

THE PASTOR AS INTERCESSOR

I wonder how many of our members look upon us, their pastors, as people who in love intercede for them at the Throne of Grace in our daily prayers?

For a long time it was a mystery to me why a Roman Catholic businessman should extend courtesies to me. Why, for example, does a Catholic pharmacist charge me only what the prescription drugs cost him? Why does a Catholic car dealer offer to sell me an automobile for a price much less than other dealers ask? Why did a Catholic doctor charge me nothing, and refuse to take what I offered him for the extensive medical help he gave me and my family? One day I found out. I asked a Catholic merchant, "Tell me, why do you, and the business and professional men of your church, give me such liberal discounts?" He brushed it off by saying, "Pastor, just keep on putting in a good word for us Upstairs." The Roman Catholic church member looks upon his priests, and upon the clergy, as persons who pray for him. Therefore, not to spoil a good thing he's got going for him Upstairs, he is careful how he treats his priests and the clergy, and will do his best to stay on the good side of his priests.

When I received this assignment, to prepare to say something on the subject, "The Pastor as Intercessor," out of curiosity I decided to look again at the several Calls I received and accepted. It surprised me to find that, in the Calls, the congregations obligated me to do quite a number of things. One is to exercise strict church discipline. Not one Call, however, specifically mentions or even hints at it that I am expected as pastor to pray and intercede for the people. The congregations, on the other hand, in each Call, obligated themselves to pray and intercede for me.

I still remember with gratitude, how, a few days after my Ordination, I was reminded of my obligation to pray for my people. An aged, deeply religious woman said to me in German, "One request I wish to make of you and with it to remind you of your obligation and duty. As our pastor and shepherd, be so kind, dear pastor, and pray for all of us every day. Knowing that you do this makes me happy."

There are a number of examples in the Bible of persons praying for and interceding for others. Moses prayed for Miriam (Num.12:13). Many are the times that Moses interceded for Israel (Ex.32:32; Num.14:17; Deut.9:26). Samuel interceded for Israel (I Sam. 7:5), a Man of God for Jeroboam (I Kings 13:6), David for Israel (I Chron.21:17), Hezekiah for the people (II Chron.30:18), and there are other instances that could be cited.

Our Lord and Savior offered many prayers of intercession to His Heavenly Father. He interceded for sinners (Is.53:12), for weak believers (Luke 22:32), for His enemies (Luke 23:24), for His disciples that God would send them the Comforter (John 14:16), for the entire church (John 17:9).

St. Paul tells us that our certainty of being accepted by God is made firm by Christ's intercession for us (Rom.8:34), and so also our salvation (Heb.7:25).

What a thrill it must have been for the Ephesians to read that the Apostle Paul was remembering them in his prayers, that he interceded for them that God would bestow priceless blessings upon them (Eph.3:13-21). St. Paul interceded for the Philippian (Phil.1:3ff), for the Colossians (Col.1:3), for the Thessalonians (II Thess.1:2), for the believers and for his co-workers. Indeed, he prayed for and interceded for all people.

As Jesus and the holy writers prayed and interceded for the people, for all without exception, so they urge and exhort us to do. We are well acquainted with the many passages. One such word of encouragement, urging, and exhortation we find in I Tim.2:1-8. Here St.Paul writes: "I exhort, therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority...For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth...I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

We follow this injunction of our Lord. We are intercessors as pastors and as congregations. We intercede, we offer intercessory prayers, when we baptize, in the

general prayer or similar prayers, in the rite of confirmation, in the Communion service. We intercede for the communicants, the confirmands, the child or adult to be baptized, for the government, those in authority, for the enemies of the church, for our absent ones, for the aging, the suffering, the dying, the mourning---indeed, for everyone, friend and foe, Christian and non-Christian.

As pastors and shepherds of the flock of Christ we are intercessors; we intercede and pray for people, and for all people. We do this in our homes, in the church services, in the sickroom, in the privacy of our studies, at night before we fall asleep, during the night when we awaken, in the morning when we arise.

As intercessors, we are unrestricted, free of bounds and limitations, and in no danger of becoming involved in religious unionism. On behalf of all, freely we open our hearts to our dear Heavenly Father and ask Him in grace to take all people into His fatherly care for Jesus', His Son's, sake Whose love for them was so great that He laid down His life for them.

In the sickroom we make intercessions. Not only do we lead patients in prayer, or pray with them, but we also intercede for them. This especially is the case when the patient's senses have grown numb, when his mental powers fail him, when he is unconscious, when death is at hand, or when the spirit already has left the body but the doctors are still keeping the organs of the body active with expensive machines that must be paid for. In the latter case, we pray that God's will prevail and the body and its organs be delivered from the probing instruments, machines, hands, and minds of man. We can, as we often do in the church services at baptism and other times, use the Lord's Prayer as a prayer of intercession; or, we simply speak our own words from the heart, such as, "Dear Heavenly Father, take this precious soul into Thy gracious care and protection, hold him by his right hand with Thine almighty power, never leave him nor abandon him as Thou hast promised, guide him with Thy counsel, and then, dear Heavenly Father, receive him to eternal glory before Thy throne for Jesus' sake Who has redeemed him and prepared a place for him in heaven, and Who is even now at Thy right hand interceding for this precious soul."

In the privacy of his home, room, and study, a Christian pastor cannot do otherwise than send prayers of intercession to the Throne of Grace on behalf of his people, his congregation, the Church Council, the office holders, the teachers, the children, the adolescent, the youth, the betrothed, the families, the widows and widowers, the sick, the aging, the suffering, the dying, the mourning, the neglected, unwanted, the social outcasts, the drunks, dope addicts, prostitutes, derelicts, the imprisoned, and for all people without exception. All are dear to the Chief Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. For all does He intercede. So, also, does the Christian pastor. As Christ had love and compassion, so does the pastor.

Every night, as my head hits the pillow, I think of the many aging, sick, suffering, dying, mourning, of the people with problems real and imagined. Then comes to mind a little prayer, a hymn verse, which I learned many years ago on my mother's lap. With it I include all and intercede for all as I say that little verse in

German: "Krankeⁿ Herzen sende Ruh';
Nasse Augen schliesse zu;
Lass sie hier in Gnaden steh'n,
Und einst in dein Reich eingehn."

In English - if you pardon me for trying to be a poet - the thought is something like this:

"Those sick in body, soul and mind
Give rest, dear Lord, in mercy kind.
The tear-filled eyes and sorrowing hearts
Close Thou with sleep, and peace impart.
Grant all to live here in Thy grace;
Then, take them to Thy heavenly place."

The greatest encouragement I have in life, as I go about my work and calling, is that my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Who died and rose again, is even now at the right hand of God constantly praying and interceding for me. My brethren, I should like to make a request of you. As you speak your daily prayers, would you also put in a good word for me Upstairs?