

PRACTICING THE PASTORAL PRAYER

Recently I have been reading a book that has been a great encouragement to my prayer life. It is *"2000 Years Of Prayer"* compiled by Michael Counsell and published by Morehouse Publishing in Harrisburg, PA in 1999. It is 644 pages of prayers prayed down through the centuries. My first response, as I have been reading through it (and praying some of the prayers) is that, compared to saints in ages past, today's public prayers are rather anemic. Maybe that is because we do not practice enough in private.

It used to be customary for the pastor to pray a "pastoral prayer" in the church service – especially on Sunday mornings with most of his congregation present. He would pray for the needs of the congregation generally and specifically, for the sick and bereaved; missionaries and so on. Sadly, this is a fast disappearing part of the worship service. The trend seems to be more singing and less supplicating. Be that as it may, this is not the type of "pastoral prayer" that I have in mind.

The "pastoral prayer" that I am thinking about is the pastor's prayer for the pastor! Private praying is reflected in public prayers. Effectual, fervent prayers are born in private, not in the pulpit. A good example is a prayer that Martin Luther prayed. He was a man of passion, bold courage, and humility. When he first entered the ministry, he demonstrated all three traits in this prayer:

"Oh, Lord God, Thou hast made me a pastor and teacher in the Church. Thou seest how unfit I am to administer rightly this great and responsible Office; and had I been without Thy aid and counsel I would surely have ruined it all long ago. Therefore, I do invoke Thee. How gladly do I desire to yield and consecrate my heart and mouth to this ministry! I desire to teach the congregation. I, too, desire ever to learn and keep Thy Word my constant companion, and to meditate thereupon earnestly. Use me as Thy instrument in Thy service. Only do not Thou for sake me, for if I am left to myself, I will certainly bring it all to destruction. Amen."

That's a real pastoral prayer! Praying like that in private will put new life and passion into public prayers. Recently I e-mailed a friend who is suffering and said, "we are praying for you." The response came back, "Thank you! I need the prayer and you need the practice!" How true! Do you?

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