

THE PRAYERS OF CHRIST'S SAINTS

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)

“Golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.”
—Revelation 5:8

THERE exists not a more undoubted evidence of a renewed nature than prayer. The absence of it is the unmistakable evidence of *death*, its existence a palpable¹ and positive evidence of *life*. Prayer is the most vital, spiritual, and pure emanation² of the indwelling of the Spirit in the soul.

If, in a case of suspended animation,³ we marked the slightest symptom of life—the gentlest heaving of the heart, the faintest moisture breathed upon the surface of a mirror—we should certainly hail it as proof of the existence of the vital principle. We would not ask for strong spasmodic⁴ action and postpone all efforts to rouse the dormant pulse before we pronounced the individual alive. We would be satisfied that the spark still glowed, and this would reassure our hope and animate our labor. Prayer is the spiritual life of the renewed soul.

There may be the absence of profound religious knowledge, great depth of Christian experience, fiery zeal, and gigantic energy. Nevertheless, if it is said of one thus apparently dormant, “Behold he prays!”; if in the secret walk, all deeply veiled from human eye, there is fellowship with God, communion with the Invisible, there is life—life divine, life spiritual, life eternal. To change the figure, here is a plant of righteousness growing in a corrupt soil; here is a flower of holiness blooming and exhaling amid sin, corruption, and death! Surely, this cannot be indigenous to our fallen humanity, but must be a seedling, a germ, a graft from the paradise of God. Among the most precious things of God is this: the principle and spirit, the power and sweetness of prayer.

¹ **palpable** – easily observed.

² **emanation** – something that issues from a source.

³ **suspended animation** – a temporary cessation of vital functions with loss of consciousness resembling death.

⁴ **spasmodic** – sudden muscle contraction or twitches.

Begirt with His ephod⁷ and wearing His breastplate, He bears the burdens and participates in the sorrows of His Church below. By no avenue but His bleeding heart can they enter—up no ladder but His cross can they ascend; and with no name may they entwine their supplications but the one name that transcends every name, the name of Jesus. Who can fully unfold the blessedness of this truth to the saints of God? Do we not, beloved, rob our souls of the peculiar blessing—the support, the comfort, the grace—bound up in the intercessory work of our Immanuel within the veil? What can be more encouraging and animating than to *know* that Christ remembers us, prays for us, and upholds us in heaven?—that He thinks of us with a friend’s affection, *compassionates*⁸ us with a brother’s sympathy, prays for and supports us with a Savior’s meritorious intercession? By faith, [do] you not see Him, standing before the golden altar in glory, presenting the sacred incense of His merits, the temple all filled with its perfume? Do not think that the Church below has no tokens, unmistakable and precious, of her Great High Priest’s intercession within the veil of glory. Has the type of this truth no significance? A part of Aaron’s vestment was “a golden bell...upon the hem of the robe round about” (Exo 28:34). The Divine instruction was, “It shall be upon Aaron to minister: and his sound shall be heard when he goeth in unto the holy place before the LORD” (Exo 28:35.) How expressive and how sweet must that sound have been to the waiting congregation without! It was to them an evidence and a token that the priest was within the veil, ministering before the altar, bearing them upon his breastplate, presenting their sacrifices, and securing by his intercession their acceptance and God’s response. Beloved, our Great High Priest has passed within the veil and appears in the presence of God for us. Hear you not the music of His bells? How entrancing their melody! How precious their significance! Every covenant blessing sent down from God, every gracious answer to prayer returned, every pure beam of love darting into your soul, every spring of joy, peace, and hope welling up in your heart, every burden sustained, every grief soothed, every temptation broken is the chiming of these bells upon the robe of Jesus as He ministers before the throne of God in glory. How sweet, how precious, how soothing their melody!

“**The prayers of saints.**” If prayer be the breathing of the indwelling Spirit in the soul, if the expression of deeply-felt [need], if the

⁷ **begirt with His ephod** – clothed with a priestly garment, encircled with a sash or belt.

⁸ **compassionates** – treats with compassion; feels pity for.

language of a child, and if the incense of the heart wafted⁹ to heaven through faith in Christ, then the saints of God are the only individuals who offer true prayer. Prayer is too holy and spiritual an exercise for any but the holy ones. None prostrate themselves at the mercyseat but the poor in spirit—the self-abhorring—Christ-desiring! To them, this spot is the *dearest in the universe*. Here is attraction that, find them where it may, irresistibly draws and indissolubly¹⁰ binds them. All may be gloom beyond—all is sunshine here. The saint in audience with Jehovah is the most morally sublime spectacle in the universe. Angelic spirits must look down upon it with an emotion of blended awe and delight. Such is the privilege of a saint. Let the world deride the name and trample in the dust him who wears it, yet is it the most honored and sacred appellation¹¹ God ever conferred upon mortals: “called to be saints”—what a high calling, beloved, is this! Made lower than angels by sin, we are made higher than angels by grace. Redemption has exalted our humanity above every other nature but the Divine. To be clothed upon with the “righteousness of God” (Rom 3:21-22) is to occupy a position of dignity and glory to which no other creature can aspire...Lord! Let the infidel deny the character and the worldling¹² scorn the name, number me among Your saints everlasting, upon whom is conferred the privilege of fellowship and nearness with You here, and glory, honor, and immortality with You hereafter!

But what is the incense?—“the prayers of saints.” The emblem is exquisitely beautiful and expressive. It is one of the highest conceptions of poetry in one of its most sacred forms. Prayer is holy incense...David so employs the expression in connection with prayer: “Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Psa 141:2).

We have but glanced at the truth that the saints of God are a praying people, that communion with the Triune Jehovah is an essential characteristic...No man is a saint of God who is not a praying man; and a praying man, find him where you may, is a saint of God. He may prefer the place and the mode of prayer that his conscience best approves; whether that place be a cathedral or a barn, and the mode

⁹ **wafted** – floated through the air.

¹⁰ **indissolubly** – unable to be dissolved or destroyed; permanently.

¹¹ **appellation** – name or title.

¹² **worldling** – a person more interested in concerns, interests, and pleasures of the present world rather than spiritual matters.

be liturgical¹³ or free, is of no essential moment. If, penetrating within the inner and hidden shrine, he waves before its altar the censer of a truly contrite, believing, adoring heart, drawing near to God in the name of Jesus and holding fellowship with the Invisible, that man is a man of prayer...But not only is prayer *essential* to the character of a saint of God, his whole history implies that he is a man of prayer. Your Christian life, beloved reader, necessitates this walking with God in all its minute detail. If it be a divine precept, as it is a precious privilege, to acknowledge the Lord in all our ways, then this habit of recognizing the being and government of God, His love and care for us, His providential guidance of our every step, must keep us in constant and close contact with our Father and Friend. When to this we add the more spiritual part of our history—the Christian conflict we wage, the discoveries of sin we make, the seductions by which we are assailed, the daily trials, sorrows, and disappointments to which we are subjected—surely prayer must be the living, enshrouding atmosphere of a saint of God! Not one moment could we live without it. Prayer, breathed from the believer's heart on earth or from the lips of the Great Intercessor in heaven, sustains each moment the life of God in the soul of man. Ah, beloved! Where could you go with those burdens, those wants, those chafings,¹⁴ those backslidings, those shortcomings, those sorrows that compose so large a part of daily life, but to the throne of grace? Where could you resort for mercy, for strength, for fortitude,¹⁵ for patience, for comfort and soothing, but where the God of love and power meets you and talks with you through Jesus, as man communes with his friend? It is in this light we come to regard prayer, not merely as a divine command or as a Christian duty, but as the holiest, sweetest, and most precious privilege God has given to us on earth.

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¹³ **liturgical** – relating to the forms or regular rituals of public worship.

¹⁴ **chafings** – irritations; things that inflame our feelings or make us impatient.

¹⁵ **fortitude** – unyielding courage in the endurance of pain or adversity.