



Offertory & Prayers of the Church

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free spirit. Amen.” (Psalm 51:10-12).

The Offertory and Prayer of the Church form the hinge of the Sunday morning Divine Service. These are the links between the Service of the Word and the Service of the Sacrament, and they are the response of the people to the Word of God, read, explained in the sermon, turning our eyes to what is yet to come.

In Holy Scripture we are reminded of all the good works our Lord has done for our salvation. It can be overwhelming to hear once more just how much our Father in heaven has done for us, forgiving our sins through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus. His Holy Spirit leads us in thanksgiving, renewing us with a godly spirit, a desire to serve our Lord in our lives. So, in return, we make the sacrifice of our daily lives by giving of our first-fruits, offerings of money from our occupations.

Like the first-fruits offering in the Old Testament times, we give this money to God not because he demands it of us, but as an acknowledgement that everything we have and are is by God’s gracious gift to us. To return to the Lord of the first bits of what we make reminds us that the rest comes from God through our jobs and our occupations. They are all blessings we all too often take for granted in our life. When we give of the first fruits, the Lord blesses all the rest to be a blessing for our daily life. God has given us everything we have and enjoy; why can we not return to him a portion?

How much should we give? Some talk of a tithe, 10% of our income, but then comes the question is that before tax or after? Ultimately, the

question is best answered by St Paul: *“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver,”* (2 Corinthians 9:6-7 ESV). Our offerings are gifts to God for all that he has done and continues to do in our lives; we can never out-give God, nor should we try. We are to only give him thanks!

This is why we also pray. The Prayers of the Church gather together the concerns and needs of the congregation and lift them up to the One who answers prayer. These are the prayers of everyone, so there will be petitions one person may not have thought to pray, but we pray all together, offering up the concerns of everyone. This is corporate prayer, all God’s people, together, bearing with one another’s burdens of heart and soul.

The Pastor stands before the altar with outstretched arms, hands open to heaven to lift up the prayers of the whole congregation. Often the congregation adds their assent to each petition with a refrain, *“Lord, have mercy”* or *“Hear our prayer.”* There is also the ancient form of the Bidding Prayer, where an assistant declares what is to be prayed for and then there is a pause when the congregants are invited to offer silent prayers for that petition. After that pause the Pastor offers a prayer on behalf of the whole congregation. This is the whole body of Christ praying together with the help of the Holy Spirit.

However the prayers take place, they all serve common purpose to come to the Lord our God with all boldness and confidence as dear children of the heavenly Father. He hears our prayers, and in Christ he will answer them! Thanks be to God!

In Christ’s service,
Rev. Joel V. Kuhl, Pastor