

Sunday Morning Prayers,
For Monday Morning People

By

Herbert Meza

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Jacksonville, FL

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International Standard Book Number 13: 978-1-60452-010-1
International Standard Book Number 10: 1-60452-010-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2007939573

BluewaterPress LLC
2220 CR 210 W Ste 108 #132
Jacksonville, FL 32559
<http://bluewaterpress.com>

This book may be purchased online at
<http://bluewaterpress.com>

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“Wow, preacher, what a prayer!”

Herbert Meza

Forward

It takes courage to publish a book of prayers. No one reads them and not many pray, and some would say we stand more in need of prophets than of prayers. But it's when I'm weary of confrontations and tired of being responsible, or as Robert Frost puts it,

“When life is too much like a pathless wood
When your face burns...with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig having lashed across it open...”

Then prayer takes on a new meaning.

These prayers were crafted over many years of ministry. They were prayed at Sunday worship, often printed and offered to people to take home for Monday morning. I am sure some of them are still floating around. They were Sunday morning prayers for Monday morning pilgrims. I always believed that if we had been holier on Sunday mornings, we would have been more disturbed at injustice on weekdays and maybe more compassionate. These are not prayers with simple requests. They often remind us of the mystery of God's providence.

Ernest Hemingway in *Green Hills of Africa*, speaks of “barren lives that live without memory or without mystery.” These are not prayers for barren people, or for those who suffer from memory lapses, or for those who know everything about the

face of God and the furniture of heaven. But I hope that these are prayers that sustain those who are truly seeking God's way without knowing all the answers; who know that, "Like a bird who, landing on a tree too slight to hold its weight, sings knowing it has wings." (Victor Hugo)

I have labored over these corporate prayers as I have labored over my sermons. I have intended to speak to God with as much preparation as I intended to speak to my parish; unlike today where prayers seem to be too spontaneous, needing little preparation. God deserves better.

There are many folks to thank for their encouragement; many faces lifted toward the pulpit for years. I particularly want to thank Eneida Parra Wells, a poet herself, for the latest encouragement to put these prayers into print. And I can't thank Sandra Royal enough, a member of my church once and a friend always, who saw to it that this manuscript was typed and retyped. Her diligent support is much appreciated. A special word of thanks goes to Tish Hubbard, a friend and fellow worshipper, whose creativity can be seen in the cover cartoon. Then, I want to express my gratitude to Cathy Horan, who graciously helped to complete the process.

The tragedy of poets like Shelley, Burns, and Keats was not that they died young, but that they were constrained by poverty to do all their own writing and producing. I wonder what I would have done when these prayers were first written without the wonderful help of Nancy Lee Head, Blanche Heston, and Sabra Miller.

And finally, love and profound appreciation go to my wife, Fran, who heard many of these prayers, sometimes more than once, who serves as my editor, often my encourager, always my inspiration, and true companion of Monday mornings.

Herbert Meza
Jacksonville, FL

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A Prayer of Reflection

Omnipotent God,
The days appear and disappear and each one bears a gift for mortals, old and young. The sweet, sad melancholy days that fling a shadow across our ways come and go, and we stand in their procession to wonder about their story.

But we know now, no day is left without Your touch, no evening sweeps upon the landscape that You have not brushed with Your pure strokes. Alone no more to stand, Your children commit their souls into Your loving hands, assured of that Providence that knows neither days nor nights, but only of a Presence so real that each day is transformed into a place to stand and love, and though the darkness intervenes in unending sequence, it brings comfort and rest to those who trust and wait. The face and pace of all the years have changed since first we heard Your footsteps move upon our souls. For the joy of hours and days, for the gifts of life, we give You thanks, O Lord.

And for hope. How would this moment, here and now, look to us if we were not overcome by the promise of Your love?

How would we face all our tomorrows if all of our lives were not caught up in the rhythm of Your will? We know that between now and tomorrow there is a providence, and that between now and yesterday there is a provision so that our lives hang suspended between grace and hope, between Your love and our faith and caught up in that affair, we drink the cup of bitterness and praise You for its sweetness.

So our yesterdays and our tomorrows speak their words, but their language is clear because Your voice moves in what they say. So teach us to use the present, for it is the only time we have to live in. Remind us that each “now” comes between yesterday’s memories and tomorrow’s memorabilia, between deeds and dreams. Help us to build upon what has gone before, enable us to forgive and receive forgiveness, so that we are not impaled on yesterday’s agenda.

Give us the courage to redeem each experience which might appear to us to be full of Your destiny, for there are moments with meaning beyond their moment. Teach us the priority of love, the necessity of loyalty, the need for courage, the indispensability of friendship, and the joy of commitment. So that armed with memory and hope, and constrained by commitment and courage, we can move on to bear the burden of a heavy heart, or the joy of the minstrel life, in the knowledge that You alone, who made us rich in Jesus Christ, can make us poor.

In Christ’s Name, Amen.

A Prayer of Gratitude

How great You are, O God,
You can enlist a host of daffodils to sing Your praises; You can arm a field with a regiment of jonquils and burst upon the mountainside with the madness of forsythia. Your battalions of azaleas lay in wait to ambush us and remind us of the fury of Your own hopes for earth.

How great You are, O God! Your touch can change the earth; rain to fill her veins; sun to chlorophyll her flesh, and little children to melt our harshness.

How great You are, O God! Help us to explore Your greatness. Lead us to the frontiers of life's depth, to the edge of silence, to the stillness of the night, to the hush of prayer, to the touch of love, to the faith in hope and the hope in faith. Help us to discover within ourselves the beauty and truth that have been kept imprisoned by the anxieties of daily life. Give us courage that is nurtured in the memories of past deeds, so that our bravery may be the product of our integrity and not of whim.

Make us conscious of all that holds life up; the aroma of early morning coffee, the feel of clean clothes, the encouraging note,

the music of strings, the companionship of friends tried and trusted, the taste of sharp cheese, the heat of honest debate, the joy of believing beyond our capacity, a child's evening prayers, the awareness of Christ's presence in the midst of tempest. It is the familiar things that hold our lives together as we wait for the mysteries to unfold, or for our faith to enlist them.

How great You are, O God! You undergird us for the days ahead by enriching our memories with the thoughts of friends, near and far and in transition. We thank You for friendship itself for, at its best, it always has something redemptive in it. It never plays charades or caters to our weaknesses. Its comfort comes in challenge as well as in support. It is at home with tears and at ease with laughter. It listens in sympathy to the voice of pain, and in silence it offers the assurance of a firm grip. May our friendships always be sacramental so that they may never be sacrilegious so that Your Son and our friend, Jesus Christ, may feel at home among us.

We pray for ourselves, that we may be able to see clearly, whatever truth is birthing in the turmoil and sadness of our lives, lest in hesitation we enfeeble all the hopes of our tomorrows and shipwreck the future upon the shores of our fears. So keep us undismayed in the midst of uncertainties until today's dream become tomorrow's reality.

How great You are, O God! We praise You for the times of tranquility and we praise You for the times of uncertainty, for the world without storms and our lives without agony would bring us nothing to grow on.

We thank You for Jesus Christ, who knew both peace and pain, in whose name we pray, Amen.

A Prayer for Love

O Hidden God,
Experience has taught us that You protect and provoke Your friends in special ways. In alternate forms, depending on our spiritual and physical strength, You succor those who, in affliction, call upon You and You afflict those, who in their comfort, neglect to call upon those who need comforting.

Experience has confirmed how strong Your arms support those in need; how exquisite Your quiet and steadfast presence encourages those who are weak and feeble. It is not the victor's cry that catches Your attention so much as it is the sufferer's sigh that sounds the alarm that brings You to bedside despair.

Your loving force, like a transfusion, is injected into the soul and in its own miraculous way, it revives the spirit, and the spirit revives the flesh, and the doctors get the credit, but those who travel through valleys of chloroform corridors learn the miracle of Your healing presence. We would not dare do without doctors, those mechanics of the body who know about anatomy and blood pressure, but we could not do without

our faith in Your assurances which nurture those intangible qualities that not only bring health but also peace, peace of mind and peace of heart.

Beloved God and Father of our lord Jesus Christ, we thank You for communities of love; for those fellowships in which You place us so that we can become more than egos, hell-bent for heaven, seeking our own salvation with splendid disregard for brother and sister. Rather we thank You for folks like those who, by the consciousness that we belong to one another, make their lives and love available to all and, in that caring, also heal the wounded heart open to love as a healing agent. Remind us that caring is the miracle drug for those who have contracted the malignancy of despair, depression and desertion. Teach us that there is something each one of us can do with a fountain pen, or a bedpan, with a needle or a recipe, with a telephone or a balloon. Deliver us from being afraid to love and thus rob the world of one of its most powerful medicines. Remind us that when love and care enter life, new frontiers and new possibilities appear. When love is activated, the world is young again and the heart is renewed.

Teach us that when love is hoarded or unexpressed, it ceases to be love, it loses its effects, it shrivels and gives up to cheap comforts.

Teach us that love finds strength in its expression. It is renewed in the measure it becomes a spendthrift. We would like to know the extravagance of overspending our compassion, for we can always draw on Your account.

So that is our prayer and our priority this morning. Teach us to love splendidly, to care spontaneously, to touch sincerely. And thank You for the model!

In the Name of Christ, Amen.

A Sustaining Prayer

Almighty God, the refuge of all that are distressed, the companion of all who find themselves alone, the resting place of the tried, the abode of the tired, friend of publicans and sinners, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Savior,

Grant unto us that in all the troubles of this mortal life, we may flee to the knowledge of Your loving kindness and tender mercies. So that finding shelter in that thought, the storms of life passing over us may awaken with their adversities, the peace, Your peace, that rests within us instead of feeding our bitterness.

Whatever sorrow this life may bring to us, grant that it may never take from us the full faith that You are in control; for we could not endure that. For to be left to our fancies, our pet peeves, our prejudices, our wits and our fears, is but to leave us adrift in the midst of an uncharted sea, tossed without creed or companion to compass us.

To surrender our wills to all the clamoring voices calling for allegiance is but to make ourselves slaves to a host of idols already drunk with the power of their domain.

No, to be under Your control is our prayer!

Deliver us also from merely reacting to the unexpected uncertainties of life, for to do so, merely makes us slaves to our own fears and suspicions. Teach us to respond, for if we only react, then there is no way by which we can be surprised by providence in provincial garb, by the visit of angels unaware, or by simple deeds of love and mercy.

Yes, it is our faith that You are in control, it is our hope that we are under control, and it is our prayer that Your destiny for us is above control. Blessed God, we take You afresh to be our Savior and our Strength. Give us that quality of faith that may cast out all fear, endure all fare, and overcome all foes.

In this world of going out and coming in, of pilgrim trains that lead by gothic cathedrals and glaring slums, of streets, both deserted by fear and convulsed by crime in absurd sequence, of distance made near by speed and neighbor made distant by greed, we are grateful there is a way that makes plain the journey though it is not often easy, and above all, that there is a home to which we can all return.

Help us to make our homes fit for Your Presence. Deliver them from becoming places where ideas become more important than ideals. Deliver them from having enough religion to hate but not enough to love.

And we are grateful for the church. You call us to be family. We thank You for that insight, for the love nurtured in the community of faith, the hopes that frustrate fears, the joys pushing back the sadness, and above all, the feeling that we are involved in each others' lives. Help us so to love one another that we could never neglect each other.

And in that way, remind us of that love which You have placed in our midst thru Jesus Christ, our Lord, in whose Name we pray, Amen.

A Prayer for Healing

O Great Physician,
We are grateful that at least You still make house calls, tip-toeing to the side of every sick bed to which You have been called, allowing Your strength to be transfused by faith to those who are in need of strength and hope, providing the dextrose of Your Spirit as the nurture for our bodies.

We are grateful for Your love, which makes sense more vividly when we are helpless. That love which has lead You down countless chloroform corridors and sterilized surgery chambers, by lonely beds of affliction, to alienated and troubled minds, has transformed sickness into health, and if not health, into peace, the peace of victory over death, the hope of all the hopeless.

Few of us enjoy perfect health. We carry with us all the days of our lives the virus of death, divorce, despair, and disease. There is no way for us to immunize ourselves from these viruses. Except, of course, to live by faith in the knowledge that if You are for us, who can be against us?

Teach us therefore that faith and health go together as do

hope and joy. That a good conscience is as important as a good physique and that daily devotions may be better than a diet.

We ask You therefore, O Great Physician, to reveal to each of us Your healing power, even if You have to be tough in Your diagnosis. If our sickness is due to our sin, then convict us, if our irritability is due to our disposition, confront us, if our pain is caused by neglect and abandonment, then comfort us.

We confess that most of us are overweight, over-sensitive, over-burdened, and some of us are even overbearing. Heal us by the discipline of Your love. We need healing, therefore, help us to set aside our pride, so that we can face our need. Make us willing to change, lest suffering from "hardening of the categories," we die before we are dead.

We pray for all who are hungry, homeless, or unemployed, the three epidemics of our day. Protect them from that leadership which brings little hope. Deliver us from rich baseball players who sell their autographs to children, from affluent legislators who deny children lunches, and from pompous commentators whose gloomy wisdom lead us to despair. What kind of logic, or is it fear, that would spend more money on prisons than on provisions for schoolchildren; more on prison cells than on primary care?

Is it that we are so full of what we want that we don't know what we need? Deliver us by the quarantine of faith from the disease of greed and from the rigor mortis of not caring. Make us sensitive to those who suffer, for to be insensitive may be the worse disease of all.

In Christ's Name, Amen.

A Prayer for Guidance

O Holy God,
We live in a dangerous world. Terror is now a policy, bombs explode amid cities and civilians. There is no safety. Guns are everywhere, arson is common, vandalism continues, and our prisons are bulging. Children are abused, abandoned, assassinated, and absconded. People sue each other at the drop of a hat and often drop the hat themselves. The war on drugs is not going well; between crooks and crack, everything is corrupted.

Is there something we are missing? What is going on? Do TV evangelists get it? Jimmy Swaggart told us that Jesus was coming soon, Oral Roberts said to send money, and Jerry Falwell wanted us to enlist in the moral majority, Pat Robertson asked us to make him president. Is that all there is?

How do we live in our kind of world, O God? Is it the same kind of world Your Son grew up in? Could it be the kind of world He would die for again?

Could it be that there is something wrong with human

nature itself, some principle, some perspective that escapes us in our devotion to ourselves? Are we sick, simple, selfish, or is it that we are sinful? Is there a law of nature that works in us to make us dangerous? How do we tame the beast within us? How do we become different? Can we start afresh, born again without any intervention?

That is why we pray for Your presence in our life. We need the “expulsive power of a new affection,” something that will sweep over us, and give us discipline over ourselves, some new point of loyalty that is beyond our selfishness.

Help us to experience Your love and how it can change our lives. Place in our homes an altar at which we can kneel to remind us no family can experience true affection without divine devotion. Help us to make our homes fit for Your indwelling. Deliver them from becoming places where ideas become more important than ideals, lest we insist on prayer in schools while neglecting prayer in the home. Let worship become serious, for if we reduce it to convenience, we make our faith but another institution, robbing it of its demands and obedience. Remind us that the church is not like a convenience store, easily accessible when we need a quick fix but ignored when we need large resources.

Many of us have pacified our consciences so that we can live with ourselves, but like all pacifiers, we outgrow them. Deliver us from grown adults who subside on religious pabulum.

We pray for the homeless, for circumstances beyond their control, whether it be floods or hurricanes or neglect, who find themselves adrift upon the land. Keep them from despair, and let our encouragement help stem the tide of desperation. And let not our good intentions be undermined by those who have learned to cheat at welfare, who find it easier to beg or steal than to work. For our charity, while being wise, must never be wicked.

So, here in this community, make us truly mature, by a faith that will enable us to grow, a love that makes demands, and a community that provides strength, and above all, give us a clear picture of what You expect of us.

In Christ's name, Amen.

Prayer for Companionship

Our Heavenly Father and Our Heavenly Mother,
Life is not unbeknown to You. You've tasted our way of life, even our way of death. You know frustrations and You know temptations, if only because Your Son exposed You to them. You know what we are like and what we are likely to be. Therefore, You know how our minds can play tricks on us. We feel sorry for ourselves; we find ourselves alone and very often we distort reality. And that is where our faith comes into play. We need each other to deal with our fears and our distortions. We need to find someone, some one person who loves You and whom, therefore, we trust to help us discover the truth, the reality of our circumstances. So we pray, simply that You may match us with someone who cares; a neighbor or a friend or a relative or a pastor who can help us sift through the minutia of our circumstances, the debris of our broken dreams, the hints of our fragile hopes. Sometimes our ambition, or our greed, disfigures beauty, our unattainable hopes destroy our peace, and our unreconciled failures undermine our being. And we need the luxury of an

intimate exposure. So send a friend who can share our hearts and uplift our vision.

And remind us of that other Friend, Jesus by name, who is always willing to accompany us on our daily journey.

We pray this day for peace; peace in our hearts and peace in our world. Some people are struggling with difficult decisions or facing critical experiences. We pray for all:

- Who must decide to give up something in the name of love,
- Who must determine if they are on the right path or need another direction,

- Who must wait for others to decide their own fate,
- Who face a surgeon's knife,
- Who must endure a neighbor's strife,
- Who are looking for employment,
- Who are expecting a new baby,
- Who are suspecting an old problem,
- Who are nurturing anger and jealousy,
- Who having lost a sense of what is vital, reduce life to trivia,
- Who are ill and can't seem to get their strength back,
- Who are strong and can't find a place to use their strength.

You know the recital of our deeds, like a loving mother knows her children, and You know the solution to our needs like a wise father. Therefore, we open our heart unto You and pray that Your Spirit may dwell in each one of us and give us poise and peace. We believe in You, O Divine Parent, help us now to believe in what You tell us we must do. We trust in You. Now give us faith to trust the decisions we make with Your help. Therefore, teach us how to listen to the prompting of Your Spirit and thus save us from floundering in indecisions that subtract from our peace, divide us from those we love, and multiply our troubles. Rather teach us the new math, that one with You equals a majority, and that where two or three are gathered together, there is always Another present.

Now help us to do the best we can and leave the rest to You.
In Christ's Name, Amen.

A Prayer for Peace

Our Heavenly Father,
We could have called You Mother because it is not Your gender that makes You God, it's Your grace, it is not Your assertion that makes us trust You, but Your assurance.

You are a parent, and so we call You by whatever name brings that reality alive.

So Your children in their disobedience call to You as a child in the night. And like a child, we may ask for a glass of water, but it is the night and the darkness we fear and need You to come and do us a favor, not to relieve our thirst so much as to calm our fear.

Why haven't You answered? Or maybe You have. Could it be You are waiting for us to grow up? You've left us alone to manage as best we can. Well, we're not doing too good, O God. Our forests are on fire, our wildlife more and more extinct, our oceans and rivers are filling with oil and refuse, our air is stagnant with pollutants, our waste is taking more and more of our land space. Could that be the ultimate indignity, O God, becoming victims of our own waste while wondering if we can yet pollute the heavens in search of the ultimate weapon that will give us security? We

do not seem to realize that in our commitment to development and defense, we are coming closer to disaster and despair.

Many of our leaders have departed to far countries of self-indulgence. Our preachers with their eye on bread, have lost their baker and now are worried about their dough. Our politicians, while seeking great office, have wandered down forbidden paths and have suffered from heartburn which has affected their stomach for campaigning. Therefore, we have great models of pollution and promiscuity, while trying to find our way amid deceptions and democracy.

Our government seems to be suffering from selective amnesia amid its paper shredders, so that no one knows when, who, or why. Our foreign policy has been too often corrupted by those who line their pockets with money from selling their wares by playing on our fear. The allure of power has allowed unconscionable behavior, dishonoring our own heritage. Where is the honor we have lost in deception? Where is the heritage we have misplaced in the name of patriotism? Where is the democracy we have abandoned for covert operations, and where is the dignity we so easily discard in selling arms to ayatollahs and dictators only to fight them at another time? Have we forgotten how contemporary allies make strange bedfellows? Or even worse, is our fear of terrorism so uncontrollable that we dare mortgage our history, our system, and our honor?

How do we pray, O God? Do we pray for more cover up so we won't have to go through so much anguish, or do we pray for truth and for those who serve it without reservation? Do we pray for Afghanistan or Iraq or for both? Do we pray for victory at any cost or for honor at any price? Do we pray for a place to deposit our waste or a way to control our appetite? Do we pray for love or power?

We do not know how to pray, Our Father, because we are not free to see Your will or test Your truths. So we ask You to pray for us, and to be merciful to all Your children in this strange and lonely planet where we need each other so badly and manage only to deal badly with one another. Be merciful, O God, if only for the sake of the earth You created with us as caretakers.

In the Name of Christ, Amen.

A Prayer of Hope

God of the Ages, whose Almighty Hand leads forth
in Beauty,
It is exciting to anticipate the things that await us! It is hopeful to acknowledge the reality that this is the first day of the rest of our lives.

So many great adventures die of stillbirth because we never begin. Teach us that everything worth achieving has a beginning, that every gallant gesture has a moment of gestation, that every cause worth serving has to be anticipated before it is participated!

Nourish our dreams so that they will lead us to new beginnings. There is so much spiritual mildew in our lives, so much fear of the unexpected. Keep us in the happy company of the buoyant and the brave. Do not let them become an endangered species. For there are so many for whom fear will be the only anthem, who suffer from lobotomy of the will, who turn trivia into vintage and find their companionship in fellow critics.

Teach us that hope is an act of creation, that nobility is a

product of faith, that joy is the gift of integrity, that courage is given to those who dare much. And teach us to love, to love each other, to love the stranger, to love the enemy, to love those who spitefully use and abuse us. For so abiding in love, we may abide in You. For if we cannot love, then we cannot build that better community You have in mind for us.

We know, O Lord, that we are not permitted to choose the frame of our destinies, but what we put into it is ours. So keep us open to adventure!

Deliver us from loneliness, and yet help us to see that aloneness is our most precious asset, for it is there in the workshop of aloneness that we fashion what we will to make of ourselves. Save us from wanting too much, for life is best not only knowing what we want but also knowing what we settle for.

Above all, help us to master all that would master us and rob us of control of our lives, from smoking to overeating. If we must suffer from addiction, let it be to our faith in the Christ who liberates us and calls us to be responsible.

And that is our concluding petition. Keep us in touch with Christ's spirit, not His law, or His words, or His church, for all of these without his spirit can only make us proud, obnoxious, and unbearable. But it is Christ's spirit that keeps us humble, vulnerable, and available. So come, Spirit of God, and dwell in us now and in the days to come, Amen.

A Prayer for Unity

Our Heavenly God,
Please stay in heaven. Down here among us mortals, You can be the victim of a terrorist bomb or get caught in the crossfire of soldiers fighting for their nation's honor, or somebody might give You a drug for Your headache and You could end up in the morgue.

Stay in heaven, Lord. It's safer there. Watch after us from the distance of a heavenly suburb. Do not involve Yourself in the affairs of the Middle East or Asia. It's too complex for You anyway. We've got the answers. It's simple if You see it our way. So get out of the way. We will settle it and then we will invite You to join the human family again.

What do You mean You're involved already? Where? On whose side? You mean You are a Jew and a Muslim? Come God, You have got to be kidding. An American, yes, but a Palestinian, an Iranian? Come on. That's like saying You were a slave in Egypt or in Dixie. That's like saying You are with the bum on the corner or the mother in the welfare line. Surely You're not with these either. Are You with the nice people over