

## Devotions for the week of the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, July 26-30

### Monday of Pentecost 9 – Prayer of the Week

Almighty and most merciful God, the protector of all who trust in You, strengthen our faith and give us courage to believe that in Your love You will rescue us from all adversities; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one god, now and forever.

*Not long ago we were sitting on our patio in the evening when suddenly our cat sat up and growled. My back yard is long and narrow. The boundary is some distance from the patio. We turned and followed the cat's attention. We saw a coyote loping along the edge of our yard. Now, you also need to know something else about my cat. She is an absolute coward. The bunnies graze at will within my garden if I do not fence them out. The squirrels romp across the yard with impunity in their quest for whatever it is that squirrels search for. She watches this all happen, but she is afraid to do anything about it. She is especially afraid of the coyote, with good reason.*

*What then about this sudden, growling ferocity? She was safe. She was sitting on the patio with us. She knew that we were right there. We would not let anything happen to her. This prayer asks God to strengthen our faith. In faith we trust that God is right there in our lives. It also asks God to give us courage to believe that God will rescue us from all adversity. We can bare our teeth and face whatever the world or Satan may throw at us. God will rescue us. He may rescue us in this life; He will certainly rescue us on the day of the resurrection of the dead. Have courage. You are always in God's hands.*

### Tuesday of Pentecost 9 – Genesis 9:8-17

<sup>8</sup> Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup> “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, <sup>10</sup> and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. <sup>11</sup> I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” <sup>12</sup> And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: <sup>13</sup> I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup> When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup> I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. <sup>16</sup> When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” <sup>17</sup> God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

*They say an optimist sees a glass half-full. A pessimist sees a glass half empty. An engineer sees a container twice as large as it needs to be. We can each look at the same thing and see something different, and perhaps all be right. When you look in the sky on a day when a rain shower has passed through, what do you see? Does light refract through raindrops to create a multihued band of light in the sky? That is one way to describe a rainbow. It is indeed a physical phenomenon which involves light and water interacting. We can describe it that way. But is that all there is for us to see?*

*Genesis 9 would have us see something else which is also true: a promise from God in that rainbow, a promise not to repeat what happened in that flood so many years ago. God will destroy His creation eventually. Peter says it will happen by fire, so I suppose that is technically keeping the covenant God makes here. But I think there is something more than that. In the flood, God made a serious effort to wipe out the evil from the world, washing it away with a deluge. Only Noah and his family were left. God promises not to take that approach again. He does wash away evil, even uses water, but he does so now through Baptism.*

*The next time it rains and you look into the sky to see this rainbow, marvel at its beauty, explain the physics of light refraction to your children if you are able, but most of all, remember and praise God for His promise. He has another solution to the evils of this world in which we live.*

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, <sup>19</sup> in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup> because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. <sup>21</sup> Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.” I Peter 3:18-22

### **Wednesday of Pentecost 9 – Psalm 136:1-9**

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever.

<sup>2</sup> Give thanks to the God of gods,  
for his steadfast love endures forever.

<sup>3</sup> Give thanks to the Lord of lords,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;

<sup>4</sup> to him who alone does great wonders,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;

<sup>5</sup> to him who by understanding made the heavens,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;

<sup>6</sup> to him who spread out the earth above the waters,

for his steadfast love endures forever;  
<sup>7</sup> to him who made the great lights,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;  
<sup>8</sup> the sun to rule over the day,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;  
<sup>9</sup> the moon and stars to rule over the night,  
for his steadfast love endures forever;

*“Yeah, Mom, I have to go!” he said on his way out the door and to the car. It was time to head back to college after the holidays and his mother wanted one more embrace and to speak one more hurried, “I love you,” to her son. He was young and did not have time. When we are young, we often do not understand the value of those words. “I love you.” They are not a box you check off and then are done with it. “I love you,” is a refrain which we need to sing and hear every day. One never really finishes saying that to someone you love. God never finishes saying it to us.*

*The Psalms, originally prayers which saints spoke to God, have become the Word of God to us. Psalm 136 has the unique device of recounting God’s deeds and after each one repeating the refrain: God’s steadfast love endures forever. We are only reading part of this psalm today. It goes on to recount the deeds of the Exodus. After each statement, the psalmist repeats the refrain: God’s steadfast love endures forever.*

*Today finds you in need of hearing those words again. Every day brings with it a reason why we need to be reminded of God’s love. Bad news, a new pain in your aging body, a conflict at work, school, or home, each of these or something else can give us reason to doubt, fear, or be distracted from God. Our minds are adept at filling in the blanks of our knowledge with the worst of imagined futures. To all of that, God comes back with this refrain: My love for you does not end. It does not mean the thing which causes you to fear or makes you angry has gone away. It means, however, that whatever you struggle with is not the last word. That belongs to God, and His Word is love for you. In this part of the psalm, the psalmist has us see that God made this world and the heavens above our heads. He causes the sun to rise. His love is renewed every day like that rising sun. It always happens. Count on it.*

### **Thursday of Pentecost 9 – Ephesians 3:14-21**

<sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup> that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

*Do you know a justification addict? I bet you do. I used to know a fellow who always had to be right. He was sure to let you know that he had it figured out. If he were ever shown to be in the wrong, he would tell you why that was someone else's fault. He was always justifying himself. That's a justification addict. I found with such people that argument gets you nowhere. The hammer must fall upon them through their own doing. Your best bet is to love them despite them and wait. The day will come when they arrive at the limit of their justifications. Perhaps they will stand before a judge and croak out a guilty plea. Perhaps it will be the stern visage of a spouse or someone else whom they have inexcusably harmed. But the day will come. They will stand there, ashamed and without excuse. That is the moment to pounce. Pull out your gracious blade – love them anyway and slay the addict. Tell them you love them despite what they have done. Tell them that you have always loved them, and it had nothing to do with their rectitude, morality, or just being good. It had everything to do with love.*

*Paul prays that we will have the strength to comprehend with all the saints the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ's love. Did you notice that there are four dimensions to that love? That is not sloppy writing on Paul's part. It is very deliberate. The only way you can measure all those distances is from inside the love itself. Christ's love is broad, wide enough to love everyone, even people like me, you, and everyone whom you meet. It is long, it does not run out, but always stretches off into the distance. No sin or sinner can never out distance it. It is high, the saints of old, the angels themselves, they love and are beloved of God. They also need that love. We will love in heaven with the very same love we have now. Paul tells us that love does not fail. (I Cor. 13). And love is deep. It reaches down to the very bottom of creation and humanity. Jesus prayed for the men who nailed him to a cross. He loved Saul the persecutor. He loves everyone you will ever meet, no matter how undeserving of that love. There is no bottom to that mysterious love.*

### **Friday of Pentecost 9 – Mark 6:45-56**

<sup>45</sup> Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>46</sup> And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>47</sup> And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. <sup>48</sup> And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, <sup>49</sup> but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, <sup>50</sup> for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." <sup>51</sup> And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, <sup>52</sup> for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

<sup>53</sup> When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. <sup>54</sup> And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him <sup>55</sup> and ran about the whole

region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was.<sup>56</sup> And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

*It felt like we could not catch a break. I was leading a crew of people through the seed corn fields of the Midwest and we had to get this done today. Detasseling seed corn needs to be done in a very short window of time or the pollen will ruin an entire field. It is hot, dirty, and occasionally frantic work. This corn was extraordinarily tall. We were late getting there, then we had an issue with one of the workers. But the real holdup was the fact that the company had brought the wrong machines for my people to ride while we removed the tassels. Because the corn was so tall, most of my workers could not really reach the top of the plant on foot. They needed the machine to ride upon to do this job. Seed corn is planted in a particular pattern of alternating varieties, but the pattern can vary. The company had brought the machines set for the wrong pattern. My crew was gamely trying to work through the field on foot, but it was obvious we would not get done. Every half-hour or so another grizzled and cap-wearing representative of the seed company would arrive, take stock of the situation, and announce that they had the right machines down by Trier, a town some miles away. We would all look at each other and say, "Yep." Nothing would get done. 30 minutes later this would repeat.*

*Finally, he got there. The guy who could make a difference. I do not know what authority he had that the other fellows did not, but within moments, he had the right machines on the way and before quitting time, we got the field done. There was no more useless "yeping" on the end of the rows.*

*The disciples, having done what Jesus said last week and having distributed the five loaves and two fish to the multitudes, obey him again in this reading, setting out for a late-afternoon, cross-lake journey. But the wind is against them. The text says they are making headway painfully. I have rowed a boat before until I got a blister. I think I know a little of their pain. But Jesus is not initially heading into the boat with them. He is walking across the sea and seems intent on passing them by. Their fear draws him, and, as he steps over the gunwale, the wind ceases.*

*I have spent a great deal of my life doing things that do not seem productive. I have labored against heavy headwinds, feeling as if, for all my efforts, I am going backwards. But on more than one occasion, when I was about to give up and tend the blisters which were developing, He got in the boat, the wind stopped, and suddenly what seemed impossible was possible. Thanks to the Spirit, I understand about the loaves. The Jesus who feeds multitudes with a scant lunch is right here, right now.*