

Hello everyone! And welcome to our Wednesday Word devotion for today, February 3, 2021. Thank you so much for tuning in, and for taking this time out of your day to focus on God and focus on your faith.

For today's devotion, I would love to continue on with leaning into the prayers of ancient church forebears. I am so moved by the words they prayed and proclaimed and how true so many of these tenets of faith continue to be, even hundreds of years later. What comfort we can take, that God continues to show up for us and for all people, no matter the time or place or space.

The prayer that really captivated me for today's devotion was written by Catherine of Siena, a well-beloved, medieval Italian saint who had a beautiful, powerful, mystical faith, and played an active role in the medieval Catholic church - super unlikely and also incredible for a woman living in the 14th century. I could go on about her historical and credential achievements, but we're here for a devotion, not history lesson today. Her writings, prayers, and many theological thoughts collected in *The Dialogue of Divine Providence*, speak of a mystical God, a deeply spiritual faith, and a physical, lived experience of God in her day to day life. And the prayer we will read and pray today does an incredible job of linking the spiritual with the physical aspects of our life, and how they cannot be separated, that God is within and around every part of us, in love, light, wisdom, and strength.

So, please join me in praying these words of Catherine of Siena:

*Power of the eternal Father, help me. Wisdom of the Son, enlighten the eye of my understanding. Tender mercy of the Holy Spirit, unite my heart to yourself. Eternal God, restore health to the sick and life to the dead. Give us a voice, your own voice, to cry out to you for mercy for the world. You, light, give us light. You, wisdom, give us wisdom. You, supreme strength, strengthen us. Amen.*

And our Scripture reading for today comes from John 6:52-63:

*The crowd then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.*

*When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.*

The Word of the Lord.

I love the honesty of the disciples in the Scripture reading and often identify with their sentiment - "This teaching is difficult, who can accept it?". How many difficult realities have we had to face in this past year, in this current season, and indeed over the course of life itself?

And so many of those difficult realities come directly at the intersection of the physical and the spiritual. COVID has killed over 400,000 people in the US alone, and the grief faced by their loved ones left behind is heartbreaking on so many levels. The physical reality of people dying creates a new and unbelievably hard spiritual reality for people who continue to live. And how often do the difficult spiritual, mental, emotional realities in our lives start to wreak havoc on our bodies too? How often do we ignore our spiritual emotional pain until we physically cannot go on anymore?

As much as I wish I could give you easy answers on how to cope with these incredibly difficult realities, indeed some of the hardest questions of even being alive, really only God can bring about the healing and comfort we need to face these challenges. We can be assured that God is very present in our lives, showing up, as Saint Catherine prays, as wisdom, strength, and light. Sometimes we need to gain our comfort and strength and healing from resting in how God is different and more powerful than anything we could imagine. God is powerful enough to make God's presence known certainly in the physical sacraments of the bread and wine, indeed in the human and divine Christ who guides our paths and saves our lives every single day, and in the incredible power of creation - creating the world around us, creating new life for us by the power of Jesus Christ every single day. That holy presence of God is so wholly other from us and yet so crucially within us it is the very breath that fills our lungs by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So maybe coping with the painful realities of life isn't so much about calling on God to fix things the way we want to see them fixed, but rather calling on God for the strength, wisdom, and light that God herself is. Maybe it's about uniting us to the promises of life, healing, and mercy that God himself provides, for our hearts, our bodies, our whole selves. And maybe praying to God for a revelation of Godself is what can provide for us a new way, a way of help and guidance, and a way to continue to live and find new life in the challenges we face each day.

So as we take a deep breath, feeling that Spirit power of life uniting our bodies and spirits together, let us pray these words of Saint Catherine once again:

*Power of the eternal Father, help me. Wisdom of the Son, enlighten the eye of my understanding. Tender mercy of the Holy Spirit, unite my heart to yourself. Eternal God, restore health to the sick and life to the dead. Give us a voice, your own voice, to cry out to you for mercy for the world. You, light, give us light. You, wisdom, give us wisdom. You, supreme strength, strengthen us. Amen.*

Go in peace, dear friends, have a beautiful rest of your day. Amen.

[Physical, Spiritual God and Saint Catherine of Siena]