

Arrow Prayer

I've suggested some simple ways of praying when you don't have much time, or are short of ideas or motivation. (See [here](#) for ABC Prayer and [here](#) for QC Prayer.) Here is another, an 'oldie but goodie': arrow prayer.

Arrow prayers are quick (as an arrow flies) and sharp (like an arrow head). They expand to fill moments of uncertainty, anxiety and pain, whether on behalf of oneself or others. They fit into the habit of continual prayer, not because any of us wants to feel pain and anxiety, but because no one can avoid it. Even if your life is so charmed that it offers no guest room to sorrow, as a Christian, it is your baptismal vocation to care for the sorrows of others: to relieve those, as it is possible for you, or to pray when there is nothing directly you can do. To live as a Christian is to agree to shoulder some of the burden of the world's pain, as you are able. It is sometimes our travail, but always our privilege.

So what might you use as an arrow prayer? Bow-and-arrow hunters carry a quiver, because they need more than one arrow if they are to feed their families. A praying Christian also needs a quiver, a quiver of arrow prayers for different purposes. The quiver need not contain *many* such prayers, but at least a couple for different purposes.

One might be a prayer for immediate needs. You hear the wail of an emergency vehicle's siren. Some of us were taught to make the sign of the cross and say 'Jesu mercy, Mary pray'. If that isn't your piety, you could stop still for a second and say 'Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy'. Or just, 'Jesus, mercy'. The exact words don't matter. What matters is that like an archer, you have something you can reach for quickly, so settle on some formula you find congenial, keep it ready and stick to it. The same words can be used for the friend or colleague telling you of a recent misfortune.

Or you might be aware that you just did something wrong or foolish. Once again, you grumbled some pointless chastisement at another driver—one less perfect than yourself. Or you sat in a meeting and thought, at someone's contribution to the discussion, 'You idiot!' Try the Jesus Prayer, 'Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me a sinner'. Or maybe just, 'Father, forgive me'. Or 'Create in me a pure heart, my God'. Or ask God's blessing on the unknowing recipient of your muttered imprecation: 'May the Lord bless you and keep you.' After all, the more stupid and thoughtless they actually are, the more they need God's care.

Perhaps, though, someone just wronged you, called you stupid (or subtly implied it), made some casually insulting remark. Instead of lashing back or wallowing in self-righteousness or self-pity, you could say 'Holy Spirit, enfold me in your tender wings'. Or, leaning on the realisation that people rarely lash out at others unless they feel some lack within themselves, say 'Holy Spirit, enfold [him/her/name] in your tender wings'.

However let's assume that you don't spend most of your day irritated with other people, putting up with their barbs, or watching a fleet of emergency vehicles speeding to an

accident. Remember God in the moments of joy and the moments of ordinariness. Suppose you're just happy that the sun is shining. Say 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth'. Or 'You are the joy of those who seek you'. Or simply, 'My God and my all!' Or 'Jesus, you are my love and my life'. Or 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his gifts'.

Many of these arrow prayers come from the Psalms or other books of the Bible and if you have the habit of reading the Bible every day, you may find verses that speak especially strongly to you. Write them down and see if they could be used as arrow prayers. The important thing is to have a few possibilities lodged firmly in your mind. If they are there, they will present themselves to you in your moment of need, thankfulness or joy and you will find yourself praying more.

Keep your 'quiver' stocked with prayer and you will find yourself on the road to practising the presence of God throughout your days!