

Body and Soul Together

All I really want to do this morning is remind us all of how theologically important our bodies are. When Jesus gave the disciples the prayer we also use now, called “The Lord’s Prayer,” it contained the curious phrase, “give us this day our daily bread.” It is a curious phrase for us in particular, because it does not seem necessary at all for us to have to pray to God for our daily bread. We have bread on the counter, or in the pantry, or in the freezer. Or if we run out, we simply hop in our car and drive to the grocery store and choose from among a dizzying array of choices some bread, pay for it with our debit card, and head back home. It would definitely be different for us, though, wouldn’t it, if we had to pray for our daily bread, as some desperate people in the world do. God, it seems though, even wants us who have plenty of bread, to ask for it on a daily basis, if for no other reason than by way of saying that we KNOW that in the end we are indeed dependent upon God for our bread.

But mainly I think that this curious phrase in this prayer is, as is most of scripture, a metaphor. It is a metaphor for all that is needed for this body which God has given us to be alive and well. I also suggest that its inclusion in Jesus’ prayer puts the body at par with the soul, and implies that human wholeness will always include some balance between body and soul. So, for the Apostle to charge us to present to God “our bodies as a spiritual sacrifice,” clearly raises the stakes on the value of humanity and the role of the human body in our life of faith and practice of religion.

God highly values these bodies which Godself has given us! God calls even and especially our bodies into God’s service, a service which the Apostle calls “holy and acceptable,” our “spiritual worship.” So, you see, whatever all is meant by spirituality and spiritual worship, they have a lot to do with the body, yours, mine, ours and all others!

And so the Church has always lifted up prayers for health, healing and wholeness. The Church has, for centuries, offered anointing with oil to beseech God’s blessings upon our bodies. For centuries, the only hospitals were the churches, which took in the needy, the aged, the infirm, and the young and cared for them, certainly anointing them, but also offering such other measures of medical care as were available. Modern medicine may have done us no favor when hospitals began to be established as secular institutions, even businesses, altogether divorced from the faith and from the Church. And churches that care only for the soul, and not for the body, are doing us no favor either!

So today, we have this rare opportunity to come forward and be anointed with oil as a blessing from God upon these unique and marvelous bodies God has not only given us, but also calls into divine service! For, in the final analysis, the offering of our bodies to God as a spiritual sacrifice constitutes the highest purpose for these bodies of ours.