

WEEK 7

MAY 28, 2023

Digging Deeper

Words of a Dying Man

What does Acts 7:49 mean?

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Stephen continues his defense against charges that both he and Jesus wanted to tear down the temple (Acts 6:13–14). The accusers know it's a lie, just as the Sanhedrin knows Jesus never really threatened the temple (Mark 14:57–59). But in Roman law, destroying a place of religion carries the death penalty. If they can make this charge stick, they can get the Romans to execute Stephen. Never mind that their real problem is that they can't defend their beliefs against Stephen's truth (Acts 6:10).

Acts 7:49–50 is a quote from Isaiah 66:1 and the first line of verse 2. Stephen is pointing out that God created the stone, bronze, linen, gold, and wood from which the temple is made. The temple is only sacred if God dwells in it. When Solomon built and dedicated the Israelites' first temple, God consecrated it, coming down to fill it with such glory the priests couldn't even enter (2 Chronicles 7:1–2). More than 400 years before the temple was built, He had done the same to the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34–35).

Paul will use this same argument with Athenian philosophers, saying, "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything" (Acts 17:24–25). He will go on to quote a Greek philosopher who affirmed that God created humans (Acts 17:28).

At the time this commentary is being written, much of the world is under quarantine because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are coming to understand that with Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, the place where we worship isn't so important. The Holy Spirit indwells believers (Romans 8:9), not buildings. Believers are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). This is why Jesus could tell the Samaritan woman, "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23).

Our Father, Not My Father

Cyprian

Above all, the Teacher of peace and Master of unity did not want prayer to be made singly and privately, so that whoever prayed would pray for himself alone.

We do not say My Father, who art in heaven or Give me this day my daily bread; nor does each one ask that only his own debt should be forgiven him; nor does he request for himself alone that he may not be led into temptation but delivered from evil. Our prayer is public and common, and when we pray, we pray not for one person but for the whole people, since we, the whole people, are one.

UNITY, WITH ONE ACCORD

The God of peace and the Master of concord, who taught unity, willed that one should pray for all, just as he himself, being one, carried us all. The three children observed this law when they were shut into the fiery furnace, praying with one voice and with one heart: thus our faith in divine Scripture teaches us, and, as it teaches us how such people prayed, gives us an example that we should follow in our own prayers, so that we may become like them: Then these three sang a hymn as if with one mouth, and blessed the Lord. They spoke as if with one mouth, even though Christ had not yet taught them how to pray.

And therefore, as they prayed, their prayers were heard and were fruitful, because a peaceful, sincere, and spiritual prayer deserved well from the Lord. Thus, too, we find the Apostles and the disciples praying after the ascension of the Lord: They all continued with one accord in prayer, with the women and with Mary who was the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. They continued with one accord in prayer, showing, by the urgency and the unanimity of their praying, that God, who makes the inhabitants of a house to be of one mind, only admits to his divine and eternal home those among whom prayer is unanimous.

But, dear brethren – what deep blessings are contained in the Lord's prayer! How many they are, and how great, collected in so few words but so rich in spiritual power! There is nothing at all that is not to be found in these our prayers and petitions, as it were a compendium of heavenly doctrine. Thus, he said, you must pray: Our Father, who art in heaven.

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN

The new man, re-born and brought back to God by his grace, says Father at the very beginning, for he has just begun to be God's son. He came to his own, and his own did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name. Whoever believes in God's name and has become his son, should start here so that he can give thanks and profess himself to be God's son, by calling God his Father in heaven.

This is the second of a series of excerpts from a treatise on the Lord's Prayer by Saint Cyprian of Carthage which is used in the Roman Office of Readings. It focuses on the Our Father as a communal prayer of God's children (Cap 8-9: CSEL 3, 271-2). It appears in the Roman Office of Readings for Monday in the eleventh (11th) Week in Ordinary Time, with the accompanying biblical reading taken from Judges 4:1-24.

St. Cyprian

Cyprian was a pagan public speaker and teacher from Carthage in North Africa who converted to Christianity around the year 246 AD. He immediately set himself to the study of Scripture and the writings of the first great Latin theologian from North Africa, Tertullian. Saint Cyprian grew so rapidly in holiness and knowledge of the faith that he was appointed bishop of Carthage only two years after his baptism. Within only a few months of his election to the episcopacy, the persecution of Decius broke out and Cyprian was forced to flee his see. Upon returning, he set himself to dealing with the problem of the reconciliation, after suitable penance, of those who buckled under pressure and lapsed in their faith. After a few years of peace, the persecution of the emperor Valerian began.

Cyprian gave himself up and was martyred in Carthage on September 14, 258. St. Cyprian's writings that survive are mainly letters and short treatises. Most notable among them are his treatise on the Lord's Prayer. Also notable is his *De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitatis* (251) on the Unity of the Catholic Church and the importance of the Episcopate as safeguard of this unity. Cyprian is recognized as one of the Fathers of the Church.





Questions to ask when reading the Bible

Sometimes when we read a passage in the Bible it can be confusing or we may not know how to best figure out what it is saying. Below are some good questions to ask when reading the Bible to help make the Bible make sense.

1. What stands out to me?

Note that this does not say “What does this passage mean?” Consider what stood out to you? What did you notice? What did the Holy Spirit highlight for you as you read it?

2. What does the text say about the character/nature of God?

The Scriptures are primarily about God so ask first what the text says about Him before moving to what it says about us, about His plan, or about anything else.

3. What does the text say?

Look at what the text literally says first (this may not be the intent of the text but it is important to look at it as read... at least initially).

4. How is it saying it?

What is the genre of the text and how should we read text in that genre?

5. Why does it say it that way?

Speculate about why the author chose this method of saying what they've said.

6. What is it trying to say?

Getting behind the Scripture, looking at its context, its original audience, its author, etc., what is the text trying to get across to the reader (both the original audience and us today?)

7. How does this fit into the whole of the book and the whole of Scripture?

Looking at the whole book, does what is being said jive with the whole book, with the whole of Scripture?

8. What questions do I have?

Do you have questions about the text? If they aren't answered in the text, are they good questions or are we asking questions that the text isn't meant to answer?

9. How do I feel about this teaching/text? Why do I feel that way?

What does your gut say? Are you frustrated with it? Are you trying to make it say something else than what it says? Does it make you uncomfortable? Where are these feelings coming from? Is there sin in my life I need to repent of?

10. What is the universal application of this text/teaching?

What are we to do with this text? Consider the original audience as well as us today.

11. What is my personal application?

What is God calling you to apply with what you've learned with this text?

12. How will I apply what it calls me to?

Make a plan to apply what God has taught you. Seek to be faithful and obedient to His leading, wherever it may go.