

Michaelmas-tide 2008

Dear Members and Friends,

Science tells us that the body's skeletal structure actually needs stressing to maintain its strength and density, even as we grow old. A sensible diet, and a regular, planned regimen of reasonable exercise and weight-bearing keeps our bones strong and healthy into great age. A programme of physical care of the body makes us able to bear the shocks and pitfalls of life with far fewer broken bones or degenerative disease. This is also true of the spiritual body. Our spiritual skeleton is our daily prayer and time alone with God. This "skeleton" needs to be exercised and stressed regularly to avoid breaks and disease.

As there have been in every age, there are many "life-stressors" today, and great and interesting debates exercising the Church at every level. These stresses of need, doubt, confusion, wonder, and, surprisingly, even our joys, all strengthen our spiritual skeleton when they are made part of our life of prayer and contemplation. Proper spiritual exercise, and bearing the weight of today's issues, is spiritually *healthy*.

Over thousands of years the Church has distilled a simple guide to strengthen our spiritual skeletons. While I have shared this with you many times, it does bear rather constant repetition. So, here it is again:

- The worship of God in his Church on Sundays and principal Holy Days (The Holy Eucharist)
- Daily prayer joined with the Church, morning and evening (The Daily Office)
- Daily prayer and devotions of your own, arising from your reading of Holy Scripture and contemplation (Private Devotion)

The Prayer Book makes abundantly clear that the Holy Eucharist is "the principal act of worship on the Lord's Day and other major Feasts" (BCP p.13). Here we offer and present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice, joining ourselves to the action and work of Jesus. Here we also lift to the Altar our weighty cares and stress. We enter into deepest and holy communion with God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. This Sunday "workout" has primacy of place and honour over all other forms of worship by virtue of the Lord Jesus' specific command to "do this". So this, then, is what we do on Sundays, our *weekly Common Prayer*.

Since its inception, the Church dispersed across the globe has gathered in prayer as the visible Body of Christ in the world to offer praise and intercession to God the Father every day at least twice during the day, morning and evening. In other Christian traditions this norm increasingly became the duty of priests and/or members of religious orders. At the Anglican Reformation that notion was rejected in the strongest possible ways, and the daily prayers of the Church were restored to, and expected of, *the laity*, the people. These prayers were enshrined in the Book of Common Prayer as the Daily Office. Led by the clergy, or a licensed Reader, these offices were and are the structural skeleton of the Church's own common daily prayer life. Individuals may come to the church at the appointed times, or join in the prayers at home (preferably at the same time, or when convenient), but it is the responsibility of *each member of the Church* as the Body of Christ to join every day in these common acts of Christian worship. (For those unable to be present at church, the Prayer Book offers forms beginning on page 136 for individuals or families to use at home.) This is our *daily Common Prayer* and spiritual exercise.

In order to maintain healthy relationships psychologists tell us to keep the lines of communication in the relationship open. Our daily prayer, personal prayer other than our common prayer with the Church, is what does this with God. God's Word *to us* is found in many ways, but above all in the Bible, and it is incarnate in Jesus Christ. Your conversation with God is based in this understanding. The common prayer

*(Continued overleaf)*

of the Church is rightly seen as the model and corrective to follow for your private prayer, lest it become too self-absorbed. Nevertheless, your devotions use your own very individual methods and take your own very individual shapes: it is *your peculiar prayer* and manner of speaking to, communing with, and contemplating our common God. Here you make your private intercessions and lift the weight of personal sorrow, joy, need, and sacrifice to God. Flowing from studying the Bible and communion with the Son of God, this is your *daily personal devotional exercise*.

These practises will result in the strengthening of your spiritual “skeleton”, and, by extension, the exercise of a Godly stewardship of your time, wealth, and abilities. A regimen of reasonable spiritual exercises and solid meditations will keep you strong into eternal life.

During the coming year at Saint John’s there will be numerous opportunities to exercise and strengthen our spiritual skeletons, bringing to the Church, and joining with the Church in the stresses and weight of both our individual lives and our common life. There will be opportunity to hear and study God’s Word, both in the Bible and in the Incarnate Son. Take good advantage of these opportunities. **Our public daily Common Prayer resumes on Michaelmas Day, Monday, 29 September, with Mattins at 7.45 AM and Evensong at 5.45 PM.** A member of Saint Benedict’s Guild will be at the church then, and daily thereafter through Trinity Sunday, to lead the Daily Office with those present, and on behalf of those who must be at home, or who cannot join in the Church’s daily common prayers for whatever reason. Do join us at the church whenever you can, and thank those who make the daily prayers on your behalf when you can’t.

With every prayer for a year of strong spiritual workouts, I remain,

Yours faithfully in Christ Jesus,



(The Rev’d) Jesse L. A. Parker  
*Rector of Saint John’s Church*

P.S. You should have picked up your new parish *Kalendar* at the church or received it in the mail. If you do not have one it may be at the back of the church in the box for collection by you. If not, please call the Church Office on 410.467.4793 and one will be sent to you immediately. Additional copies may be had at cost, \$7.00 each.

*Do not be children in your thinking, my friends; be infants in evil, but in your thinking be grown-up. 1 Corinthians 14.20*