

Devotions for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, August 18-22, 2025

Monday of Pentecost 10 – Prayer of the Week

Merciful Lord, cleanse and defend Your Church by the sacrifice of Christ. United with Him in Holy Baptism, give us grace to receive with thanksgiving the fruits of His redeeming work and daily follow in His way; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

We pray to a merciful Lord in this prayer. My friend once stood in front of a judge and pleaded for mercy, and he did not get it. He was guilty. He had in the heat of a moment pulled out a gun and pulled the trigger. He had not intended to hurt someone, but someone got hurt, badly. Now, he was standing before a judge with nothing to say but an appeal for mercy.

That is the thing about mercy. We talk about mercy in two situations. The first of these is in a court room, it can only be shown by the judge to the guilty person. If the judge lets an innocent man walk free from prison, that is not mercy, that is justice. Mercy can only be shown to the person who is guilty. The second is when circumstances have given us some advantage over another person. We also talk about people showing mercy to those who are somehow needy. We might have mercy on a stranded person beside the road and give them a lift into town. We might have mercy on the victims of a flood, a hurricane, or a tornado by opening our wallets or sending relief to them. We can show them mercy because we have not lost our home or car. If I find that both of us are standing by the road with broken down cars, I really cannot show you mercy. If both of us have had our homes swept away by a flood, my care and comfort you is not really mercy, it is the brotherhood of shared misery that we see.

Why do we call God merciful in this prayer? It is because we stand before Him helpless and without any other to help us. Beggared by sin and death, guilty of our sin, we turn to Him for mercy. Without His gift we cannot even manage to be thankful for the fruits of His redeeming work. Praise God for His mercies which are renewed every morning, inexhaustible in Christ. You follow in His way when you thank God for forgiving your sins. You did not deserve that. It was mercy.

Tuesday of Pentecost 10 – Jeremiah 23:16-29

¹⁶ Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. ¹⁷ They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you.’”

¹⁸ For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD
to see and to hear his word,
or who has paid attention to his word and listened?

¹⁹ Behold, the storm of the LORD!
Wrath has gone forth,
a whirling tempest;
it will burst upon the head of the wicked.
²⁰ The anger of the LORD will not turn back
until he has executed and accomplished
the intents of his heart.
In the latter days you will understand it clearly.
²¹ “I did not send the prophets,
yet they ran;
I did not speak to them,
yet they prophesied.
²² But if they had stood in my council,
then they would have proclaimed my words to my people,
and they would have turned them from their evil way,
and from the evil of their deeds.

²³ “Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? ²⁴ Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD. ²⁵ I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ ²⁶ How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, ²⁷ who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal? ²⁸ Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? declares the LORD. ²⁹ Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?

In 1847, the same year the LCMS was founded, a group of well-respected Viennese doctors faced down one of their colleagues, Ignaz Semmelweis. The women on their maternity ward were dying at an alarming rate and he had just figured out that it was their fault. The doctors were not adequately washing their hands after conducting autopsies of women who had died of infections. This was transmitting the infection to otherwise healthy women.

The Viennese doctors banded together and rejected Semmelweis’s conclusions, unwilling to accept the idea that they, the doctors, were the reason all those women had died. He did not respond well their stubborn self-interest, was eventually fired, and finally ended up in a mental asylum where, ironically, he died of sepsis, the same affliction which was killing the women on the ward.

Over 2600 years ago, the prophet Jeremiah must have felt a little like Semmelweis. The whole prophetic profession in ancient Jerusalem was not listening to God but telling people what they wanted to hear. It would result in the deaths of thousands. Again and again, Jeremiah had tried to warn people that God’s wrath was about to be poured out on the city for its sins, but they insisted

that all would be well. This passage is giving Jeremiah and us an insight into our human rejection of God's Truth and its consequences. Jeremiah was vindicated by history when the city of Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. Semmelweis was vindicated when we figured out germ theory and could pinpoint exactly what microbes were doing. The doctors of Vienna who rejected and destroyed him are vilified today as unscientific and narrow-minded cretins.

Christians of every generation need to ask what God is saying to us which we are not hearing because we love this world and fear for our comfortable lives. Jesus has called us to radical discipleship and sacrifice for the kingdom, not La-Z-Boy recliners and kitchens stocked with the latest ergonomic kitchen gadgets. His word is a hammer that smashes the rocks to pieces. What Word of God are we not listening to today? What consequences will fall on our heads for that sinful deafness?

Wednesday of Pentecost 10 – Psalm 119:81-88

- ⁸¹ My soul longs for your salvation;
I hope in your word.
- ⁸² My eyes long for your promise;
I ask, "When will you comfort me?"
- ⁸³ For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke,
yet I have not forgotten your statutes.
- ⁸⁴ How long must your servant endure?
When will you judge those who persecute me?
- ⁸⁵ The insolent have dug pitfalls for me;
they do not live according to your law.
- ⁸⁶ All your commandments are sure;
they persecute me with falsehood; help me!
- ⁸⁷ They have almost made an end of me on earth,
but I have not forsaken your precepts.
- ⁸⁸ In your steadfast love give me life,
that I may keep the testimonies of your mouth.

In 1997 Sylvia Stayton was handcuffed and arrested in Cincinnati. A grandmother of 10 and 63 years old at the time, she was impenitent. Her crime was feeding coins into parking meters she noticed were about to expire, thereby preventing a traffic enforcement officer from writing a ticket. That police officer warned her that she was breaking an obscure city code, but she ignored him and fed coins into several more cars. Finally, he arrested her. A jury found her not guilty of disorderly conduct, but she admitted to doing what she did and there was a city ordinance against it. The judge fined her \$750 and she spent 90 days in jail. Her case made national news, much to the chagrin of Cincinnati's government.

The psalmist in this section of Psalm 119 was being persecuted for doing what God commanded and for following the statutes of God. His condition seems to have been much worse than Mrs. Stayton's plight. The insolent dig pitfalls to entrap him, they persecute him with falsehoods, they have almost made an end to him upon the earth. He longs for deliverance and the rescue of his life. But he will not budge from his commitment to God's Torah.

Sylvia stuck to her convictions, as idiosyncratic as they might have been. She went to jail and paid her fine but was unwilling to stop feeding meters. I believe the city fathers of Cincinnati squirmed under the national attention which her case drew and quietly changed that statute on the books. I don't know that she was ever arrested again.

The people of God are called upon to heed our Lord, pay attention to His statutes, no matter the cost. Many Christians have spent their life blood rather than bend to the demands of authorities who wanted them to deny their allegiance to Christ. Of course, one of those statutes of our Lord is that we should be obedient to civil authorities, even when their rules don't make sense. It is only when we must renounce our faith that we can claim God's sanction for an act of civil disobedience. Sorry Sylvia, God is not probably going to back you up on your guerilla tactics to keep cash out of the city traffic court coffers, no matter how righteous you felt when you did it. Why was the psalmist being persecuted? We don't know. He doesn't tell us.

Thursday of Pentecost 10 – Hebrews 11:17-40; 12:1-3

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. ²⁰ By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. ²¹ By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. ²² By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.

²³ By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

²⁴ By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. ²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. ²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.

²⁹ By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. ³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. ³¹ By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

³² And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— ³³ who through faith conquered

kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. ³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

³⁹ And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

At the end of the Harry Potter series of books, the protagonist is facing the prospect of his death at the hands of his enemy. In case you have not ever read the stories, Harry is a young man upon whom is laid an impossibly large burden of defeating a horrible, may I say, demonic character named Voldemort. As he approaches the clearing where he is about to meet his enemy, Harry takes hold of a magical stone which brings up the ghosts of his loved ones, his deceased parents, friends, and mentors. They encourage him and bolster him for what he must do.

I cannot read that section of the novel without thinking about this passage and the final word of encourage we read here. Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses let us lay aside every weight, and every sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Harry had a cloud of witnesses.

In the novel Harry ends up defeating the villain, but only by willingly dying and coming back to life again. We look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and is seated at God's right hand. When J. K. Rowling needed to speak of the defeat of evil, she had nothing truly original to say, but put the only real victory over evil right into her novel.

When we receive the sacrament, when we sing our hymns, when we love in Christ's love, we are never alone. We are surrounded by a far more real cloud of witnesses than the fictional Harry Potter. They are the gift of the Holy Spirit to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Friday of Pentecost 10 – Luke 12:49-56

⁴⁹ “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! ⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.

⁵² For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. ⁵³ They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

⁵⁴ He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming.’ And so it happens. ⁵⁵ And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. ⁵⁶ You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

I sat by his bed in the hospital room, and he clutched my hand, “Pastor, I’m dying.” By his inflection and the look in his eyes, it was clear that this was a surprise to him. He had somehow thought that the 100% mortality rate for being human did not apply to him. It is not that he was young. He had lived a relatively long life. This wasn’t some middle-aged man who thought he had another 4 decades to get things right before some unanticipated cancer struck him suddenly. This man was genuinely shocked that death could come for him.

Jesus chastises humanity for being blind today. He labels it hypocrisy that we pride ourselves on our ability to prognosticate the weather but willfully refuse to see the end of all our lives and act accordingly. In His day, the structures of family were paramount. For many, dedication to family displaced all other obligations, including God. In an age when we see the disintegration of families, we might wonder at Jesus’ words. But Luther once likened sinners to a drunk trying to get on a horse. In avoiding a fall to one side, we overcorrect and fall off on the other side. Today we have eroded the familial structure so far that we are worried about families.

Jesus is not anti-family. He has idolatry in his sights. Today, we are unlikely to place these relationships before God. We are much more likely to place ourselves before God and to live as if He does not exist or as if He has no concern for the living of our lives. That is simply another sort of idolatry. As he says elsewhere, Jesus might tell this generation that he has come to slay you and make alive. Jesus yearns for his peculiar baptism and for that day when he will throw fire upon the earth. His baptism is surely the baptism of His passion, death, and resurrection. The fire He throws upon the earth is, like his baptism, two-fold. The first fire is nothing other than the Holy Spirit who engenders faith in us, poured out since Pentecost. The second fire will be the fires of his eternal judgment, when the earth shall be consumed to make way for the new creation. Praise God that by the gift of the first holy fire poured out on you in your baptism, that you believe in the returning Lord, trust his forgiveness, and know that all the idols will be consumed in that judgment.

