
Why Pray?

**An article for the *Cathedral Times*
by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell
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Here we are, again. The news of the past several weeks is filled with tragic images and stories of social violence, again. We have fallen to our knees crying out to God, again. People are wondering why we do it, again.

The time for prayer is over, they say. It's time to do something. It's hypocritical to pray, they say, unless you act. Don't tell me prayer works, they say, when this keeps happening.

I think I understand why they are saying these things. Our hearts are all breaking open with the seemingly unnecessary pain and suffering we are witnessing. We all want to make it go away. We all want to do something.

I can also hear the frustration in their voices. Sometimes it sounds like bewilderment at why we would do something that seems so unproductive. Sometimes it sounds like a desire to blame someone for something just to make sense of it all. Sometimes it sounds like a justifiable calling out of the refusal to act by people who have the power and responsibility to make these tragedies less likely. Sometimes it sounds like the self-righteous blaming of people who think they have simple solutions to complex social problems.

That's why we pray.

We have all these feelings too. We are afraid. We are angry. We know that it doesn't have to be this way. We have children. We have grandmothers. We have our own simple solutions and lists of powers and principalities to blame. And, yes, we too wonder if prayer works.

We pray because prayer is doing something.

Prayer is opening ourselves to God. Prayer is not asking God to take care of something for us. Prayer is asking God to take care of something through us. Prayer is asking God to reveal to us who we really are, how we are getting in the way, and how we might be part of the solution. Prayer is finding the courage to look beyond how we want things to be and see them as they really are. Prayer is getting beyond the fantasy of thinking that any of us are safe when one of us is vulnerable. Prayer is finding the strength and courage to lose what we know telling the truth will cost us.

We pray because real change starts on the inside.

Prayer is not the only thing to be done, but we know that we won't be able to make any real change without it. We know that doing anything hard requires us first to know who and whose we are. We will never be free to do the right thing if we are imprisoned by the self-protective prejudices of the safe thing.

We pray because we need to learn how to see again, perhaps for the first time.

We need to learn to see into people and not just at them. We need to learn to see the image of God in their faces. We need to learn to see each other as God sees us all.

We pray because we know that God is the one who opens the eyes of the blind, heals the ears of the deaf, and softens the hearts of the hardened.

We pray because we know that we are they.

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