



BELIEVERS EASTERN CHURCH

Office of the Metropolitan, Synod Secretariat, Thiruvalla, Kerala, India.

SHEPHERD'S LETTER

Sep/Oct 2019

✠Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

My beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

Barekmor and greetings to you in the name of the triune God!

One of the burdens on my mind, as your spiritual father, is that we become a church that prays. Our church was started through prayer, and it must continue in prayer. That is why one of the guiding principles of our church is its serious commitment to prayer.

God's people must pray before God will rise up to work. A church that does not emphasise the power of prayer will miss out on the power of God working through them. As a matter of fact, a church that does not have a serious commitment to prayer will eventually die.

Therefore, in this letter, I wish to take time to talk to you about prayer.

A simple reading of the book of Acts will show us that the early church was *devoted* (Acts 2:42) to prayer! To be devoted means "to give up one's time and energy to a particular purpose or activity." For the early church, everything flowed out of their life of prayer. Perhaps that is why prayer is mentioned nearly one hundred times throughout the book of Acts, in all sorts of situations. Look at the following verses:

- "They all joined together constantly in prayer" and "devoted themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14, 2:42).
- "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (Acts 4:31).

- In Acts Chapter 4 verses 8 and 14, we see the church *praying* and laying hands on people for them to be baptised in the Holy Spirit.
- In Acts 7:59 we read about the stoning of Stephen. Throughout this ordeal, Stephen *prayed* to God. Imagine praying while being killed!
- In Acts 9:11, Saul is in *prayer* after his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road.
- In Acts 9:40, Peter *prays* and a dead woman is raised to life.

So, now the question is, “What should I do?”. How can we, as a parish, practice this? Here are my suggestions.

I. Form a habit of prayer

1. Let prayer be our first response. When we are faced with any kind of situation in our lives, our first response must be to pray! The Bible very clearly tells us *to pray* about every situation in our lives.
2. Use every opportunity to pray for others. When a brother or a sister shares a difficult situation he or she is facing, be sure to take the opportunity to pray at that very moment. Don’t wait for another time to pray. Pray then and there itself.

Jesus said: “Ask, and it will be given to you” (St Matthew 7:7). And the Scripture reminds us: “You do not have, because you do not ask God” (St James 4:2). There is power when believers join together in prayer.

3. Pray, pray and pray. Pray as we start our day and before we end the day. Pray before you go to work (whether you work in a company or in a paddy field or drive a vehicle); pray before you have meals; if you are a student, pray before you write exams; pray before you go for job interview; pray before you do something very important; pray before your travels; use all occasions to pray and acknowledge God in all our ways. And remember, after we pray, draw the sign of the cross on yourself—it is a witness to others!
4. Keep the hours of prayer. As individuals, communities and in our offices, let us follow the hours of prayer, where we stop all our activities and pray for what we have done till now, what we shall strive to do and seek God’s blessings on them.

II. Create an atmosphere of prayer

We are told to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17), which means that prayer must be the very atmosphere of our lives, covering each moment of our day. Here are some ways we can do this practically in our lives.

1. In our families: Every family should set apart a time for prayer every day, where all members gather together and pray for various concerns. I had sent a video about this earlier and I received many reports saying how many families have started family prayers. During the family prayer, what all can you pray for?
 - a. Are you concerned about certain members of your family who do not know God’s love? Do you worry about how you will take care of the needs of your family? Pray! St James 5:16 (NIV) tells us that “the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”
 - b. Write down the names of ten friends or relatives who do not know about God’s love and pray daily for them.
 - c. Whenever you hear news of a natural disaster or major unrest in certain communities or countries, consider those reports as prayer requests and take a few minutes to pray.
 - d. Pray for your priest, his family and his ministry each day—pray for places he visits and families he meets and witnesses to.

2. In our parish: As a parish, we should be known as a praying parish. How can we do that?
 - a. As a parish, set aside a day each week to fast and pray, opening the church for those who are available to gather together and pray from morning until noon.
 - b. At least once in a month, have fasting prayer in your parish.
 - c. During Sunday worship service, set aside ten minutes to intercede for special prayer requests.
 - d. After the worship service, set apart a special time for prayer for those with various needs—like sickness and other problems in their lives.
 - e. Organize a chain prayer in your parish.
 - f. Have prayer walks, where teams of believers walk around different places of the community and pray for the peace and prosperity for your village or town.
 - g. Visit the sick and the suffering in the neighborhood; be the first one to visit and pray by faith. “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for

in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (St Mark 11:24).

- h. Pray for those who lead us—the President, our Prime Minister and his cabinet members, our Governor, Chief Minister and other ministers, our local government leaders etc. The Bible tells us to do so (1 Tim 2:2).

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the life and power of the early church came through the believers’ prayers! Whether in good times or bad, persecution or praise, the believers of the early church were devoted to prayer! And because of this, they saw healings and miracles take place; thousands came to know the love of God and they were given the grace to endure some of the worst persecution the church has ever known.

May we be known as individuals, as communities, as parishes and as a church for our prayers!

May God’s abundant grace be with you all!

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. ✠

Moran Mor Athanasius Yohan I Metropolitan