

The City Church, New York

The Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession – Sunday January 21, 2007

On this day in 1772, while on horseback in the Appalachian mountains, English Methodist missionary Francis Asbury jotted down these words in his Journal: "Though a stranger in a strange land, God has taken care of me." Let us pray.

Thank You, O Stranger of Galilee, for You take care of strangers in strange lands. We pray that we might be strangers in a strange land, for You, for such is our sacred calling. We pray that we might be true citizens of that City with real foundations, whose Builder and Maker, You are. Save us from being so comfortably at home in this world and in its worldview that we fail to keep pace with the One we're privileged to follow on a pilgrim pathway through this world and on to our True Home. We're moved by Your knowing what it is to be a wayfarer on a planet of Your own handiwork. You came to Your own, but You were not well received. You come to us, and, still, so often, You're not so well received. Lord, may we long for the freedom of the fellowship of the Stranger of Galilee.

Forbid it that, in our self-centered worldly ways, we're setting ourselves up for the day when we'll hear You say: "I was a stranger, but you didn't welcome me. I was hungry and thirsty but you gave me nothing to eat or drink. I needed clothes but you didn't clothe me. I was sick and oppressed but you didn't look after me." Forbid it that we should be such strangers to Your gracious ways that we will protest: "But, Lord, when did we see You, a stranger or hungry or thirsty or in bondage?" Forbid it that You will then have to explain to us – with tears in Your eyes: "I was that stranger you didn't welcome. I was that old woman you refused to help. I was that young man you kept in bondage, a victim of your disdain and indifference, for whom you wouldn't lift a finger."

Lord, You've warned us that when we shut our ears to the cries of the oppressed, our prayers will not be heard, that it is as we forgive others that we may be forgiven and that it is in terms of our condemning others that we're condemning ourselves. O, forbid it, Lord, that we should fail our sacred calling to love and serve all for whom You died.

We give thanks for the unmerited grace and peace that can conform us, day by day, into the image of the One in whose name we now pray as we were taught to pray, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.