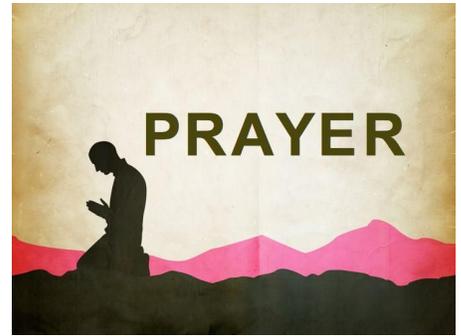


# Session #11: Ephesians Chapter 6:18-24

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As we heard last week, with these final verses St. Paul is bringing this letter to a close. His closing remarks are focused on the spiritual warfare that those who are believers must do every day and in opposition to the work of the devil. As we study the words of St. Paul today think in terms of a coach seeking to give that speech that will rouse the players to renewed energy and action. What began with the analogy of being a soldier of Christ by putting on the Armor of God concludes today with words of wisdom about prayer and God's presence.



## **Prayer as a Priority 6:18-20**

As we study this section keep in mind last week's conversation about the armor of God. While we can assume that St. Paul was speaking about prayer when he wrote *draw your strength from the Lord* (6:10), St. Paul offers a few more thoughts on the subject. Scholars suggest that we understand prayer as the seventh, most important and final piece of the armor. Seven symbolizes completeness.

### **6:18 pray at every opportunity**

*"Prayer is the raising of one's mind and*

*heart to God or the requesting of good things from God."* (St. John Damascene) In understanding that prayer is our communication with God, in the same way we do not just interact with those we love once a year, once a month, once a week or even once a day, St. Paul is calling all believers to *pray without ceasing* (1 Thessalonians 5:17). In the same way the devil will be relentless and continuous in his pursuit of our soul, so must we be in the presence of God in a constant way. We can do that not only by our attending Mass and our daily prayer times, but also by playing Christian or religious music, watching and listening to religious programming, reading and studying the bible, reading the lives of the saints and other uplifting materials... Our prayer should at every opportunity but also, St. Paul gives four other conditions or focuses for our prayer:

1. **supplication:** The definition of this word means to ask or *beg* for something in an earnest and humble way. Our prayers are not to just be prayers of thanksgiving and praise or contrition but Jesus himself said: *...ask and it will be given* (Matthew 7:7). I don't think there is a single person who does not get the idea of the asking but it is important to point out the final word in that definition – humble way. All prayer of supplication should end by acknowledging that God knows what is best for us and for His plan so like Jesus we should end our prayers of supplication with his words: *...not my will but yours be done* (Luke 22:42)
2. **in the Spirit:** To pray in the Spirit means to rely on the help of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is not something we do on our own. *...the Spirit...comes to the aide of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought."* (Romans 8:26) Whenever we pray, however we

pray we should be mindful that it is the Spirit of God within us seeking union with the Spirit of God throughout the universe. Our prayer should not be an obligation but a true desire to be in union with God.

3. **with all perseverance:** When we persevere in prayer we demonstrate that our love for God is not based on whether we get what we want. Prayer can be understood as a relationship. The more we put into it the stronger it becomes. We read in scripture that it is perseverance in prayer that obtains what it seeks: Luke 11:5-11; 18:1-8, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.
4. **for all the holy ones:** We can see from St. Paul's letters (1 Timothy 2:1-2; Ephesians 1:15-19; Philippians 1:3-11; Colossians 1:3-11) that St. Paul's first priority was to pray for strength, knowledge, endurance and love for all Christians. When we pray we should always take time to pray for the needs of the Church and for all Christians throughout the world.

**6:19 (pray) also for me**

As he brings the document to a close, St. Paul now asks the community to pray for him. Not that he be released or for a judgement of acquittal but **that speech may be given me to open my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.** Even in imprisonment St. Paul's thoughts continue to be about spreading the word of God and his prayer is that he might be effective in that process. It is interesting that he is asking for "speech" to be given to him. Even a brief study of St. Paul's works tell us that he has no problems with words, but his prayer is not for just any words, but that God will inspire him with the *appropriate* words given the occasion or moment he finds himself. First we must overcome the fear of opening our mouths but if we seek God's guidance, when the time is right He will give us the courage and the words.

**6:20 so that I may have the courage to speak as I must**

Even St. Paul has his moments of fear and timidity. But he recognizes that he has a job to do as **an ambassador.** An ambassador is an appointed position that has been given the authority to speak, in most cases, for the ruler or government. St. Paul is (as are you and I) representative of the Kingdom of God. His **chains** speak to his imprisonment most likely in Rome. As we have talked about before, St. Paul was put under house arrest once he got to Rome. While he had little freedom to move outside his home, scholars believe that he was allowed visitors as well as to teach and preach from his home. Therefore, that is why he is asking for the wisdom and courage to speak as he is called to by God.

A Final Word about Prayer:

From these few verses we can draw three important qualities of good personal prayer from St. Paul's words.

1. **Prayer must be constant.** Unfortunately, too many of us only pray during difficult moments in life. It is in daily prayer that we can draw strength and well as direction and peace. Prayer changes us to become more like Christ. But there are so many ways to

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pray other than sitting in silence or before the Blessed Sacrament. Being in service to other or dedicating the work of that day for the benefit of others as well as surrounding ourselves with uplifting music, readings or programs.

2. **Prayer must be intentional.** While rattling off memorized words may give us comfort no one would consider mindless scripted dialogue as building relationship. We must put our whole self into what we are doing (as much as we are able in that moment). Focusing our mind and heart as much as we can allows us to better hear God's response.
3. **Prayer must be unselfish.** While there is no sin to pray for our own needs, if that is all we are doing we are not understanding the message of Jesus. Look at the order of our Prayers of Intention during Mass. We pray first for the needs of the world and the needs of the Church, the needs of the local community and then our faith community. Only at the end is there time to pray for our intentions and even in that I suspect most are praying for loved ones.

### **St. Paul Says Goodbye 6:21-24**

As we come to the final verses of this letter, St. Paul introduces the bearer and then offers what amounts to a final blessing. The role of Tychicus's bringing "news" of Paul and "that he may encourage your hearts" is nearly word-for-word identical with Colossians 4:7-8. Scholars believe that is because they were written about the same time.

**6:21 *Tychicus, my beloved brother*** Since there was no public postal system, letters were hand delivered, if possible by a trusted friend or servant. It is likely that St. Paul's "messengers" had the added responsibility of possibly relaying additional instructions or messages as well as explain elements of the letter should the community not understand. The messenger would then often return with a response letter or a personal report on the conditions they found. In the case of this letter, which was intended to travel to other communities, Tychicus would, after spending the appropriate time in Ephesus or whatever community he found himself, move on to the next community. Tychicus should be a familiar name since he was introduced to us in Acts. He was a Gentile convert from Asia and joined St. Paul as he traveled to Jerusalem at the end of the third missionary trip. (Acts 20:4) Tychicus is also mentioned in Colossians (4:7), Titus (3:12) and 2 Timothy (4:12). And in the words of St. Paul is a beloved brother in Christ.

**6:23-24 *Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ*** It was common in the period of the 1<sup>st</sup> century to end the letter with a wish or prayer for the recipient. St. Paul is writing in that style. But it has the added benefit that should the letter be read during a community prayer, these final words would be heard as a blessing from St. Paul. In ending this letter he uses, in some ways, the theme of the entire letter that **peace** be a part of the faith community, and that all would understand that **love with faith** comes from God. Remember this letter is being circulated throughout the many Christian communities, so this prayer goes out to all believers from St. Paul. His final words **in immortality** may refer to the eternal future of those

who belong to Jesus. In the Revised Standard Bible we read: **with love undying** which may be what St. Paul expects of all true disciples – to cling to Christ with love undying.

As we bring our study of St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians I would like to offer a summary of our study by pointing out some key characteristics of this masterpiece of a letter, in hopes that it will remind us of our conversation over the past eleven weeks.

1. **The letter to the Ephesians is a “prison” letter.** As we brought our study of the Acts of the Apostles to a close, St. Paul is put under house arrest in Rome. There he sits and awaits his trial. It is during that time that he wrote some of his most profound letters. Apart from a couple of very general references (3:1; 4:1; 6:20), no one would ever guess that St. Paul wrote while in chains. Even though his earthly body was bound and imprisoned, St. Paul’s thoughts and spirit rose to the heavens. In our study I hope we are all filled with a greater appreciation that St. Paul was not only filled with praise for God under all circumstances, that St. Paul was a highly educated man filled with the knowledge of God, but, for these and many other reasons, St. Paul was filled with confidence in his relationship to God and hope for the future.
2. **The letter to the Ephesians was intended as a “circular” letter and not necessarily a “problem solving” letter.** Most of what St. Paul wrote was as an answer or directive to the problems and concerns he was hearing about in specific communities. Examples would be, Galatians is a “hot letter” shot off to rebuke the community for giving in to the legalism of those Jewish Christians who placed their Jewish laws above the love of Christ. The two letters to the community of Corinth are filled with St. Paul’s corrections to problems including divisions within the community, lawsuits and immorality. The Letter to the Hebrews was a homily or speech. The Letter to the Ephesians is missed named as it was never meant solely for one community. It was written with the expectation that it would travel from community to community, not dealing with petty problems but offering praise to God and perspective as to our role in God’s plan of salvation.
3. **The letter to the Ephesians is an insight into St. Paul in prayer and praise to our God.** Remember back to the first three chapters. After a brief greeting St. Paul’s first words in Ephesians begins: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...* (1:3). The tone, the texture of those first three chapters were of St. Paul in ecstasy of prayer. In reading those first three chapters it is like we are a fly on the wall watching, hearing and receiving St. Paul in prayer. Those chapters were not addressed to us but to God. Our best response is to receive them and use them in all humility to form our own prayer and praise.
4. **The letter to the Ephesians is meant to frame how we as Christians walk in faith.** As believers earth is not our home, but we must sojourn through our lives in the midst of chaos, confusion and violence. In the second half of the letter to the Ephesians St. Paul

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reminds us that as believers we are to form ourselves to Christ and not the world. And he gives us a very simple plan of action to do that: *Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. (5:21)* The plan is this: to be great in the Kingdom of God we must work to recognize the Christ in every person we meet, and in that recognition to be in service to all.

5. **The Letter to the Ephesian calls us to be prepared to do battle with evil.** In the last days of our study we looked at one of the more powerful images that St. Paul provides: As believers we are to become soldiers of Christ and do battle with evil. And we do that by putting on the Armor of God. We all know all too well that there is evil in the world. Our stance as believers is not to reply to evil with evil but to offer love and service in the face of evil. But if we are to remain strong in facing that evil we need to be prepared by: *having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (6:14-17.)* God does not send us off to the battle without concern for our welfare and survival.
- Personal thought:** Maybe it would do us all well to reflect on, think about each of those elements of armor and give it a personal touch. Maybe we find a pin, necklace or other item that we put on each day as a reminder of the breastplate of righteousness that becomes our touchstone in the heat of the battle of the day. Maybe our helmet of salvation is religious reading and so on. Just a thought
6. **Finally, the letter to the Ephesians calls us to prayer.** *Pray at all times... (6:18)* St. Paul tells us because he understands something that we need to constantly remind ourselves – we need to be in relationship with God.

So, with those parting thoughts we bring our study of the letter to the Ephesians to a close. I hope and pray that our time together has been both edifying and challenging.

### Reflection Questions:

1. Take a moment to think about your own personal prayer life. How would you describe it? Is there some area or way you might be called to improve it?
2. If you were to do as St. Paul asks, *to pray at all times*, how would that look in your life? Do you think your life would be different? How or why not?
3. As we bring this study to a close what would you say were the high points? Ideas you want to remember? Thoughts that struck you?

## **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

Holy Spirit in Prayer: 2623, 2652, 2672

Call to Pray unceasing: 2742-45

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