

Column – Prayer for our national life

Have you ever wondered what life in the early Church, the Church immediately after Pentecost, was like? If you read the Acts of the Apostles, at least one characteristic was prayer. Before every important decision, before every obstacle placed in her way, the Church prayed and things happened. Those held in shackles for the sake of the Gospel went free; wisdom was given to select men to assist in the administration and ministry; new doors of opportunity for proclamation of the crucified and risen Jesus were opened.

Perhaps one of the reasons the Church today is so weak and ineffectual is that she has forgotten the source of her power. Instead, she has tried to operate under her own steam. Programs and methods have replaced prayer and reliance on God. Perhaps the Church needs to return to first things.

If prayer is vital to the life of the Church, so it is vital to the life of the nation. History has shown this to be true. During the dark days of the Second World War, just prior to the D-Day landings, President

Roosevelt encouraged the people of this nation to pray. More than that, what he encouraged others to do he did himself over the airwaves. The prayer he offered on this occasion begins with the immortal words: “Almighty God: Our sons, pride of our nation, this day have set upon a mighty endeavour Lead them straight and true; give strength to their arms, stoutness to their hearts, steadfastness in their faith”

While President Roosevelt was calling the people of this land to prayer, King George VI was doing the same in Britain. In the spring of 1944, he called for a national day of prayer.

What was the outcome? Well, the poor weather hindering the D-Day offensive suddenly relented and fine weather on June 6 allowed the Normandy invasion of France and Europe to go forward with far fewer lives lost than was expected.

But this was not the only time King George called the people of his country to prayer. I read somewhere recently that there were no less than seven such times during the Second World War. The

first occurred on May 26, 1941, after Allied troops were cut off by the German army during the Battle of Dunkirk. Responding to King George's appeal, crowds flocked to church to pray for the stranded men. Meanwhile Prime Minister Churchill ordered every available sea-going vessel across the Channel, hoping to snatch 30,000 back.

What was the outcome? Well, nothing short of a miracle. The water became as smooth as glass, enabling even the smallest crafts to set sail. Meanwhile a heavy storm grounded the Luftwaffe, and Hitler inexplicably halted his advance. Within ten days more than 335,000 Allied military personnel were rescued.

Scoffers will always remain sceptical, but people of faith can rest secure in the knowledge that the God to whom they address their prayers is no absentee landlord . . . someone far off who only seldom, if ever, visits His people. Rather, He is the God whose mighty hand has guided His Church throughout many generations and the One who is the God of the nations.

As this national prepares for the inauguration of the 47 President of the United States, it is certainly the task of Christians to do as they have in the past, to pray, to pray that old wounds will be healed, that acts of terrorism will no longer dominate the news, that common sense may be restored, that selfishness might be replaced by a concern for the common good, and that there might be a return to morality, pride in craftsmanship and true religion. Resolve to do your part, pray.

O GOD, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, the Prince of Peace; Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly, union and concord: that as there is but one Body and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

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