



**St. Andrew's By-the-Sea**  
*The Episcopal Church*  
*in Destin, Florida*

“Thy will be done”  
Easter 6B – May 5, 2024  
John 15:9-17

A Homily by The Rev'd Jo P. Popham

When we pray together the prayer of consecration later this morning, at the end we will say “through Jesus Christ our great High Priest.” And our post-communion prayer we will end with “Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart; through Christ our Lord.” Indeed all prayer must be said in the name of Christ. He is the intercessor for us. He takes our prayers to God. We can never pray for things that we know Christ Jesus would disapprove. We cannot pray in the name of the one who is pure love for vengeance against our enemies, for someone or something to be hurt to fulfill our prayer, nor can we turn prayer into something to realize our own ambitions at the expense of others. When we pray “thy will be done” we need to realize that we do not know better than God. Rather than praying for things that we wish for, mightn't it be better to pray for us to accept what God wills for us? When we pray for something to happen, we need to ask ourselves, is this for my own good or for the good of all? Whatever God sends us in his perfect wisdom and infinite love. So we take to God our desires and petitions, and pray for God's will to be done.

We must believe in the power of prayer, that the love of God can and does affect us in this world. So what about the efficacy of prayer? There have been many experiments about influencing things by thought – dare I say prayer – to the world of science. For centuries doctors and lawyers, and scientists and clergy all have united to try to prove the efficacy of prayer by double-blind clinical trials and triple-blind studies. I am sure that we are all familiar with studies that appear to prove that prayer does work. But my favorite Christian apologist C. S. Lewis insisted that there is no proof that when one prays for something and that thing happens, that the prayer is what made it happen.” Whether prayers are answered or not is not of so much importance as is the revelation of God that comes from prayer, Lewis would say to us. But we 21<sup>st</sup> century folk have this need to know why, so we gather data and categorize and form focus groups to prove the efficacy of prayer. Perhaps the most interesting of recent studies on healing and prayer has had extraordinary results. Research has shown that not only does prayer work to

extend life and effect healing, even more surprisingly, praying for the well-being and full recovery of patients in the hospital from 1990 to 1996 showed fewer deaths and more rapid healing. The twist in this study was that the praying was done in the year 2000. There were 4000 people in the study, but they did not know that there was a study nor did the hospital staff. This “praying for yesterday” experiment was meant as a spoof, yet it shows, I believe, that God does not live in our time. And we should never underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit. Nor can we deny that our lives are united to God through prayer. We have access to God through God’s son Jesus, the Christ who taught us to pray and who sent us the Holy Spirit so that he might always be with us.

Jesus chose us to be members of the family of God, as he did for all people. And we can and must take everything to God – in prayer. But then we must accept God’s answer. The more we love God, the easier it will be to do that.

Throughout service today, I pray that what we say with our lips and in our hearts NOT be simply a formality, not merely routine and conventional repetition of a form of words. Yes, our *Book of Common Prayer* lays out some beautiful prayers that we repeat often, but let us pay attention to what we are saying so that our words may be prayers of our hearts. Clergy often change up the prayers not just to make them new and fresh, though that is true, but mainly so that we are not praying simply by wrought. Doing the work of the people, which is what liturgy actually means, should be fresh, even when the prayers are laid out for us in our prayer book. The Prayers of the People are in the BCP in many forms, but we often use one prayer for a whole season of the church calendar. But, today, we will do the Prayers of the People in song; when we sing we pray twice.

If we are honest we are all standing in the need of prayer. So let us end this sermon together with a hymn from *Lift Every Voice and Sing*....

### **Standin’ in the need of prayer**

*Refrain:*

It’s me (It’s me), It’s me, O Lord,  
Standin’ in the need of prayer;  
It’s me (It’s me), It’s me, O Lord,  
Standin’ in the need of prayer.

Not my brother, not my sister  
But it's me, O Lord  
Standin' in the need of prayer.  
Not my brother, not my sister  
But it's me, O Lord  
Standin' in the need of prayer. *Refrain.*

Not the preacher, not the deacon,  
But it's me, O Lord,  
Standin' in the need of prayer.  
Not the preacher, not the deacon,  
But it's me, O Lord  
Standin' in the need of prayer. *Refrain.*

Not my mother, not my father  
But it's me, O Lord  
Standin' in the need of prayer.  
Not my mother, not my father  
But it's me, O Lord  
Standin' in the need of prayer. *Refrain.*

Not the stranger or my neighbor  
But it's me, O Lord  
Standin' in the need of prayer.  
Not the stranger or my neighbor  
But it's me, O Lord  
Standin' in the need of prayer. *Refrain.*

*LEVAS, # 177, Words: Traditional*

Lord, may it be so. **Amen.**