

by Msgr. Frank Chioldo

Prayer



One of the most critical turning points of the American Civil War was the Battle of Gettysburg. Shortly before this battle, President Lincoln explained to one of his generals, General Sickles, that the burden of responsibility that rested on his shoulders was bone-crushing and that he had turned to God in prayer. Lincoln said, “Never before had I prayed with such earnestness. I wish I could repeat my prayer. I felt that I must put all my trust in Almighty God. He, alone, could save the nation from destruction. When I arose from my knees, I felt my prayer was answered. I had no misgivings about the result.”

Lincoln did not pray for an easy life; he prayed for the power to brave the battle and emerge victorious. Can you identify with Lincoln? Every parent, teacher, friend, spouse, or pastor has felt at one time or another the heat of battle—the battle to carry the burdens of life without allowing them to crush us under pressure, strain, or worry.

The Apostles in the Gospel experienced this stress. Jesus said to them, “Come by yourselves to an out-of-the-way place and rest a little.” The words of Jesus are words for us as well; come by yourselves to an out-of-the-way place and rest a little. What Jesus is inviting us to is rendezvous with Him, i.e., to pray.

As the old saying goes; “Do not pray for an easy life; pray to be a stronger person. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks.”

One of our greatest temptations is to pray for an escape. Some pray for an escape from the heat of spousal responsibility. Others pray for deliverance from the burden of being alone. Some pray to escape pain. However, the prayer we should offer is for powers equal to our tasks, whatever they might be.

If Lincoln had prayed for an escape, where would we be today? He prayed for the power to meet his tasks and God granted it. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians (1:17-18): “Jesus came and announced the good news of peace to you

who were far off, and to those who were near, through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”

Praying acknowledges our need for God’s power in our lives. Worrying denies it. Praying puts our hand in God’s, trusting in his loving guidance. Worrying withdraws our hand, denying God’s power to lead. Praying leads us through the door of faith into the presence of God. Worrying leads us through the door of anxiety into the darkness of loneliness and discouragement. If prayer does not cancel worrying, worrying will cancel prayer. Do not pray for an easy life; pray to be a stronger person. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks.

Who of us does not suffer from worrying?

We are beginning to discover the intricate relationship between emotional stress and physical illness. Jesus reminds us of the power of prayer—the medicine that counts: “Come by yourselves to an out-of-the-way place and rest a little.”

Sometimes people tell me they cannot find privacy for prayer. We MUST search for that prayer time and place. We thirst for the strength that comes only from our prayers—our conversation and communion with the Lord. Be creative and search for a prayer place to spend some precious moments each day with the Lord. I guarantee you will find yourself coping better with worries, strengthened to face the trials of life, and encouraged to keep on trying rather than escaping. Worrying can have a strangle hold on your life. Lincoln broke that stranglehold through prayer, and so can we.

There are two golden days about which I never worry—yesterday and tomorrow. Those days belong to God; therefore; that leaves me only today. Anyone can fight the battles of just one day. It is only when we add the burden of those two awful eternities (yesterday and tomorrow) that we break down. Those are God’s days. Leave them with Him. I will journey just one day at a time and pray.