in translation

cultivating
kingdom
language

volume 1, issue 1 | July 2019 | *prayer*

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Cover:
Compassion of Christ, Emanuel Burke, 2019

It was said of Abba Agathon that for three years he lived with a stone in his mouth, until he had learnt to keep silence.

—from The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection

The heavens are not too high,
His praise may thither fly;
The earth is not too low,
His praises there may grow.
Let all the world in every corner sing,
My God and King!

—George Herbert

The Lord's Prayer

by Fabien Pering

How we pray matters just as much as what we pray. Jesus teaches both in Matthew 6:9-13. He teaches in the preceding verses that one ought to pray in secret, rather than open places like the hypocrites. The stark difference in place and posture reveals the location of the heart. The person praying in secret isn't concerned about what they look like, who sees them, or what their prayers sound like. They are simply praying to God who sees them in that secret place. However, the motive of the hypocrite praying in the synagogue is the exact opposite. They are concerned about what they look like, who sees them, and what their prayers sound like. They are seen and heard by those present rather than by God. We are to, therefore, pray with humility.

we learn to submit our wills to a higher authority and relinquish our understanding of the world...

There are times when it is hard to pray. The Lord's prayer teaches how to posture our hearts when life is difficult. We are driven to our knees only to pray honestly to God. We humbly acknowledge that He is in charge of everything and making things new. Incidentally, the Lord's prayer also teaches us how to pray when life is going well by praying the same thing. We acknowledge that God is still in control and provides for our needs regardless of circumstances. Jesus teaches us that God is the same through the ebbs and flows of our lives. Humility is produced when we submit ourselves to His kingdom and will.

Our elder brother, Jesus, also teaches us what to pray. The prayer gives words to those who do not know what to pray. It does so in a way that is consistent with Jesus' teaching. The prayer instructs us to speak simply to the Lord and guards us from praying empty words. Humility and simplicity are the qualities of a heart that God desires. Therefore, as children of God we are taught to ask our Father for His help and provision.

The Lord's prayer is simple, yet profound. The simplicity comes when we ask God for His name to be honored, His kingdom to come, and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. We then ask for physical/spiritual sustenance and guidance. There is no getting around the simplicity of asking. "Asking" means that we need help. This is where the prayer becomes profound. It is profound because we learn to submit our wills to a higher authority and relinquish our understanding of the world when we pray the Lord's prayer. Submitting to authority and relinquishing understanding shakes the bedrock of our society. The prayer is counter cultural because our society teaches us to be the center of our own kingdom and authority.

We learn to speak same language of the Kingdom of the Lord's prayer when we pray spontaneously. We learn about God, our Father, who is holy. His desire is to make us holy, and give life to His creation. His will is to be in relationship with His creation. And so, Jesus taught us how and what to pray so that we can speak freely with Him whenever we desire.

Prayerful Gaze: An Interview with Emanuel Burke

Parishioner Emanuel Burke is a painter and digital artist working in the iconographic tradition.
This interview was conducted by Jonathan Atkinson at Emanuel's home in Hendersonville, NC, June, 2019.

What was your first exposure to icons?

I actually didn't know much about iconography at all until a couple years ago. I was exploring the Anglican way and found myself chatting with a priest over breakfast about a number of things. He referred me to an Orthodox deacon, who was serving in Candler at the time, so I could learn more about iconography. The priest walked me around the sanctuary and introduced me to a large variety of icons, and told me a good deal about what they all meant. I was most captivated by their "set-apartness". I wasn't sure what it was exactly about them, but they lead me to feel drawn into a space between heaven and earth. That experience was really groundbreaking for me. I began to spend time thinking about the images, buying a few for myself, and then I began drawing them.

Do you use them (icons) in your own prayer life?

Yes, sometimes. Fr. Photios, when he served as a deacon in the Orthodox Church, actually gave me my first icon. It's a travel sized triptych icon of the Nativity. It's an ornate wooden piece a couple inches tall, and it opens to reveal the icon. I like to keep it in the bag I take to work so I can meditate on it when I pray during my downtime.

Praying with an icon is really simple. In his book, Behold the Beauty of the Lord: Praying with Icons, Henri Nouwen wrote, "Icons are painted to lead us into the inner room of prayer and bring us close to the heart of God." Praying with an icon is mostly about "seeing" or "gazing". In Byzantine spirituality, seeing the divine is very important. When we look at the ongoing narrative of our lives, we can choose to focus all our attention on the pain and failure we've experienced, or we can choose to see where God has been at work over the course of our lives. When we look in the mirror, as James wrote, we have the choice to see the reality before us and make the appropriate changes. Likewise, when we look at the world around us, especially other people, we can choose to see what is broken or we can choose to see Christ. Praying with icons is like training our eyes to see Christ where he is: present with us and in the world around us.

How do you know when an icon is complete?

It truly depends on the type, for me. I'm not working strictly in the Byzantine tradition, which is to say that not all of my work follows the exact rules and guidelines of iconography. If I do work traditionally, the goal is for the piece to have the depth and beauty of the original. For example, I'm currently finishing a Christ Pantocrator icon. While I'm free to adjust the values and shape design to a degree, the hues, and much of the linework, have to be consistent with tradition. It's very time consuming because I use traditional egg tempera (I literally have to make the paint before I begin working). The paint is applied in thin washes, beginning with the darkest colors, and ending with the lightest colors. This technique causes the icon to have an "illuminated" quality. Also, more layers of paint equals more depth, which in turn results in a better piece.

Most of my work, however, is what I have been calling "contemplative and contemporary" iconography. I choose a preferred medium for the icon I want to create, which, for the sake of convenience, is usually digital (Photoshop). In this way of working my goal is to remain as faithful to tradition as possible, but experiment a bit with the aesthetics. I really enjoy working in this way because it allows me to work more intuitively.

I usually know I'm finished when I feel like I can't find anything I want to change.

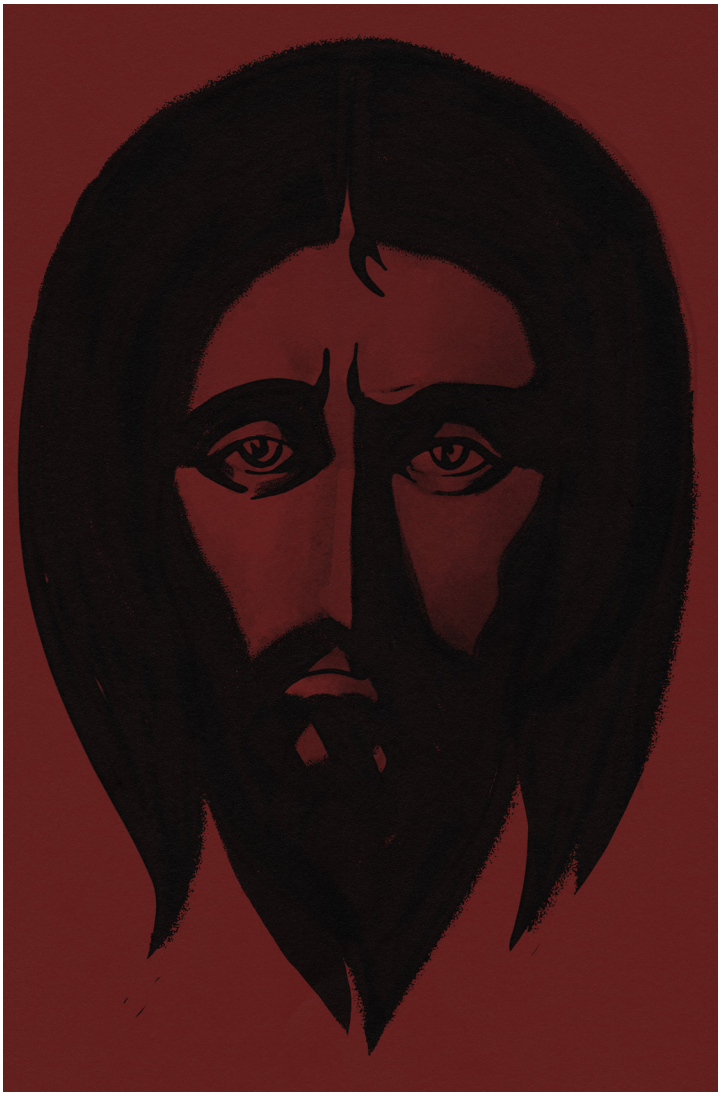
Something I think a lot about is how more often than not, my art tends to look inward, in that it's an attempt at making sense of the world as I experience it. This is rewarding when you create something that elicits a strong reaction out of others, particularly a positive one. Yet, it also leaves you open to despair when others don't react the way you had hoped or perhaps don't react at all. This brings up some interesting questions about how we find validation as

Praying with icons is like training our eyes to see Christ where he is: present with us and in the world around us.

artists and how we as Christians should think about creating art that is so focused on our own personal experience. Could something so focused on ourselves ever be glorifying to God?

I have discovered, in the practice of iconography, that there is ongoing conversation with God that we are having all the time. It's important to understand that everything in an icon bears significant meaning, and mining the depths of an icon is like mining the depths of Scripture.

Icons were created by Christians, first, out of a practical need to disciple illiterate people. They came up with ways of infusing line and color with the truths of Scripture. When we gaze upon them, we are lead to "read" the lines and colors. When we see Jesus wearing red, and covered with a blue robe, we are called to consider that he is human (red symbolizes blood and humanity), and that he is also the divine (blue symbolizes divinity). But our reading doesn't end there. We are then moved to experience the weight of the incarnation: that God, in his great love and mercy, chose to share in our humanity and experience the broken world we experience. This is the beginning of a conversation with God.



Face of Christ, Emanuel Burke, 2019

opposite: Theotokos with Christ, Emanuel Burke, 2019

In light of those things, I think there is a way in which iconography uniquely interacts with our universal human experiences, and even individual experiences, and also, in a very explicit way, brings glory to God. And while I don't believe all art is able to do this, I think we have been given the capacity to create in such a way that we accomplish the honor and praise of God while also drawing from our inner places. In this way, all art is sacred.

I'm not sure we would ever be able to totally remove ourselves from what we create, nor that we should. There does seem to be something more selfless though, in creating art intended to be used by others during worship and/or prayer. Icons for example are specifically meant to assist others in enhancing their prayer life and drawing them closer to God. There is a self forgetfulness at work there that seems to be rooted in a Christian ethic. How would you respond to this given your recent work with icons?

Creating iconography is really interesting because so much of it requires me to forget myself, and yet calls me to examine myself at the same time. I forget myself by relying on a specific tradition. I almost never create an icon that hasn't existed before in terms of the composition. If I do, I am very intentional about depending on the wisdom of those who have come before me (using specific colors, poses, and etc.). I involve my personal experiences by praying or meditating while I work. I struggle a lot with depression, and creating icons is one of the ways I experience healing and find relief. I will often pray the Jesus Prayer repeatedly while I work to focus on the reality of Jesus' love to penetrate the darkness of my depression. I'm still there, depressed, and yet continuing to work. I have a strong preference for more subdued colors, rather than very vibrant colors (most of the time). I think a lot of this is because the world around me so often seems gray when I'm experiencing depression. And yet, somehow, the result is a piece of art that can bring healing for other people, and is also glorifying to God.

Is your artistic expression intrinsically connected to worship or do you feel the need to differentiate between them at times?

I do feel the need to differentiate my art. I create iconography mainly for personal devotion--by that I mean for other people to use in their own devotion to Christ. I was at one time less concerned with a distinction, but as I have grown in the practice I have realized that it's best to create intentionally for specific circumstances. All my iconography, I believe, can be appropriate for personal prayer, but not all of it may be appropriate for use in corporate worship.

Iconography, traditionally, is about a communal memory--sharing in the identity of the Church through the ages in a specific visual tradition and practice of faith. Work that I do

that most closely resonates with that tradition is what I consider most appropriate for worship.

As far as personal worship is concerned, I've been really impacted by 1 Peter 4:7-11, specifically this part of the passage: "...Serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received." As an artist I am called to meet the need for beauty in the life of the Church. Somehow my gift can make a real difference in the lives of the people I love and care about. I'm still figuring out what exactly this looks like for me, but I have a lot of ideas I'm excited to get into this year.

As far as your creative process goes, are you someone who tends to wait on inspiration to motivate you to work or are you of the mindset that you should just work everyday regardless of how you feel?

I definitely believe in the power of practice and persistence. I do my best to draw or paint everyday. While I would say I have a natural affinity for visual arts, that doesn't mean I don't need education and practice. I've only been pursuing my creative goals seriously for about 3 years or so. Over these years I have seen myself grow from an untrained doodler to a budding professional, and it's because of my daily practice and persistence through emotional waves.

I dedicate myself to specific times of working, and always keep an eye out for open opportunities to make a quick, unplanned sketch. Even while I'm not actively drawing or painting, another technique I use is visualizing how I might create something. For example, I pay close attention to the way light and shadow affects a person's face. I imagine how I would paint them. I imagine the values and colors I might use. This helps keep me fresh and ready for the next opportunity to work.

Praying with Our Bodies

by Rev Gary Ball

Up and down, up and down—stand, sit and kneel. Occasionally this is how liturgical worship is described. People may characterize it as empty ritual, however, these forms of worship were not just made up out of thin air, there is meaning and purpose behind liturgical movements. We often refer to these movements as praying with our bodies. Throughout the Bible people were directed to take postures in worship. These are only a few of many examples:

• The New and Old Testament instruct us to 'stand and pray'.

• The Psalms invite us to 'bow down.'

• Timothy instructs us to 'lift holy hands to God.'

• Philippians reminds us that 'every knee shall bow.'

Let's take a moment to consider why posture is important in worship.

The Incarnation affirmed the value of creation—of matter, flesh and blood, so much so, that Jesus instituted the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Baptism (using bread, wine and water), not as an empty metaphor, but as actual instruments of grace. God uses created earthly forms to reveal invisible spiritual realities. Think about that—we receive spiritual grace into our bodies as we partake of the consecrated bread and wine! The posture we take as we receive the bread indicates this reality—we cup our hands, acknowledging that we receive it from God, He feeds us with grace and we take it into our bodies.

God's use of created materials for such heavenly purposes should imply that we are not saved by escaping our bodies, but through them. We have been created to be spiritually formed in such ways—to look and learn, to touch and feel, to walk and experience. Therefore, when we take postures in worship, we are not just going through motions, but God forms our heart through this embodied participation.

The simple definition of a sacrament is an outward sign of an inward spiritual grace. Therefore, worship is sacramental because our words (songs/prayers) and postures (kneeling/crossing) reveal the inward disposition of our hearts. The importance of posture can be heard in the words we are taught to pray, for example, we 'lift up our hearts'. As we confess our sins we take the humble posture of kneeling as a visible sign of a repentant heart. However, posture is more than just a sign. Kneeling, even without words, is a prayer of sorts—an act of submission before God, offering ourselves to Him and indicating that we are dependent on His grace.

At that moment I lift my eyes to look over the congregation so that I can see everyone mark themselves with the sign of the cross.

Liturgical postures are enacted corporately. In worship we are not only shaped as individuals, but as a community. Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann describes the liturgy as "an action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals." One of my favorite moments in the liturgy occurs during the Sanctus, as we sing, "Blessed is He who comes…" At that moment I lift my eyes to look over the congregation so that I can see everyone mark themselves with the sign of the cross. I wish you could witness this bit of choreography from my perspective. It is a beautiful expression, made in unison, of being bound together by the One who comes in the name of the Lord.

Again, it is both a sign of our common identity, and a prayer that he would bind us to Himself, and to one another as His people.

I hope this brief explanation will encourage you to participate in these liturgical postures. Let's join as a community to pray with our bodies, believing it to be essential to the way God reveals Himself to us and forms us as His people. As you pray, be attentive to the correlation of outward and inward realities—is the physical posture a faithful expression of your heart? Also, pray as you kneel, stand, or bow, that God would use that posture to shape the inward disposition of your heart.

Lessons from the Eucharist: We Never Pray Alone

by Pat Boyer

Our church offers a number of opportunities to pray together. Whether at Morning Prayer on Tuesday or Wednesday mornings, at Prayer and Pie, or at our weekly Eucharist services, we can join together in prayer to God and for one another. But we spend most of our other prayer time by ourselves. Have you ever felt lonely praying on your own?

The Scriptures and our common worship tell us that we are never alone in prayer. Every Sunday, right before we sing the Sanctus ("Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, …") the celebrant calls us to pray with the angels: "Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who forever sing this hymn …". The celebrant invites us to join in with the heavenly worship that never ceases. Isaiah the prophet saw the angels singing "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts …" (Isa. 6:3). In his mystical vision on the island of Patmos, John heard the angels sing "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty …" (Rev. 4:8). And every Sunday we lift up our voices with all of heaven and earth, singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, ..."

In John's vision, we see God's holy temple and throne room, the Lord sits enthroned, surrounded by angels and other strange, mystical heavenly beings. The angels bring golden bowls of incense before the Lord, "which are the prayers of God's people" (Rev. 5:8). The Scriptures urge us to imagine our prayers rising up to heaven, filling God's throne room with a beautiful fragrance. The incense we burn during our Eucharist services should remind our hearts and minds of these heavenly scenes, where our prayers join with the prayers of the angels in heaven and with all His children on earth.

Next time you find yourself lonely or discouraged in prayer, let your imagination contemplate these heavenly scenes. Remember the smoke of the incense rising during the Eucharist service. Imagine your prayers and the prayers of people in your neighborhood, town, or country, rising up to heaven, just like the incense rises to the roof of the church. Remember the smell of the incense filling the church. Imagine your prayers rising before God on His majestic throne. Imagine yourself in God's holy temple, surrounded by angels and archangels singing praise to God with you. And remember that you are never alone when you come to God in prayer.

Being Stilled

by Anna Vess

Just what does it mean to be still? The stillness that God invites us into is not something we must strive to attain. Rather, God invites us to stop striving and consent to being stilled by his Spirit, our wandering self captured by his exquisite Presence. We all experience unexpected moments of being stilled - meteor showers across the night sky, misty mornings hugging the mountains, the impossible majesty of the Grand Canyon, the delight of a baby's smile, the hush of snowflakes quieting the earth - moments that literally take our breath away. "I am here, know me," God is saying. In these moments He draws us close. There is a tender intimacy to being stilled.

Stillness is a quiet place. Imagine sitting on a park bench with someone you deeply love. Enjoying being together, you are next to each other but not speaking. The silence is rich with meaning; words aren't necessary. They would, in fact, be distracting. Such intimacy cannot be contained in conversation.

So it is with being stilled. God calls us into ever deeper intimacy with Himself, to the loving oneness that exists in the fringes of our ever-growing awareness. We can choose to join Him in the silence where words are no longer needed. We can enter God's presence with open and willing hearts to simply be with Him, to consent to His quiet work in our spirit, to allow Him to transform us; knowing that He delights in doing so. We can choose to be stilled.

The deeper we move into intimacy with God, the more difficult it is to describe the experience. We lack the capacity to express what is beyond the understanding of our finite selves. Poetic language is needed to provide comparisons of what cannot be captured. Scripture itself abounds with poetic language. It is sprinkled throughout Psalms, Revelation, the Prophets, and used frequently by Jesus Himself. The mystics knew this language well. St. Theresa of Avila paints a picture of the spiritual journey as seven dwellings of the soul, the Interior Castle. Likewise, St. John of the Cross is known for his description of the Dark Night of the Soul, a necessary part of the spiritual journey. He was also a remarkable poet.

From his poem The Living Flame of Love:

> O lamps of fire!
> in whose splendors
> the deep caverns of feeling,
> once obscure and blind,
> now give forth, so rarely, so exquisitely,
> both warmth and light to their Beloved.
>
> How gently and lovingly
> you wake in my heart,
> where in secret you dwell alone

continued...

God invites us to stop striving and consent to being stilled by his Spirit, our wandering self captured by his exquisite Presence.

In stillness God is near, communicating both with and without words. What is your heart's response? What is His response to you? Consider composing your own poetic word pictures as a prayer, song, or poem. Write them out; the physical act of writing can be surprisingly insightful.

Like you, I am growing in awareness of God's abiding presence. This growth is largely due to my twice daily being-stilled time with God, a practice of silent consent called Centering Prayer. The following poetic expressions were written from these times of quiet presence.

A prayer for use before Centering Prayer:

Welcome Father, Son, Holy Spirit. You who inhabit the center of my heart, where my truest self dwells in oneness with You, in the home You have prepared.

My deepest desire is to be present with You, You who are always present in and to me. I rest in knowing that this gift of intention delights You. Continue your work of creation in me. May I rest in knowing that You do, even when I am unaware of it.

As the inevitable distractions come, may my soul quietly return to our true home, where I dance face to face with You in your loving embrace.

Come, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, let us BE.

A poem:

"Still"

Like a timid hare
    I see you here,
        I see you there.
If I were still
    would you stay,
        and I would see your face?
Perhaps if I were still
    you would draw near,
        and I behold your wonder.
Perhaps if I were still
    I could enter your world,
        where being and being other
                melt into one.