

the CATHOLIC NAVIGATOR

Charting a Course to Christ

13 November 2016 • Cycle C: 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

VOLUME III • Issue 51

Chasing Holiness: SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY – “PRAY FOR THE LIVING AND THE DEAD”

Today in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus describes the end of Jerusalem and the Temple with the coming of false prophets, wars, and natural and man-made disasters. Still other events would precede even these signs – God’s faithful would be seized, persecuted, imprisoned, brought before those in power, and challenged to defend themselves.



At this point in the passage, Jesus gives a most interesting instruction: “Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking...” Even though accounts of this event in Matthew’s and Mark’s Gospel refer to more than merely the end of the city and the Temple, the instruction Jesus gives to ‘trust that God will supply your defense’ is the same.

Imagine – face the end by not preparing for it! While it is impossible to prepare a defense for accusations not yet known, it is possible to at least gather one’s thoughts. Yet, Jesus says ‘no’ to this. Instead, he asks us to simply trust in him. This is a feat best achieved through prayer.

Prayer is our first impulse when we feel our longing for God; it is our final impulse as we face death. The Spiritual Work of Mercy, *pray for the living and the dead*, reminds us to seek that tiny place where we know our own longings and fears, and then direct our best intentions for the welfare of others! Here, our prayers become authentic. Here, we crawl into the hand of God, trusting and knowing that we need not prepare because ‘not a hair on our head will be destroyed.’ Here we can pray for others instead of ourselves. St. Faustina (of the *Divine Mercy* devotion) left us a prayer that can help us grow in that trust:

“O blood and water which gushed forth from the heart of Jesus as a font of mercy for us, I trust in You.”

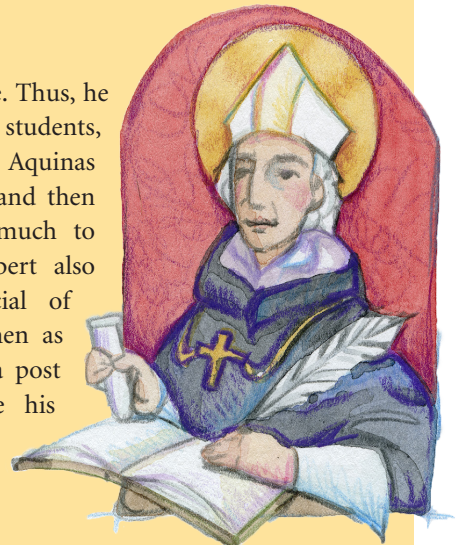
Certainly, this short little prayer, repeated always, can prepare us for anything.

Saints Preserve Us!

St. Albert the Great (memorial, November 15) is today acknowledged as a Doctor of the Church, but in his lifetime (1193?-1280) he was known as the *doctor universalis*, or *teacher of everything*. An exaggeration? Well, he helped to develop the course of studies for his religious order, the Dominicans. He did write a multi-volume encyclopedia covering what was known of natural science, mathematics, astronomy, logic, rhetoric, ethics, economics, and metaphysics. And he systematized the study of scholastic philosophy and theology! [He also discovered arsenic, an element the later Borgia family would put to infamous use.]

Albert, born in Germany and educated at the Universities of Padua and Paris, was an acclaimed university professor of philosophy and theology, and an acknowledged expert

on the works of Aristotle. Thus, he attracted the brightest students, most notably Thomas Aquinas who learned from him and then surpassed his teacher, much to Albert’s satisfaction. Albert also served as the Provincial of German Dominicans, then as Bishop of Regensburg, a post he resigned to resume his academic life. We can clearly see why he now serves as the patron saint of scientists.



Scriptural Secrets

Earlier in Luke's Gospel, Jesus counseled his disciples about how to behave when seized and taken before the authorities, "... do not worry about how or what your defense will be or about what you are to say. For the holy Spirit will teach you at that moment what you should say." (Lk. 12:11-12) In today's passage from Luke, Jesus goes beyond this and names himself as the source of this help, "...for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking." (21:15)

Malachi 3:19-20a 2
Thessalonians 3:7-12
Luke 21:5-19

Here, the word used in the Septuagint for 'speaking' is *stoma*, or, a *mouth*. What a great image – Jesus himself will *fashion a mouth of wisdom* for those who are persecuted for his sake. He will provide. This message is one also found in Proverbs, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, on your own intelligence do not rely." (3:5)

In the Gospel, the prompting to trust in the face of persecution is linked to those who endure and persevere, those counted by God. Intimacy with God has been described with many images. In one psalm of praise, David sings, "You formed my inmost being, you knit me in my mother's womb." (139:13) Luke has already illustrated God's closeness to man by revealing his knowledge of even the smallest of details– "Even the hairs of your head have all been counted." (12:7) This now reassures the disciples of their place before God: "...not a hair on your head will be destroyed." (21:18) With this trust in place, the disciples can face whatever comes to their bodies; their faith will bring their souls to rest in God.



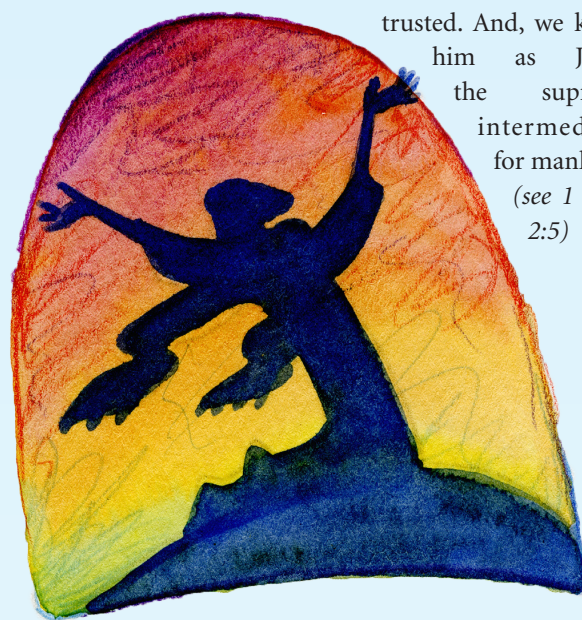
Catechetical

Payer, for both the living and the dead, is a supreme act of faith. It presumes that there is one who exists, who listens, who cares, and who can be trusted. The one who prays exercises and makes stronger his faith; the one with faith responds in prayer to the longing God placed within him. Thus, we pray for the living and the dead.

Prayer for the dead is seen as long ago as the time of the Maccabees (2 Macc. 12:42-45), the rebel Jews who rose up to rule Judah around 164 B.C. "... (the Church) from the very earliest days of the Christian religion, has honored with great respect the memory of the dead... Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping them, but also of making their intercession for us effective." (CCC 958) Prayer for the dead is seen as a good and holy thing since it acknowledges all members of the Body of Christ, each member a part of him, yet at various places on the journey home.

Prayer for the living occurs in much earlier times, "Once the promise begins to be fulfilled (Passover, the Exodus, the gift of the Law, and the ratification of the covenant), the prayer of Moses becomes the most striking example of intercessory prayer, which will be fulfilled in 'the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.'" (CCC 2574) Ultimately, Moses teaches us that God is, he

listens, he cares, and he can be trusted. And, we know him as Jesus, the supreme intermediary for mankind. (see 1 Tim. 2:5)



Imprimatur: Reverend Richard F. Stika, Bishop, Diocese of Knoxville, June 14, 2016. The Imprimatur ("Permission to Publish") is a declaration that the work is considered to be free of doctrinal or moral error. It is not implied that those who have granted the Imprimatur agree with the contents, opinions or statements expressed.

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