



30 September, 2020
Feast of St. Jerome

My beloved family in Christ,

This Sunday will be the 18th Sunday after Pentecost 2020. Our collect this week is a very ancient prayer, first appearing in the 5th century. Perhaps you have had times in your life when you felt unworthy to pray. I think we all have experienced such feelings of unworthiness. Our collect reminds us that even though our feelings of unworthiness make us not want to pray, yet it is through prayer we receive the forgiveness of sins. In fact, prayer has been described as God's longing for us and our longing for God coming together.

We often find it difficult to pray. We make resolutions to pray. We pray for a while and then we neglect prayer. We decide that we are going to pray for a certain amount of time, and then when we do pray, we are always checking the time and we find it a relief when we finish. Isaiah (and later Jesus) utilizes the image of a vineyard to teach us about our relationship with God. For Isaiah the vineyard is the people of God. God lavishes his love on the vineyard. He tends it; he waters it; he builds a wall around it. God does everything he can do for the vineyard, and he anxiously awaits the vines to return his love by bearing fruit. I love growing heirloom roses. They can be something of a challenge in Florida. They do not like our humidity and their roots don't like the Florida nematodes. Roses take a lot of work, but when they produce that perfect fragrant bloom, all of the work is worth it.

I think God feels that same sense of fulfillment when we intentionally return God's love in our thoughts, our words, and our deeds. There may be times when you very much want God's intervention, when you need forgiveness, when you long for God's comforting presence. No matter how much you might want God to help, God will always want to help you more. No matter how much you might need to tell God something, God wants to listen to you even more. No matter how much you might long for God's blessing, God longs to bless you even more. You are God's beloved vineyard, and God is always waiting for you to respond to God's loving nurture.

I hope you will take time in the coming week to remind yourself that God is longing for you. When you have a moment, just take the time to be with God. You don't have to say anything, just be with Him. As you engage life's activities and challenges, take a moment to pray and ask God to help you do your very best to God's glory. As you marvel at the love God lavishes upon you, take the time to demonstrate that love to someone else, not because you want something, but because they too are a marvelous creation of God.

Beloved, I pray the coming week will be most blessed for you and that you will continue to grow in your relationship with God.

Grace and Peace,

Robert +