

Sermon for the Sixth Sunday of Easter May 10, 2026 jj  
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✠ sdg ✠

The month of May can be very solemn in America, you could even say it's spiritual. It urges us to dip down deep into our nation's religious roots and our reliance on God our Creator. Last week was the National Day of Prayer. Today we keep an American tradition to honor our mothers, whom God has used to build our character and teach us to pray. And of course at the end of this month our Nation will observe that most somber national holiday, Memorial Day. At these seemingly spiritual occasions it just feels right to say a prayer with all our fellow citizens, regardless of denomination, thanking God for His abundant blessings and including a prayer for those who are still out there, hard at work defending our liberties and promoting the well-being of our allies. You have often seen students in the past holding hands in a moment of prayer standing around the flag pole. Churches often make a patriotic tug at the heart strings, even going so far as to force the pledge of allegiance into the liturgy and manufacture a new creed exalting the Christian virtues of certain founding Fathers.

Of course, if feeling is the only thing you go on when you consider the spiritual work of prayer, then you run the risk of straying from God's Word and what our Lord Jesus Christ gives us in the gift of prayer. I can give you an example from Kansas City, where they absolutely love President Truman. But a few years ago, on the occasion of Truman's birthday (also in May) a Catholic priest offered a so-called "prayer" that really was just a collection of Truman's pithy quotes arranged one after another like a litany so that one of them went like this: "If you want to have a friend in Washington,

get a dog." And everybody was supposed to respond, "Amen." As cute as that was, and well-intended to honor one of our presidents, I'm sure, it said to me at least that American Christians can sometimes get a little lost when they think about prayer. It's like they are wandering around in the dark, and can't find their way.

In our reading from Acts 17, the Apostle Paul visited the eminent city of Athens—it was the St Augustine of Greece- already an ancient city in his day! Athens was constantly buzzing with philosophers, thinkers, theologians and religious experts from all over the known world. Following the tradition of Alexander the Great, leading thinkers at Athens were constantly pursuing all possible philosophies and religions in order to arrive at a deeper, more profound truth.

Our world around us may look like it is doing the very same thing as those educated people did in Athens. Always learning, but never coming to a full understanding. What I would say is the most profound difference, however, between then and now was that the men of Athens gathered more and more information so that they would better understand those things that were already true in the world around them. Today, on the other hand, there is no more search for information, really! The information bombards you constantly, and it practically demands that you must throw out the window anything that you currently consider true, and give your thumbs up "like" to this or that influencer. Nobody seems confident in absolute truth anymore, including many

Christians. They question truth reminiscent of Pontius Pilate; in fact, it can be considered quite rude and arrogant for you to say one religion is better than another. Instead, it's popular to believe that you just have to find what works for your own purposes. You can use religion, philosophy, values, politics, anything. You just can't say in today's world that what God has said is really the one, profound, all-encompassing truth that's good for everyone. And with just the right amount of boldness, you could respond as many are beginning to do again, "Who says you can't say that?"

Paul's tactic was not to condemn the Athenians, to be sure. That wasn't his apostolic and missionary call. But it is important to note that he did not affirm their scatter-shot belief in all those false gods, either. Instead, he preached the Gospel to these people, saying, "I know you are nobly diligent in searching for the truth and if you will hear me out, I will present to you the Good News that your search is over!" Then Paul preached to them following an outline that's very similar to the Creed. He said: "The God who created you and has sustained your earthly life, is the one and only true God. He sent His Son as His appointed Savior, who died and rose from the dead, and will come again to judge the world in righteousness." Rather than contradicting them, Paul, out of Christian love for all people lost in sin, delivered to them God's own command that everyone should repent. He let God remain the judge, and He informed the ignorant so they would know the one and only Gospel truth.

We have the blessing of the freedom of religion, for which we should daily thank and praise the Lord. In general, it holds true that all citizens ought to be free to worship

according to their conscience. Still, that does not accurately translate into a conclusion that all religions are true. Nor does it mandate that religions be mixed together or treated as equal attempts to approach our Creator. There's a lot of "try us, see if you like what we have to offer," out there, I remember it being called "church shopping," and that is especially tempting in American society. But it wasn't easy for St. Paul, either. He needed great courage to confess the one, true faith. And he had the sincere love for the lost brothers and sisters of Athens and other mission fields to tell them what God wanted them to hear. He did not have to change or modify what he said in order to help the Word out or give the Holy Spirit a helping hand.

Note also that Paul did not ask them to continue their ignorant spiritual groping, saying something like, that's OK, one day you may possibly stumble on Jesus Christ the crucified. He did not invite them to pray themselves into the Holy Christian Church. Prayer was certainly not Paul's instrument by which a person accepted Jesus into his heart. Instead, prayer is described in the Bible as the response of a faith already given. It, too, is a precious gift of God, thanks to Christ. Prayer is a privilege bestowed upon us by the Holy Spirit, along with all of His gifts, about which we will hear again soon on the Day of Pentecost.

Today, we heard the promise that Jesus gave to His disciples just before His suffering and death. Yet a little while, Jesus says, and you will see Me. If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. If you ask anything in My Name, I will do it. But how can it be that those great blessings and promises often have such a tough time breaking through to your heart? Why are you at times concerned

about only your own well-being, and not about that of your neighbor? What kind of grip does worry or anxiety have over your spiritual life? Perhaps it's difficult for you at times to see your faith as having any impact on the rest of your life out there in the so-called "real world." Or, in order to search for something more relevant, you start to fall for the "pick and choose" temptations of our culture.

Our merciful Lord is not an unknown God, after all. In fact, as St. Paul said to the people of Athens, quoting from a pagan poet even, God the Holy Trinity is the Supreme Being who is very near to us. He had every right to condemn you for your sin and for your sluggishness in putting your faith into practice. He deserves to refuse your prayers. But he doesn't. Not because you said you were really sorry this time. Not because you made a handsome deal with the Lord. It's because Christ your Savior pleaded for you. He followed through on His promises to you, and granted you the forgiveness that was bought and paid for by His blood on the cross. Your experience and your feelings may tell you in certain times of your life that you might be an abandoned orphan in this cold, cruel world. You feel as though you have no one to rely on but yourself. No one will understand you, and the politically correct society will inevitably find some way to refuse a place for you and for what you confess to be true. But Jesus says, I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. Because I live, you also will live. My resurrection is yours. You may pray with certainty in my Name because I have already given you everything for free.

As we enter the week anticipating Christ's Ascension in the Church Year calendar, prayer is highly emphasized. Prayer and

keeping the commandments both express one and the same love for Jesus. That's because they also flow from His great love for us. He comforts us with the assurance that we need not grope around for truth in the darkness of our sin. We need not fear the antagonism that comes at us from every corner of our society, from people claiming to be smarter, from those followers of Hollywood debauchery, from anyone more interested in self-preservation (whether it's in politics or in the school and workplace). Yes, we might even get friction from wholesome American spirituality in this solemn month of May and feel forced to focus only on our feelings of love for God and of brotherhood with each other, don't offend your mother, and forget about all our different doctrine talk.

No, you are not a slave to the cute and the current. Those things of this world don't make prayer any more effective even though they may temporarily feel good. You don't have to pray to satisfy some innate feeling or urge to get closer to God. You rather have the privilege to pray because Jesus Christ gave that privilege to you before He ascended to the Father's right hand. He died and rose to forgive you and claim you as His own. You have the Savior's own sworn promise that the Father loves you. Thanks to His Holy Word, He is not an unknown God, like He was in ancient Athens. During this month of May, from Mother's Day leading up to Memorial Day, when you set aside a holy day and remember someone special or remember those who are now gone, remember also your living Savior, who is with you as He promised, and make use of the precious gift of prayer that He has granted you.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.