

# Diocese of the Central States News

Volume IV, Issue 2: Lent 2015



## A Message from Bishop Morse

St. Paul says, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." (1 Corinthians 15:19) If there is no resurrection of the dead, and we all—Christian and non-Christian alike—find our burial or cremation the end of everything, then we have believed in and followed Christ for no good reason, and Paul adds we are of all men most miserable. That is, by believing in Christ and faithfully observing his commandments we have deprived ourselves of all the sinful pleasures of this world—the only world that is if there is no resurrection—and we haven't enjoyed the world's sinful pleasures. That is a very miserable way to live.

To state the same thing positively, Jesus has come into the world to give us life now and forevermore by removing sin and its curse forever. We may grieve over our sin, but we do not grieve the same way as those who have no hope in the resurrection of the dead.

In the Gospel for Ash Wednesday Jesus gives general instructions about fasting. He says we are not to be like the hypocrites who manufacture a sad countenance so as to appear to be deeply sorrowful for their sins.

I remember as a child thinking that the only appropriate way to partake of the Lord's Supper was to keep my head down, have a glum look on my face, and meditate on the tops of my shoes. After all it was my sin that made Jesus suffer the terrible agony of the cross, and I certainly should not enjoy a little taste of grape juice and a sliver of dry cracker. The whole thing seemed designed to make people sad even if they weren't when they came to church. It seemed to shout, "Here, eat this, and be sad for your miserable self." I don't remember rejoicing that God had provided free for the taking the remedy for all my sins, and that he was inviting me to come to a party to celebrate his marvelous grace.

Lent can seem like a harsh season of denial and repentance, but the beauty of the church calendar is that it offers us a chance to embrace a rhythm of joy and reflection. One can only rejoice for so long before the harsh realities of life set in and have us reeling and questioning.

"Who are you?" is a question Jesus answered on Easter morning. It's a question we can spend Lent (and our whole lives) asking. If we are faithful in the asking, He will answer. He longs to show us who He is and how He loves us. Because when we begin to see who He is, we can ask another big question: Who am I?

Who am I? As we heard on Ash Wednesday, we are dust and to dust we will return. Yet just as we live in the already and not yet, we are dust and more than that. We are holy dust, made in the image of God, crafted in His likeness.

One of the mysteries of faith is that the more we ask "Who are you, God?" the more we see who we are. During Lent may you rejoice that you are God's and He is yours.

## Diocese of the Central States

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## Diocesan Cycle of Prayer

<b>Parish/Mission</b>	<b>Date</b>
St. Jude's, Richmond, VA	03/08/15
Christ Our Hope, Dayton, OH	03/15/15
St. Lazarus, Dayton, OH	03/22/15
St. Nicholas, Owensboro, KY	03/29/15
St. John's of Mt. Laurel, Birmingham, AL	04/05/15
All Saints, Lynchburg, VA	04/12/15
Covenant REC, Roanoke, VA	04/19/15
St. Andrew's, Appomattox, VA	04/26/15
St. Andrew's, Asheboro, NC	05/03/15
Christ Our Hope, Westpoint, TN	05/10/15
Trinity REC, Mason, OH	05/17/15
All Saints, Raleigh, NC	05/24/15

# Christian PDAs - Matthew 6:1-18 (KJV)

Adapted from a Sermon by Fr. William Smith; Covenant REC, Roanoke, VA

I had taken my airplane seat when a couple—an older man and a younger woman—took seats a couple of rows ahead. I was very sleepy but was fighting to keep my eyes open because the couple was so interesting. They were in lust, and maybe drunk, and pretty soon their physical involvement became both inappropriate and embarrassing. The stewardess came several times to ask them to stop but to no avail. It was so bad that they were detained on the plane when we landed.

PDAs, public displays of affection, can be natural and sincere, even if inappropriate. But other times, you get the impression that at least part of what the couple wants is for people to notice what they are doing. Jesus challenges us about our public displays of spirituality. Do we do what we do for God or to impress others?

## 1. The Principle

The saying in Matthew 6:1 gives us the principle which guides the rest of what Jesus says in these 18 verses. In the King James Version it reads, “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.” However, in all modern translations Jesus talks about “righteousness” not “almsgiving.” The reason for this change is that best manuscripts have the Greek word for “righteousness” in verse one.

The word “righteousness” means “right-ness.” The nature of God is righteous, and all of God’s acts are righteous. We also can have righteousness. Often the word refers to our “justification” or our righteous standing before God. This righteousness is not found in us, but in Christ. It is not anything we are or anything we do. When we put our faith in Christ, God declares us righteous, counting Christ’s righteousness as ours.

But there are other aspects of righteousness for believers. We do righteous deeds that flow from faith in Christ. We do righteous deeds when we act out of love for God and our neighbor, when we obey the Ten Commandments, when we do good works.

But here Jesus is talking about a particular kind of righteous deeds: righteous acts that involve our devotion to God that are done in public and private acts of worship. Then he goes on to give us a warning about three in particular - almsgiving in

verses 2 - 4, praying in verses 3 - 15, and fasting in verses 16 - 18. He tells us to take heed or be careful when we do these things because there is a danger. We can do these things “before men, to be seen of them.”

Why do we do the things we do? Do we do them for God? Or do we do them to be seen by others who will take note of what we do and praise us for it? Jesus tells us to be careful about our motives. He also warns us of the consequence of doing these righteous acts to be seen and congratulated by others. If we seek and get the praise from others, we will not have praise from the Father in heaven for whom we claim we are doing these acts of righteousness.

## 2. The Practices

For the Jews, almsgiving was an important religious duty. Alms were given to help the poor, and helping the poor was part an expression of religious devotion. Giving for us too, as Christians, is an act of worship, which is why we include giving in the liturgy.

Jesus points out a practice of some Jews who called attention to their almsgiving were playing a role, wanting others to notice and applaud, while their hearts were not generous. They got the reward they wanted—recognition and praise from others—but they did not please God.

Jesus says to us, his disciples, “When you give, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” His point is, “Don’t dwell on your giving. Don’t go over it in your mind. Be as unconscious of what you are doing as possible and forget it as soon as possible.” Otherwise you might start congratulating yourself. If you’re really doing it for God, you don’t need anyone else to know what you are doing. God sees what you do in secret; he knows when you give and how much. At the right time he will acknowledge and reward the giving you do because you love him and others.

Next Jesus turns to prayer, which for us, as it was for the Jews, is essential for our worship and our whole relationship with God. In prayer we adore and thank God, confess our sins, and ask for God to bless us and others. Jesus’s warnings about prayer focus on both the hypocrites and the pagans.

## Christian PDAs (cont.)

Hypocritical Jews love to pray standing on the street corners and in the synagogues. They want to be noticed. They are seeking the attention of other people. Jesus tells us to go into our closets, shut the doors, and to pray to the Father who is in secret. If we are really praying to God, we don't need others to know that we are praying.

It's clear that Jesus is not telling us not ever to pray in public as we do in worship. Even the Lord's Prayer assumes we will pray in the presence of others, for we use the plural pronoun "our." What Jesus is warning us against is wanting others to notice and honor us for our prayers—the words we say and the fervency with which we offer them.

Pagans pray to get God's attention. They think that they will get God's attention by repetition of his name and multiplication of words. When Elijah met the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel to find out whether the LORD or Baal was God, the pagan prophets called out, "O Baal, answer us!" from morning till noon. But, there was no response, so when noon passed they started cutting themselves and loudly crying to Baal, and continued on well into the afternoon.

Jesus, says, "God does not hear you because you keep repeating his name or because you pile up many words. Just address him as Father and say what you have to say." Jesus gave us the Lord's Prayer as a prayer to be prayed and as a model to teach us about prayer. We address God, "Our Father" and then there are six concise and clear requests—three about God, that his name may be hallowed, his kingdom may come, and his will be done; and then three about us, that our daily needs may be met, that our sins may be forgiven, and that we may be either kept from temptation or protected against evil in temptation.

The third religious practice Jesus calls our attention to is fasting. Fasting is abstaining from food. Fasts can be partial or total, for a brief time or a more extended time. In the Old Testament there was only one prescribed day of fasting, the Day of Atonement. However, that did not mean that individuals could not fast at other times or that the nation could not be called to fast to repent and seek God's favor.

There is no record of Jesus having fasted, though we can assume he did on the Day of Atonement. Nor is there any record of his disciples

fasting, but the fact that Jesus says, "When you fast," makes clear that he expects there to be times when his disciples will fast. His concern is with how we go about fasting when we do. Again he warns us not to be like the hypocrites. When they fasted, they changed their daily routines. They did not wash their faces or put oil their heads. We might say that they did not shower and shave, or they did not brush their hair and put on make-up. Rather they looked gloomy and did things like pour ashes over their heads. They put on a special fasting look so that people would look at them and know they were fasting.

Jesus says to us, "Don't call attention to yourself when you fast. If you are going to fast, go about your daily life as you would if you were not fasting. Look cheerful. Do the usual preparations for going out in public." If you are fasting to deny yourself, to repent of your sins, and to seek God for his blessings, let that be between you and God. He will know that you're fasting and why. That's all that matters. Let God take care of rewarding you in his time and way.

### 3. The Paternal

If we stopped where we are now, we might turn this into a piece of legalistic teaching about how we practice Christianity. Don't be like the hypocrites and pagan when you give, pray, and fast. Be better than they were. Be a good Christian. But that misses what Jesus is saying. There is a word that we might miss that Jesus uses nine times and each time with the personal possessive pronoun. The word is "Father"—your **Father**, our **Father**.

"Father" is a word that belongs to a personal relationship, the relationship between a son or daughter and a father. The word is not as formal as it may sound in our ears. Jesus spoke not Greek but Aramaic, and the Aramaic word for father is "Abba," which is a word used by a child to speak to his father.

When the father-child relationship is healthy, the child feels secure. He is confident his father loves him and will take care of him. When the child is in trouble, he does not call out, "Mr. Jones, help me," but, "Dad, I need you. Help me." The problem for both the hypocrites and the pagans was that they did not know God as Father.

The hypocrites needed affirmation from others because they were not confident of affirmation from

**Instead of living confident of God's love and care, we think of him as a distant and stingy God from whom we must try to wrangle a blessing here and there.**



## Christian PDAs (cont.)

God. They put on performances hoping others would notice them and praise them. They were not secure in a father-child relationship. They needed to get the attaboys from others who saw their acts of devotion, because they did not sense that God saw and was pleased with them. For them, religion was performance—both an act to be put on and a list of things to do to earn God's favor.

The pagans needed to get the attention of an inattentive God and to try to wrest what they needed from an unwilling God. So they called out his name over and over to get try to get his attention and repeated words over and over again to try to get him to give them what they needed. They did not know God as a loving and caring Father.

The problem we have is that the hypocrites' and pagans' way of relating to God are natural to us and deeply ingrained in us. Instead of giving, praying, and fasting confident of our Father's attention and approval, we try to perform to get his approval and we look to others to approve us since we don't sense that God notices and approves. Instead of living confident of God's love and care, we think of him as

a distant and stingy God from whom we must try to wrangle a blessing here and there.

What's the cure for this? It is to know God as our Father in Jesus Christ. God's approval is not earned by our performance but by Christ's performance for us. We obtain God's blessings not by how many words we say in prayer but by coming to him in Jesus name. When we are confident in God's love because of what Christ has done for us, then we won't need to do our acts of righteousness before men to be seen of them. When we are confident of God's generosity that he gave us Christ, then we can approach him as our Father who loves and cares.

When we come to the Table of our Lord, we focus not on ourselves but on Christ, not on what we have to give him but what he freely gives us. In Christ we know God Almighty as our heavenly Father who of his tender mercy gave Christ to suffer upon the cross for our redemption.

Visit Covenant's website: <http://www.crecroanoke.org>.

Read the full article at Fr. Smith's blog:

<http://thechristiancurmudgeonmo.blogspot.com>

## Report from the Colvins

Keep up with news from the Colvins at

<http://receivewithmeekness.wordpress.com> and

<https://www.facebook.com/ColvinFamilyMission>

In February, Sora traveled to Thailand to attend the Christian Medical and Dental Association's conference for medical missionaries. During that time, Matt visited the Indonesian school in Davao with Faith International Academy head of school Alan Farlin, who lived in Indonesia for 9 years. Mr. Farlin charmed everyone at the school by conversing and joking in Bahasa Indonesia and was a model of affable cross-cultural interaction for Matt. As a result of this experience, Matt met with Mr. Suhardi from the Indonesian consulate to arrange some language lessons. Praise God for providing connections and help from others who have experience with the cultures we are thinking of learning.

At this point, we're not at all certain of our next steps after 2015 when we'll be returning to North America for home assignment. We're all—especially the children, who have not visited the States since we left—excited to see friends and family again and be part of the life of our home church, which we have deeply missed. By the time this year is over, we feel that we will have reached a

natural point of closure for the various works God set before us here. The visit from Bp. Peter Manto and Canon Bill Jerdan in December made poignantly clear to us how important it is to have a more Anglican context for our family in the future, both for Matt with his orders, and for our children's spiritual formation. At the moment, that doesn't look like it will happen in Davao City, so we are prayerfully considering other places and other plans. We're planning a trip as a family to Indonesia in June; in many ways, this is an exciting prospect, but there remain many hurdles and difficulties to overcome before deciding whether this potential placement will be a fit for our family. Some of our children identify strongly as missionary kids and would like to continue to be on the mission field; others would much prefer to be back in North America.

We greatly appreciate your prayers as we try to work out how we can best serve our God and His church in the years to come. But for the next few months, we are glad to be where we are, with our Filipino friends and in fruitful ministries here in Davao City.