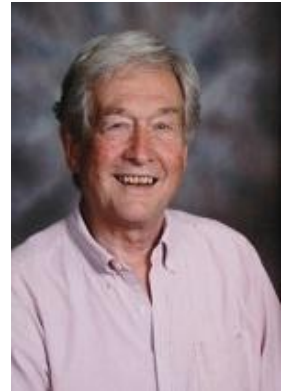


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## **A DISCIPLINE OF DAILY PRAYER** A Guide for Personal or Corporate Devotion

1 In an earlier Essay, faithful reader – Essay 204 “Signs of the Kingdom” – I promised to begin a new series of Spiritual Exercises. I followed that Essay in due course with Essay 208: “A Spiritual Biography”. Here’s yet a third in that new series: A guide to daily prayer after the manner of a breviary or personal daily discipline for private or corporate prayer.

2 Readers may already be familiar with other schemes or programmes for daily prayer. My personal favourite, and the resource I use daily in my personal devotional life, is that splendid four volume publication of *The American Lutheran Publicity Bureau (ALPB)* entitled *For All the Saints: A Prayer Book For and By the Church (FATS)*, compiled and edited by Frederick J. Schumacher (1994 ALPB).

3 This resource is a beauty! I use it daily. (Along with Henri Nouwen. See 10 below). *FATS* is unique in providing a really rich resource for private devotion. Each volume is about 4" x 7" x 1", so they're easy to carry in your backpack or suitcase or briefcase. I've made a cardboard book box, covered in adhesive shelf vinyl, for each of my four volumes!

4 First, *FATS* utilizes the two year ecumenical daily lectionary, published in *Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW)*, pages 179 - 192, that provides for the reading of virtually the entire Bible over the span of two years. Our current Lutheran worship resource, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)*, presents a somewhat different ordering of the same Biblical material, pages 1121 - 1153.

5 Second, all of those Bible lections are printed out in full. So you don't have to carry a Bible with you when you travel. Hence *FATS* is published in four volumes: Year A readings are included in Volumes One and Two of *FATS*; Year B readings are included in Volumes Three and Four.

6 Third, *FATS* provides, in each volume, a reprinting of *LBW*'s Matins, Vespers, and Compline, a brief selection of Prayers for Various Occasions, Psalm Antiphons for Daily Prayer, and the complete Psalter – all 150 Psalms! It should be noted that a) *FATS* uses the *RSV* Bible translation, not *NRSV*. And b) *FATS* was published before *ELW*, hence the language of its Daily Office and its Psalms is not inclusive, as *ELW*'s is.

7 Fourth, *FATS* provides, for each Day in the Church's Year, an Opening Prayer, the three appointed Bible Readings, a Fourth Reading, and a Closing Prayer. Plus prayers and readings for *LBW* major festivals, but not for commemorations.

8 Finally, that Fourth Reading is a dandy! It is selected for its relation to one or another of the appointed Bible lections. And it's often selected from the writings of the Church Fathers (and Mothers!). Augustine, Gregory the Great, Teresa of Avila. Or from more contemporary sources: Erasmus, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Bonhoeffer, Tillich, Dorothy Day. That Fourth Reading is alone worth the price of the four volumes!

9 I can't speak highly enough of *FATS*. Every Christian pastor or leader should own this splendid four volume collection. And use it daily!

10 My own devotional discipline includes reading daily from *FATS*. And from Henri Nouwen's *Bread For the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith* (1997 Harper Collins). This is a year's worth of brief, one paragraph, one page meditations on a variety of subjects, arranged according to the civic calendar, not the Church Year. I find myself every year reaching December 31, and the next day turning back to January 1, to begin the volume all over again. For more than ten years now! It's a splendid companion to *FATS*.

11 You may want to construct your personal regimen for daily devotion, using *FATS*'s Matins or Vespers. Or you may use simply the daily Prayers and Readings *FATS* provides. Or you may prefer to use still some other form for daily worship. But I remember with fondness the daily prayer in the home of my childhood. I'll adapt my memory of that discipline in the paragraphs below.

12 Choose a time when most members of the household are together. (That's a formidable enough task these days!) Perhaps after supper time, around the dinner table.

13 All say the INVOCATION: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Tracing the Sign of the Cross on one's breast is an appropriate corporate gesture at these words.

14 Read a brief selection of SCRIPTURE aloud. Here's where you could insert those four wonderful readings from *FATS*. Or utilize a favourite devotional guide, with the commentaries they provide.

15 Leader: Lord, have mercy. Response: Lord, have mercy.  
Leader: Christ, have mercy. Response: Christ, have mercy.  
Leader: Lord, have mercy. Response: Lord, have mercy.

16 All pray the LORD'S PRAYER. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

17 The LEADER or another may offer a brief PRAYER. See *ELW* pages 54 - 64 or *LBW* pages 42 - 51 for more prayers. Or use the following daily cycle of prayer, based on the classic theological scheme from the Sixteenth Century known as the “Orders of Creation.” These are those arenas of life where we each find ourselves simply by reason of being human. Bonhoeffer preferred to call them “Mandates of Creation”, in the sense that, within each, God calls us to serve, and provides us with a set of “mandates” for the living out of our “ordination” as Christian in our baptism.

18 SUNDAY: The “Lord’s Day”. Pray for the CHURCH; for our home parish and its pastor and people; for all churches in our community; for all Christian churches and denominations around the world, and for our eventual unity; for all the world’s religions as paths to truth; for the Final Coming of God’s Rule and Reign in Christ...

19 MONDAY: Pray today for all FAMILIES: for spouses; for fathers and mothers; for children; for the presence of God’s Spirit among the generations; for extended families; for singles; for the divorced and widowed; for marriages; for intentional family groupings such as communal households...

20 TUESDAY: Pray today for our CIVIC LIFE: for our country and all governments; for the Queen and Prime Minister; for the Parliament; for our Premier and provincial government; for managers and mayors and local officials; for those in media who shape public opinion; for voters; for police and firefighters; for those in the military; for peace and justice at home and abroad...

21 WEDNESDAY: Pray today for our ECONOMIC LIFE: for capital and labour; for commerce and industry; for systems of production and distribution; for the hungry, the dispossessed, the powerless, the unemployed; for a more equitable use of the world’s wealth and resources; for the environment and for our wounded world...

22 THURSDAY: Pray today for SCIENCE, EDUCATION, and MEDICINE; for all who teach and learn; for technology; for the healing arts; for doctors, nurses, technicians, counselors, and therapists; for the ill or addicted; for all useful knowledge...

23 FRIDAY: Pray today for THE ARTS: for musicians, artists, architects, engineers, poets, novelists, dancers, filmmakers; for the vision and creativity that the arts bring to human life; for the “holy yearning” the arts inspire in us...

24 SATURDAY: Pray today for our LEISURE TIME: for all that refreshes and recreates us; for retreat centres and camps; for all that entertains us and makes us laugh; for the freedom given in Christ not to have to earn our salvation; for the relaxation and joy of the Sabbath...

25 Leader: Let us bless the Lord. Response: Thanks be to God.

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