



October 20, 2020

When Your Prayer List Seems So Long

By The Rev. Rachel Rickenbaker

A parishioner approached me recently following Sunday worship and said, "I'm sorry your list was so long."

"Hmm?" I asked.

"I'm sorry your list was so long...I'm sorry you had so many things to pray for. It seems like it's all hit at once."

This past year, I've served as a "supply" priest, mostly on Sunday mornings, at a parish north of Richmond that is currently without a priest. That particular day, it did seem like the prayers were longer than normal. We prayed for our nation's leaders; for any people suffering with COVID; for students, teachers, and all who work in schools; for those in the way of recent hurricanes; for all fighting wildfires out west; and the list continued.

By the grace of the Holy Spirit, I also remembered that day to say a prayer specifically for the clergy, for deacons, priests, and bishops who feel exhausted and overworked during these especially difficult times.

The truth is there is much for which to pray. I have found that even when a prayer is answered, there are always many more things for which to pray. St. Paul knew what he was saying when he told the Thessalonians, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). It’s not only because it’s God’s desire for us, but also because there are many things for which to pray.

Lately, this may feel even more the case. I think there is such a thing as prayer exhaustion. I wish it didn’t exist; but, even in my own prayer life, I know there have been times when I’ve felt dried up, unable to name or articulate all the things on my heart or mind.

It can also be hard to pray sometimes when it feels like our prayers aren’t being answered, at least not in the ways we wish to see them answered. Perhaps you have felt this way. Perhaps you have found that you can’t find the time in your day to pray for all the needs of the world.

Someone asked me recently, “Do I need to set aside a particular time to pray, or can I do it throughout the day?” Of course, you can and should pray throughout the day! I believe our Lord delights in hearing from us at any and all times, about anything on our hearts. It can certainly be helpful to set aside time and space in your day.

I found that some of my most fruitful prayer time was when I talked with and listened to God on my long commute to and from Alexandria. I would turn off the radio and just have a conversation with God. Some other drivers might have thought I was on the phone or talking to myself, but I valued that time in conversation and listening.

Now, with a young child at home, I find prayer time in other ways. I try to pray when I do chores – folding laundry or washing dishes. If I’m waiting for an appointment, rather than pulling out my cell phone and browsing Facebook (it’s so easy to do), I remind myself of the opportunity to instead sit and pray.

As I walk outdoors, I seek to notice the beauty of God's creation and delight in God's presence – walking provides a good opportunity to listen for God's voice. Singing is also a great way to pray, especially in these times when we're unable to sing some of our favorite congregational hymns.

When I become exhausted, I trust the Holy Spirit is continuing to pray for those things which I can't muster the energy or words to pray.

No matter how you find time to pray, be sure to remember to pray for your clergy! I'm not working as a full-time parish priest at this moment in life, but even so, many times I feel the weight of the world on my shoulders. Most clergy are not typically going to ask others to pray for them, but they are often the first to be asked to pray for so many things. This time has not been easy for the Church, so ask your clergy how you might pray for and support them now.

Yes, your prayer list might be long. But remember that the Holy Spirit is praying for you and through you. So, wherever you are, even in your car, pray without ceasing!