

Pray to Live and Live to Praise

September 23, 2007

The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know. Pray especially for leaders. 1 Timothy 2:1 (The Message)

Ana, today is the day of your baptism.
Today you become part of a people
who pray to live and who live to praise.
Both practices will set you apart from many in your world;
both practices will also connect you to many.

Prayer will connect you with God, with the compassionate heart of the universe.
In ordinary times, you can pray before you eat, giving thanks for food, for life.
You can pray before you go to sleep, bringing before God the events of the day,
and the people you care about for blessing.
You can join with others on Sundays at worship, praying as a people for the world.
Those are some of the ordinary moments of prayer that will
nurture an awareness of One beyond you who loves you and cares about all creation.
You are only little today
and we all want to love and protect you from hurt or hardship
yet we know there will be those times in your life also.
There will be times when it will seem that God is far away.
There will be times when it will seem that God doesn't care.
Those are also times to pray, Ana.
You will learn that prayer doesn't have to be polite,
that we don't have to be on our best behaviour before God.
For God is big – big enough to hear our cries of hurt and bewilderment,
big enough to take our tears and torment.
God's heart, you will come to know, breaks when there is suffering.
And, as much as you will struggle with questions of "why"
when you pray, you will experience the presence
of One who knows you intimately and loves you and all creation.
Your ideas about God will change and grow as you do, Ana,
but the love and compassion of God will remain.
Just as now, you trust your mother and father,
in this way, they are teaching you to trust God, mother and father of all.

So prayer connects you with God, Ana.
It also connects you with all of the people who pray,
and all the people who have ever prayed.
Today, we gather as a people of prayer.
We come because we meet God here, consciously, deliberately, joyfully.
We know that there are millions of other Christians
and millions of other faiths
who come together to pray to God, even as we do.
Together we weave a tapestry of prayer around this earth,
with our prayers for peace and justice,
with our prayers of love and compassion,
with our prayers of hope.

It is a beautiful and life-affirming practice of faith.
And you are part of that in your own way, with your own voice, now.
No doubt you will have friends who wonder why
you pray alone and with us at church.
Remember you are part of both an ancient and a contemporary Way
that we follow because of Jesus.
We pray to live.

We pray to live and we live to praise.
Your life, our lives, the life of our planet, is a gift.
The life of Jesus, the light of the world, is a gift.
How can we keep from singing?
And so we praise God
from whom all blessings flow.
We praise with our laughter, with our song.
We praise with instruments and with rich silence.
We praise the God who made this whole universe –
the far-flung stars and planets and whole galaxies,
the oceans and forests and plains,
the great whales and elephants,
and the smallest cricket and frog who sing.
We praise the God who showed us love very concretely
in the person, Jesus,
who loved and laughed with all kinds of people,
who wept in sorrow and healed with compassion
and challenged the powers that stole life,
and offered his very life for love of the world.
We praise the God who gave people the power of love
that formed the first church,
not a building but a people with a song to sing –
a song of love and joy and adoration.
We pray to live because we need God's hand in our lives, in our world...
and we live to pray because God is awesome and joy-giving
and our hearts are glad.

So welcome, little Ana, to the waters of baptism.
Welcome to this people of faith who pray and praise.
Welcome to an ancient tradition, an ancient practice with many teachers
and to a church that seeks to serve today's complex world.
We welcome you to be part of all that we do
and to share your gifts, your prayers, your praise
with us, with the whole people of faith, with God,
as together, we weave our prayers
and as we sing and dance our praise.

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