

Christian congregation in Ephesus. He names them (and us) “the saints” (Eph. 1:15-23).

Not that any have been excluded from the blessing — all the ways that God blesses inevitably involve us — but there is a slight shift at verse 15 that brings the saints into particular focus. The saints are pulled into an act of thanksgiving: “I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers” (Eph. 1:16). He gives thanks, and before you know it he is praying *for* them: “I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you . . .” (v. 17).

Give what? Paul enumerates five gifts that he is praying that the God of blessing will give them:

wisdom and revelation,
an enlightened heart,
hope,
the riches of his glorious inheritance,
the immeasurable greatness of his power.

These gifts don’t just float at random down out of the sky, scattered like confetti. They have energy behind them. They are the “working of [God’s] great power” in Christ (vv. 19-20). The power that brings these gifts to us is ascribed to four successive and interrelated actions of God in Christ. After listing the gifts, Paul supplies four details that fill out exactly how God puts this power to work in Christ:

He raised him from the dead.
He seated him at his right hand.
He put all things under his feet.
He made him head over all things for the church.

The five anticipated gifts tell us what we can expect from God as we practice resurrection. God’s way of putting “this power,” this gift giving, at work in us is both personal (“in Christ”) and cosmic (Jesus raised, ascended, ruling, and head of the church). The practice of resurrection is no hole-in-the-corner affair. This is not something to culti-

vate privately. We participate in everything that Christ does. The five prayed-for gifts and the four dimensions of the reach of Christ’s power take their place in the context of the seven all-encompassing rocket verbs of blessing and the triply emphatic “praise of his glory” that tells us how all this is going to turn out.

This is a lot to take in. Extravagance compounded. Prayer extrapolated in every dimension. We can’t help being impressed. This resurrection country, “the land of the living” that the psalmists so keenly anticipated, cannot be reduced to domesticated moralism or civilized good manners — or projected into a future that we will inhabit after death. This is the country that we live in. Here. Now.

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Paul has used three verbs to name what he is doing: bless, give thanks, pray. And one noun: prayers. But prayer — and Paul at prayer is a conspicuous example — cannot be accounted for by grammar. It is fairly common among us to discuss the language of prayer by developing a vocabulary of nomenclature: adoration, petition, intercession, praise, thanksgiving, blessing, confession, even imprecation. This making of lists is not without its usefulness, but I have never been fond of the practice. Too much is excluded.

What we are after in the practice of resurrection is a way of language in which the word of God to us is continuously implicit in the way we use words, both in response to God and in relation to one another. It is a fluency and habit in the use of language that is comprehensive of all that God says and does and that is thoroughly dialogical, conversational.

Martin Thornton, one of our best teachers on the nature and practice of what is involved in prayer, often capitalized the word — Prayer — and treated it as the act and acts that bring everything together in attention and offering to God. When we pray we are not holy ghosts levitating, but bodies held firmly in place by gravity.

These are his words: “Written with an initial capital — Prayer — we have a generic term for any process or activity qualified by a living

relation between human souls and God. It not only embraces all the usual divisions of prayer . . . but all such works, arts, and moral acts which truly spring from our communion with God. Prayer, quite simply, is the total experience of the Christian man and woman."²

We pray when we are meditatively quiet before God with Psalm 118 open before us; we pray while taking out the garbage; we pray when we are losing our grip and then ask God for help; we pray when we are weeding the garden; we pray when we are asking God to help a friend who is at the end of her rope; we pray when we are writing a letter; we pray when we are in conversation with our cynical and bullying boss; we pray with our friends in church; we pray walking down Main Street in the company of strangers.

I am not saying (nor is Thornton) that everything we do is prayer, but that everything we do and say and think *can* be prayer. It seems to have been that way with Paul. I am also saying that many of us pray far more than we are aware that we are praying. We pray when we are not in a conventional place of prayer. We pray when we are not using the conventional language of prayer. I am saying that "always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1 KJV) happens a lot, unnoticed and unremarked.

There are forms and models for prayer. It is important to know and be familiar with them. But looking for models, methods, and strategies that can be duplicated is not the way to mature in prayer anymore than learning stock phrases as a child ("You're welcome" . . . "Thank you" . . . "Please pass the potatoes" . . .) is the way to become fluent in the English language. God works differently in each local context. We saturate our minds and memories in Christ and the Scriptures, and then go about our day's work without a prepared script, unself-consciously trusting the Holy Spirit language — its syntax and metaphors, its tone and rhythms — always working deep in our souls without awareness, sometimes articulate in our ears and on our tongues.

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2. Martin Thornton, *Pastoral Theology: A Reorientation* (London: SPCK, 1964), p. 4.

John Wright Follette was an itinerant teacher in the church world in which I grew up. At the time I am writing about, he was elderly, perhaps in his seventies. He never married. He was greatly revered as a "saint" all over the country. He was small of stature and slight of build, a kind of spidery figure with delicate fingers and ascetic mien. He spoke always in a soft voice and never smiled. My parents were fond of him and provided hospitality whenever he was in our area of Montana. He loved to spend days of retreat at our mountain lake cabin.

One summer day I accompanied my mother to the cabin for the day to prepare his meals and "sit at his feet" (her words). I was about sixteen and greatly in awe of his reputation as a holy man. After lunch he retired to a hammock on the shore of the lake to rest. I observed him from the deck of our cabin and wanted desperately to talk with him, the famous Dr. Follette. I wanted to talk to him about prayer. This was the chance of a lifetime. After an hour or so I got impatient — we were going to have to leave in a while, and I didn't want to miss my chance. I asked my mother how long she thought he would sleep. She said she didn't think he was sleeping: "He likes to be quiet and listen to the Spirit." She told me to go down and speak with him: "He won't mind." I was hesitant, shy — the "holy man"! She was insistent. Tentatively, cautiously, I approached the hammock.

"Dr. Follette, can I talk to you about prayer?"

He didn't open his eyes, but he spoke. He spoke in a kind of bark, louder than I had ever heard him, "I haven't prayed for forty years!"

I stood there. Stunned. That was it. I left.

I wandered off into the woods, puzzled and then scandalized. The venerable Dr. Follette — hadn't prayed for forty years! I never told my mother lest she also be scandalized at this fraud. I kept my secret.

Five or six years elapsed before what had taken place dawned on me. He *was*, in fact, wise and holy. He knew intuitively that the callow adolescent that was me that day would have swallowed whole anything he said and slavishly imitated it. No matter what he said, no matter how wise and holy, it would have sent me off for years of trying to be Dr. Follette at prayer — wasted years of imitating an icon — when I needed to be experimenting, practicing, internalizing the way of lan-