

"Intercession"
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St. John Henry Newman
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"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Ephes. vi. 18.

1 EVERY one knows, who has any knowledge of the Gospel, that Prayer is one of its
2 especial ordinances; but not every one, perhaps, has noticed what kind of prayer its
3 inspired teachers most carefully enjoin. Prayer for self is the most obvious of duties, as
4 soon as leave is given us to pray at all, which Christ distinctly and mercifully accorded,
5 when He came. This is plain from the nature of the case; but He Himself has given us
6 also an express command and promise about ourselves, to "ask and it shall be given to
7 us." Yet it is observable, that though prayer for self is the first and plainest of Christian
8 duties, the Apostles especially insist on another kind of prayer; prayer for others, for
9 ourselves with others, for the Church, and for the world, that it may be brought into the
10 Church. Intercession is the characteristic of Christian worship, the privilege of the
11 heavenly adoption, the exercise of the perfect and spiritual mind. This is the subject to
12 which I shall now direct your attention.

13 1. First, let us turn to the express injunctions of Scripture. For instance, the text itself:
14 "Praying in every season with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and abstaining
15 from sleep for the purpose, with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."
16 Observe the earnestness of the intercession here inculcated; "in every season," "with all
17 supplication," and "to the loss of sleep." Again, in the epistle to the Colossians;
18 "Persevere in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving, withal praying for us also." Again,
19 "Brethren, pray for us." And again in detail; "I exhort that, first of all, supplications,
20 prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and all that
21 are in authority. I will therefore that men pray in every place." On the other hand, go
22 through the Epistles, and reckon up how many exhortations occur therein to pray merely
23 for self. You will find there are few, or rather none at all. Even those which seem at first
24 sight to be such, will be found really to have in view the good of the Church. Thus, to
25 take the words following the text, St. Paul, in asking his brethren's prayers, seems to
26 pray for himself: but he goes on to explain why—"that he might make known the
27 Gospel:" or elsewhere—that "the word of the Lord might have free course and be
28 glorified;" or, as where he says—"Let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue, pray
29 that he may interpret," [Col. iv. 2. 1 Thess. v. 25. 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2, 8. 2 Thess. iii. 1. 1 Cor.
30 xiv. 13.] for this, too, was a petition in order to the edification of the Church. Next,
31 consider St. Paul's own example, which is quite in accordance with his exhortations: "I
32 cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of
33 our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and
34 revelation in the knowledge of Him." "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,
35 always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy." "We give thanks to
36 God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you." "We give thanks to

37 God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers." [Eph. i. 16, 17. Phil. i. 3,
38 4. Col. i. 3. 1 Thess. i. 2.]

39 The instances of prayer, recorded in the Book of Acts, are of the same kind, being
40 almost entirely of an intercessory nature, as offered at ordinations, confirmations, cures,
41 missions, and the like. For instance; "As they interceded before the Lord, and fasted,
42 the Holy Ghost said, Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have
43 called them; and when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they
44 sent them away." Again, "And Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed:
45 and turning him to the body, said, Tabitha, arise." [Acts xiii. 2, 3; ix. 40.]

46 2. Such is the lesson taught us by the words and deeds of the Apostles and their
47 brethren. Nor could it be otherwise, if Christianity be a social religion, as it is pre-
48 eminently. If Christians are to live together, they will pray together; and united prayer is
49 necessarily of an intercessory character, as being offered for each other and for the
50 whole, and for self as one of the whole. In proportion, then, as unity is an especial
51 Gospel-duty, so does Gospel-prayer partake of a social character; and Intercession
52 becomes a token of the existence of a Church Catholic.

53 Accordingly, the foregoing instances of intercessory prayer are supplied by *Christians*.
54 On the other hand, contrast with these the recorded instances of prayer in men who
55 were *not* Christians, and you will find they are not intercessory. For instance: St. Peter's
56 prayer on the house-top was, we know, answered by the revelation of the call of the
57 Gentiles: viewing it then by the light of the texts already quoted, we may conclude, that,
58 as was the answer, such was the prayer—that it had reference to others. On the other
59 hand, Cornelius, not yet a Christian, was also rewarded with an answer to his prayer.
60 "Thy prayer is heard; call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; *he shall tell thee what*
61 *thou oughtest to do.*" Can we doubt, from these words of the Angel, that his prayers had
62 been offered for himself especially? Again, on St. Paul's conversion, we are told,
63 "Behold, he prayeth." It is plain he was praying for himself; and observe, it was before
64 he was a Christian. Thus, if we are to judge of the relative prominence of religious
65 duties by the recorded instances of the performance of them, we should say that
66 Intercession is the kind of prayer distinguishing a Christian from such as are not
67 Christians.

68 3. But the instance of St. Paul opens upon us a second reason for this distinction.
69 Intercession is the especial observance of the Christian, because he alone is in a
70 condition to offer it. It is the function of the justified and obedient, of the Sons of God,
71 "who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit;" not of the carnal and unregenerate.
72 This is plain even to natural reason. The blind man, who was cured, said of Christ, "We
73 know that God heareth not sinners; but, if any man *be a worshipper of God and doeth*
74 *His will, him He heareth.*" [John ix. 31.] Saul the persecutor obviously could not
75 intercede like St. Paul the Apostle. He had yet to be baptized and forgiven. It would be a
76 presumption and an extravagance in a penitent, before his regeneration, to do aught but
77 confess his sins and deprecate wrath. He has not yet proceeded, he has had no leave
78 to proceed, out of himself; and has enough to do within. His conscience weighs heavy

79 on him, nor has he "the wings of a dove to flee away and be at rest." We need not, I
80 say, go to Scripture for information on so plain a point. Our first prayers ever must be for
81 ourselves. Our own salvation is our personal concern; till we labour to secure it, till we
82 try to live religiously, and pray to be enabled to do so, nay, and have made progress, it
83 is but hypocrisy, or at best it is overbold, to busy ourselves with others. I do not mean
84 that prayer for self always comes first in order of time, and Intercession second. Blessed
85 be God, we were all made His children before we had actually sinned; we began life in
86 purity and innocence. Intercession is never more appropriate than when sin had been
87 utterly abolished, and the heart was most affectionate and least selfish. Nor would I
88 deny, that a care for the souls of other men may be the first symptom of a man's
89 beginning to think about his own; or that persons, who are conscious to themselves of
90 much guilt, often pray for those whom they revere and love, when under the influence of
91 fear, or in agony, or other strong emotion, and, perhaps, at other times. Still it is true,
92 that there is something incongruous and inconsistent in a man's presuming to intercede,
93 who is an habitual and deliberate sinner. Also it is true, that most men do, more or less,
94 fall away from God, sully their baptismal robe, need the grace of repentance, and have
95 to be awakened to the necessity of prayer for self, as the first step in observing prayer
96 of any kind.

97 "God heareth not sinners;" nature tells us this; but none but God Himself could tell us
98 that He will hear and answer those who are not sinners; for "when we have done all, we
99 are unprofitable servants, and can claim no reward for our services." But He has
100 graciously promised us this mercy, in Scripture, as the following texts will show.

101 For instance, St. James says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a *righteous* man availeth
102 much." St. John, "Whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, *because we keep* His
103 commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight." [James v. 16. 1
104 John iii. 22.] Next let us weigh carefully our Lord's solemn announcements uttered
105 shortly before His crucifixion, and, though addressed primarily to His Apostles, yet,
106 surely, in their degree belonging to all who "believe on Him through their word." We
107 shall find that consistent obedience, mature, habitual, lifelong holiness, is therein made
108 the condition of His intimate favour, and of power in Intercession. "If ye abide in Me," he
109 says, "and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto
110 you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples.
111 As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you; abide ye in My love. If ye keep My
112 commandments, ye shall abide in My love. Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I
113 command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his
114 lord doeth; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard of My Father, I have
115 made known unto you." [John xv. 7-15.] From this solemn grant of the peculiarly Gospel
116 privilege of being the "friends" of Christ, it is certain, that as the prayer of repentance
117 gains for us sinners Baptism and justification, so our higher gift of having power with
118 Him and prevailing, depends on our "adding to our faith virtue."

119 Let us turn to the examples given us of holy men under former dispensations, whose
120 obedience and privileges were anticipations of the evangelical. St. James, after the
121 passage already cited from his epistle, speaks of Elijah thus: "Elias was a man subject

122 to like passions as we are, yet he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained
123 not on the earth by the space of three years and six months." Righteous Job was
124 appointed by Almighty God to be the effectual intercessor for his erring friends. Moses,
125 who was "faithful in all the house" of God, affords us another eminent instance of
126 intercessory power; as in the Mount, and on other occasions, when he pleaded for his
127 rebellious people, or in the battle with Amalek, when Israel continued conquering as
128 long as his hands remained lifted up in prayer. Here we have a striking emblem of that
129 continued, earnest, unwearied prayer of men "lifting up *holy hands*," which, under the
130 Gospel, prevails with Almighty God. Again, in the book of Jeremiah, Moses and Samuel
131 are spoken of as mediators so powerful, that only the sins of the Jews were too great for
132 the success of their prayers. In like manner it is implied, in the book of Ezekiel, that
133 three such as Noah, Daniel, and Job, would suffice, in some cases, to save guilty
134 nations from judgment. Sodom might have been rescued by ten. Abraham, though he
135 could not save the abandoned city just mentioned, yet was able to save Lot from the
136 overthrow; as at another time he interceded successfully for Abimelech. The very
137 intimation given him of God's purpose towards Sodom was of course an especial
138 honour, and marked him as the friend of God. "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing
139 which I do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation; and all
140 the nations of the world shall be blessed in him?" The reason follows, "*for I know him*,
141 that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the
142 way of the Lord to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that
143 which He hath spoken of him." [Gen. xviii. 17-19.]

144 4. The history of God's dealings with Abraham will afford us an additional lesson, which
145 must be ever borne in mind in speaking of the privilege of the saints on earth as
146 intercessors between God and man. I can fancy a person, from apprehension lest the
147 belief in it should interfere with the true reception of the doctrine of the Cross, perplexed
148 at finding it in the foregoing texts so distinctly connected with obedience: I
149 say *perplexed*, for I will not contemplate the case of those, though there are such, who,
150 when the text of Scripture seems to them to be at variance with itself, and one portion to
151 diverge from another, will not allow themselves to be perplexed, will not suspend their
152 minds and humbly wait for light, will not believe that the Divine Scheme is larger and
153 deeper than their own capacities, but boldly wrest into factitious agreement what is
154 already harmonious in God's infinite counsels, though not to them. I speak to perplexed
155 persons; and would have them observe that Almighty God has, in this very instance of
156 Abraham our spiritual father, been mindful of that other aspect under which the most
157 highly exalted among the children of flesh must ever stand in His presence. It is
158 elsewhere said of him, "Abraham *believed* in the Lord, and He counted it to him for
159 righteousness," [Gen. xv. 6.] as St. Paul points out, when he is discoursing upon the
160 free grace of God in our redemption. Even Abraham was justified by faith, though he
161 was perfected by works; and this being told us in the book of Genesis, seems as if an
162 intimation to the perplexed inquirer that his difficulty can be but an apparent one—that,
163 while God reveals the one doctrine, He is not the less careful of the other also, nor
164 rewards His servants (though He rewards them) for works done by their own strength.
165 On the other hand, it is a caution to us, who rightly insist on the prerogatives imparted
166 by his grace, ever to remember that it is grace only that ennobles and exalts us in His

167 sight. Abraham is our spiritual father; and as he is, so are his children. In us, as in him,
168 faith must be the foundation of all that is acceptable with God. "By faith we stand," by
169 faith we are justified, by faith we obey, by faith our works are sanctified. Faith applies to
170 us again and again the grace of our Baptism; faith opens upon us the virtue of all other
171 ordinances of the Gospel—of the Holy Communion, which is the highest. By faith we
172 prevail "in the hour of death and in the day of judgment." And the distinctness and force
173 with which this is told us in the Epistles, and its obviousness, even to our natural
174 reason, may be the cause why less stress is laid in them on the duty of prayer for self.
175 The very instinct of faith will lead a man to do this without set command, and the
176 Sacraments secure its observance.—So much then, by way of caution, on the influence
177 of faith upon our salvation, furthering it, yet not interfering with the distinct office of
178 works in giving virtue to our intercession.

179 And here let me observe on a peculiarity of Scripture, its speaking as if separate
180 rewards attended on separate graces, according to our Lord's words, "To him that hath
181 more shall be given;" so that what has been said in contrasting faith and works, is but
182 one instance under a general rule. Thus, in the Sermon on the Mount, the beatitudes
183 are pronounced on separate virtues respectively. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall
184 inherit the earth;" "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God;" and the rest in
185 like manner. I am not attempting to determine what these particular graces are, what the
186 rewards, what the aptitude of the one to the other, what the real connexion between the
187 reward and the grace, or how far one grace can be separated from another in fact. We
188 know that all depend on one root, faith, and are but differently developed in different
189 persons. Again, we see in Scripture that the same reward is not invariably assigned to
190 the same grace, as if, from the intimate union between all graces, their rewards might
191 (as it were) be lent and interchanged one with another; yet enough is said there to direct
192 our minds to the existence of the principle itself, though we be unable to fathom its
193 meaning and consequences. It is somewhat upon this principle that our Articles ascribe
194 justification to faith *only*, as a symbol of the free grace of our redemption; just as in the
195 parable of the Pharisee and Publican, our Lord would seem to impute it to self-
196 abasement, and in His words to the "woman which was a sinner," to love as well as to
197 faith, while St. James connects it with works. In other instances the reward follows in the
198 course of nature. Thus the gift of wisdom is the ordinary result of trial borne religiously;
199 courage, of endurance. In this way St. Paul draws out a series of spiritual gifts one from
200 another, experience from patience, hope from experience, boldness and confidence
201 from hope. I will add but two instances from the Old Testament. The commandment
202 says, "Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long;" a promise which
203 was signally fulfilled in the case even of the Rechabites, who were not of Israel. Again,
204 from Daniel's history we learn that illumination, or other miraculous power, is the reward
205 of fasting and prayer. "In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no
206 pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at
207 all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled ... And he said unto me, Fear not, Daniel; for
208 from the first day that thou didst set thine heart *to understand and to chasten thyself*
209 *before thy God*, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words Now I am come
210 to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days." With this
211 passage compare St. Peter's vision about the Gentiles while he prayed and fasted; and,

212 again, our Lord's words about casting out the "dumb and deaf spirit," "This kind can
213 come forth by nothing but by prayer and fasting." [Ex. xx. 12. Jer. xxxv. 18, 19. Dan. x.
214 2-14. Mark ix. 29.] It is then by a similar appointment that Intercession is the prerogative
215 and gift of the obedient and holy.

216 5. Why should we be unwilling to admit what it is so great a consolation to know? Why
217 should we refuse to credit the transforming power and efficacy of our Lord's Sacrifice?
218 Surely He did not die for any common end, but in order to exalt man, who was of the
219 dust of the field, into "heavenly places." He did not die to leave him as he was, sinful,
220 ignorant, and miserable. He did not die to see His purchased possession, as feeble in
221 good works, as corrupt, as poor-spirited, and as desponding, as before He came.
222 Rather, He died to renew him after His own image, to make him a being He might
223 delight and rejoice in, to make him "partaker of the divine nature," to fill him within and
224 without with a flood of grace and glory; to pour out upon him gift upon gift, and virtue
225 upon virtue, and power upon power, each acting upon each, and working together one
226 and all, till he becomes an Angel upon earth, instead of a rebel and an outcast. He died
227 to bestow upon him that privilege which implies or involves all others, and brings him
228 into nearest resemblance to Himself, the privilege of Intercession. This, I say, is the
229 Christian's especial prerogative; and if he does not exercise it, certainly he has not risen
230 to the conception of his real place among created beings. Say not he is a son of Adam,
231 and has to undergo a future judgment; I know it; but he is something besides. How far
232 he is advanced into that higher state of being, how far he still languishes in his first
233 condition, is, in the case of individuals, a secret with God. Still every Christian is in a
234 certain sense both in the one and in the other: viewed in himself he ever prays for
235 pardon, and confesses sin; but viewed in Christ, he "has access into this grace wherein
236 we stand, and rejoices in hope of the glory of God." [Rom. v. 2.] Viewed in his place in
237 "the Church of the First-born enrolled in heaven," with his original debt cancelled in
238 Baptism, and all subsequent penalties put aside by Absolution, standing in God's
239 presence upright and irrevocable, accepted in the Beloved, clad in the garments of
240 righteousness, anointed with oil, and with a crown upon his head, in royal and priestly
241 garb, as an heir of eternity, full of grace and good works, as walking in all the
242 commandments of the Lord blameless, such an one, I repeat it, is plainly in his fitting
243 place when he intercedes. He is made after the pattern and in the fulness of Christ—he
244 is what Christ is. Christ intercedes above, and he intercedes below. Why should he
245 linger in the doorway, praying for pardon, who has been allowed to share in the grace of
246 the Lord's passion, to die with Him and rise again? He is already in a capacity for higher
247 things. His prayer thenceforth takes a higher range, and contemplates not himself
248 merely, but others also. He is taken into the confidence and counsels of his Lord and
249 Saviour. He reads in Scripture what the many cannot see there, the course of His
250 providence, and the rules of His government in this world. He views the events of
251 history with a divinely enlightened eye. He sees that a great contest is going on among
252 us between good and evil. He recognizes in statesmen, and warriors, and kings, and
253 people, in revolutions and changes, in trouble and prosperity, not merely casual
254 matters, but instruments and tokens of heaven and of hell. Thus he is in some sense a
255 prophet; not a servant, who obeys without knowing his Lord's plans and purposes, but
256 even a confidential "familiar friend" of the Only-begotten Son of God, calm, collected,

257 prepared, resolved, serene, amid this restless and unhappy world. O mystery of
258 blessedness, too great to think of steadily, lest we grow dizzy! Well is it for those who
259 are so gifted, that they do not for certain know their privilege; well is it for them that they
260 can but timidly guess at it, or rather, I should say, are used, as well as bound, to
261 contemplate it as external to themselves, lodged in the Church of which they are but
262 members, and the gift of all saints in every time and place, without curiously inquiring
263 whether it is theirs peculiarly above others, or doing more than availing themselves of it
264 as any how a trust committed to them (with whatever success) to use. Well is it for
265 them; for what mortal heart could bear to know that it is brought so near to God
266 Incarnate, as to be one of those who are perfecting holiness, and stand on the very
267 steps of the throne of Christ?

268 To conclude. If any one asks, "How am I to know whether I am advanced enough in
269 holiness to intercede?" he has plainly mistaken the doctrine under consideration. The
270 privilege of Intercession is a trust committed to all Christians who have a clear
271 conscience and are in full communion with the Church. We leave secret things to God—
272 what each man's real advancement is in holy things, and what his real power in the
273 unseen world. Two things alone concern us, to exercise our gift and make ourselves
274 more and more worthy of it. The slothful and unprofitable servant hid his Lord's talent in
275 a napkin. This sin be far from us as regards one of the greatest of our gifts! By words
276 and works we can but teach or influence a few; by our prayers we may benefit the
277 whole world, and every individual of it, high and low, friend, stranger, and enemy. Is it
278 not fearful then to look back on our past lives even in this one respect? How can we tell
279 but that our king, our country, our Church, our institutions, and our own respective
280 circles, would be in far happier circumstances than they are, had we been in the
281 practice of more earnest and serious prayer for them? How can we complain of
282 difficulties, national or personal, how can we justly blame and denounce evil-minded
283 and powerful men, if we have but lightly used the intercessions offered up in the Litany,
284 the Psalms, and in the Holy Communion? How can we answer to ourselves for the
285 souls who have, in our time, lived and died in sin; the souls that have been lost and are
286 now waiting for judgment, the infidel, the blasphemer, the profligate, the covetous, the
287 extortioner; or those again who have died with but doubtful signs of faith, the death-bed
288 penitent, the worldly, the double-minded, the ambitious, the unruly, the trifling, the self-
289 willed, seeing that, for what we know, we were ordained to influence or reverse their
290 present destiny and have not done it?

291 Secondly and lastly, If so much depend on us, "What manner of persons ought we to
292 be, in all holy conversation and godliness!" Oh that we may henceforth be more diligent
293 than heretofore, in keeping the mirror of our hearts unsullied and bright, so as to reflect
294 the image of the Son of God in the Father's presence, clean from the dust and stains of
295 this world, from envies and jealousies, strife and debate, bitterness and harshness,
296 indolence and impurity, care and discontent, deceit and meanness, arrogance and
297 boasting! Oh that we may labour, not in our own strength, but in the power of God the
298 Holy Spirit, to be sober, chaste, temperate, meek, affectionate, good, faithful, firm,
299 humble, patient, cheerful, resigned, under all circumstances, at all times, among all

300 people, amid all trials and sorrows of this mortal life! May God grant us the power,
301 according to His promise, through His Son our Saviour Jesus Christ!