for yourselves would have been a less blessing, instead of a greater, a transitory, instead of an abiding consolation. Sometimes He upbraids our narrowness of heart by His refusals – it may be that we have not
asked enough; that we have asked scantily, when He was ready to give largely. When Solomon asked for wisdom, the Lord gave him also “riches, and wealth, and Hosana glory.”

If we ask the great things of His kingdom, He will add unto us the less. If we ask of Him life eternal, He will provide for the life that now is. “Be not therefore solicitous take no thought for to-morrow.” “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” But seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Ask not for the right hand or the left hand in His kingdom, but for a place, though it be the lowest place, beneath the feet of His Elect. Ask of Him a clean heart, that you may see God, that you may trace His hand in all the ways of life; and He will give you not only things of this life but also your throne and crown in the manifestation of the Sons of God.

4 For, lastly, though He should seem to refuse all we ask, He will not refuse to give unto us Himself. The more you converse with God, the more He will manifest Himself to you. The very act of prayer will make you familiar with His presence. Though He be pleased to take from you, one by one, as from his servant Job, all things you cleave to; yet as all other things are withdrawn, He will compass you about with a more sensible presence of His love. Even as at the last, when there was nothing more to be taken

3 St. Luke XXI. 43.

1 2 Chron I. 12.
away from the man of many sufferings, 
the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind 
so from the darkness and perplexity of His 
providence there come forth, to those whom 
God chastens, such tokens of His presence, 
that they are constrained to say, “I have 
heard\(^2\) of Thee. With the hearing of the Ear;” 
Such was all my past knowledge hearsay 
and a dream; “but now mine my eye seeth 
Thee.” Now all is clear; all stands out 
before me in full outline and completeness. 
So shall it be with those that pray without 
fainting. By habitual converse with God, 
they are drawn within the veil through which 
His providence controls our mortal life. They 
rise above it; and their “life is hid with 
Christ in God.”\(^1\) their “conversation is in Heaven.”\(^2\) 
They begin to see into the hidden meaning of His 
government over the church, and of His dealing

I Job XII.5. \(^1\)Col III.3 \(^2\)Phil III.20

(15)

with themselves; into the secret of the secret, 
whereby “to principalities in powers in \(^\text{the heavenly}
^\text{places is \text{toward} \text{by the Church the manifest wisdom of God.”}^3\) 
Whatever befalls them, they 
know to be better than they could choose; 
the best that can be chosen. I have learned 
in whatever state I am, therewith to be content. 
I know both how to be \text{abased} brought low, and, I know 
how to abound” Every where and in all things 
I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, 
both to abound and to suffer need. I can do 
all things through Christ which in Him who strengtheneth 
me.”\(^4\) To those who are His, all things 
are not only easy to be borne, but even 
to be gladly chosen. All events and changes 
are the will of God and Christ Jesus. They are
also the will of those who have fellowship
with Christ; and through Him with God
the Father. Their will is united to that will
which moves heaven and earth, which gives
laws to angels, and rules the courses of
the world. It is a wonderful give of God to man,
of which we who know so little must needs speak
little. To be at the centre of that motion, where is
everlasting rest; to be sheltered in the peace of God; even
now to dwell in Heaven where all hearts are stayed

3 Ephes. III.10 4Phil.V.11-13

and all hopes fulfilled. “Though shalt keep
him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed
on Thee.” “Thou wilt keep peace; peace, because we
have hope in Thee.”

1 Isaiah XXVI.3.

[Transcription developed by Monica Oliver and Andra Langoussis]