

NOVEMBER 20, 2022, SUNDAY DEVOTIONAL

CENTERING PRAYER:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen

SCRIPTURE FOCUS: JEREMIAH 29: 4-7

4 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

BLESSED THOUGHTS: “PRAYER FOR A VERY LONG HAUL”

There were several major traumas in Israel’s history, the Global Flood, the Slave Pens of Egypt, and, perhaps the worst, the Destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile of its leaders during the lifetime of the prophet Jeremiah. In fact, here’s a spoiler. Most of the Bible was written in response to traumatic events that befell the people of faith. Jeremiah 29 is a letter sent by messenger to the exiles in Babylon. He tells them to L-I-V-E! Don’t obsess over what you’ve lost, your homes, the temple, the kingdom, loved ones. Don’t play the Victim Card. Live! Build houses, raise food, raise kids and grandkids, and—here’s the hard part—understand that it will be seventy years before even a few thousand of your people can come back and start all over. In the meantime, keep trusting in your God who is still God, even in a foreign land. And let your prayers be for the long haul!

I was talking with Theo’s Middle School principal today. He asked me how I was, and I replied, “I’m still older than your school!” He shot back, but this school is seventy-five years old!” I answered, “I’m seventy-nine. I’m one of the few good things that came out of World War II!”

The point is that the taxpayers of 1947 Winnipeg shelled out cold, hard cash to build a school for their kids. Did they ever think that although seventy-five years would fly by, and a third generation of students would come to this building to learn all about our wide and wonderful world? Likewise, almost every church spends way too much energy holding on to the past and hardly ever says a prayer for Christ’s people who will take up their crosses in 2092!

But, wow, do we ever need those prayers for the Next Century Believers! Here are just a few things we could pray for. 1. Ask God to give us the inspiration to plant a couple million trees in our province as a way of moderating the climate catastrophe. 2. Those of us fortunate enough to be grandparents need to show L-O-V-E by spending T-I-M-E with our grandkids, so that our modeling of the grace, love, and life-together in our Centering Prayer will be so precious that it will be handed down to our great-grandchildren and to our great-great-grandchildren. 3. This is a special point for me. Our kids are having more mental health issues than ever. I once attended a clinic for physicians and therapists where the presenter said that while therapy and medication were effective in helping people recover, just as important was having a group of people who listened and who cared and who were there for them. The

Psalms say that God is a light to our path. Well, my experience is that God shines through human love.

Now, look, I don't have a clue what life will look like in 2100. Will we be assembling for prayer on Mars and in Lunar Outposts? How will Word and Sacrament Ministry even look like then? Don't know. This I do know. When I wake up tomorrow morning, I will have one awesome challenge: to bring glory to God by being a person fully alive (as St. Irenaeus taught).

So, thank you, Jeremiah! I'll plant seeds that will grow to be the Bread of Life. My house will always have a guest room for our Lord, and Jesus will sit at the head of my table. Our family's marriages will glow with the love Jesus showers on his church, and every grandchild will treasure the Covenant you made with them at their baptism, because each of them will really need to know they have a God when they need Divine Presence! And, since I'm living here in Winnipeg, I'm going to do my best to make it a great place for everyone, just as you said in Jeremiah's letter.

True, in 2100, no one will even know that I was a cute boy in the 1940's, a shy student in the 1950's, a struggling survivor in the 1960's, a young husband and daddy in the 1970's, an underpaid parish pastor in the 1980's, an absolute riot in the 1990's, an awesome social worker in the aughts, and finally, a retiree in the 2010's and 2020's. But, then, I really won't be living here anyhow: forward my mail to the True Commonwealth that is called The New Jerusalem. Please, everyone I care about—be there, too!

PRAYER

We're all old men, now, but when we were young, we played awesome basketball!

We still remember how we jumped up to the rim and slammed in a buzzer beater to win that big game against a team no one thought we could beat.

Other young people now take our place on the gym floors.

It's their time, for sure.

All we old guys can do is stand up with our canes and cheer them on.

That's what this prayer is all about: cheering on all your young followers, Lord, in the Game of their Lives, up against a Team no one thinks they can beat.

But this prayer, and all who pray it, say otherwise!

—written on my daughter's wedding anniversary