

Liturgical lessons 2007 (Dec 3, 2006 First Advent start)

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ
December 3, 2006 (1st Advent) Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalms 25:4-5, 8-10, 14; 1 Thes 3:12-4:2; Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

I WILL MAKE A VIRTUOUS BRANCH GROW FOR DAVID, WHO SHALL
PRACTICE HONESTY & INTEGRITY IN THE LAND.

"There will be signs in the sun & moon & stars... men dying of fear as they await what menaces the world.
They will see the Son of Man coming with power & glory. Stand erect, hold your head high.
Your liberation is near at hand."

During the day: Be honest with yourself in the use of your freedom--it was bought back for you at great price. Get comfortable with integrity; hold your head high so others can see it in your eyes. Stand erect, the better to support those who depend on you, & shake off those who try to pull you down.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is sharing humanity with the Son of Man. Prayer is awareness of him aware of you. Prayer shares his vision, discovers your place in it. Prayer is gratitude, expressed in trust. Prayer stabilizes commitment. Prayer sows, reaps, then enjoys the harvest. Prayer is indispensable.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ
December 10, 2006 (2nd Advent) Baruch 5:1-9; Psalms 126:1-6; Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11; Luke 3:1-6

JERUSALEM, TAKE OFF YOUR DRESS OF SORROW & DISTRESS. GOD
WILL SHOW YOUR SPLENDOR TO EVERY NATION UNDER HEAVEN.

"Prepare a way for the Lord, make rough roads smooth.
All mankind shall see the salvation of God."

During the day: We're all brothers & sisters, children of one Father-Mother. Live & love that truth. Do your bit--govern your thoughts, words & deeds accordingly. That's really all you can do to make a better world; God, however unapparently, is using all such to make it happen.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is that subliminal radar that detects God's approach in every human being beneath the surface of their thoughts, words & deeds. Prayer governs the reactions to the latter with respect for the former. God uses each encounter as instrument of salvation for both; each is free to do likewise.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ
December 17, 2006 (3rd Advent) Zeph 3:14-18; Isaiah 12:2-6; Phil 4:4-7; Luke 3:10-18

BE GLAD & EXULT WITH ALL YOUR HEART. THE KING OF ISRAEL, THE LORD,
IN YOUR MIDST. YOU HAVE NO FURTHER MISFORTUNE TO FEAR.

"John said, 'I baptize you with water, but one mightier than I is coming.
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit & fire.'"

During the day: Don't fear misfortune. Sure, be cautious & prudent as it happens, but don't be afraid of it, i.e. don't let fear govern your reactions; face it rather with courage. Trust there's a Providence bringing good out of it you may never see. That's what makes it true.

ABOUT PRAYER: Advent prayer is vigilant. Alert to the hidden mechanics of the Spirit, prayer stokes the fire of enthusiasm for what's to come. Aware there's a loving power to surrender to, prayer becomes the pregnancy of new life in the heart, both human & divine.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ
December 24, 2006 (4th Advent) Micah 5:1-4a; Psalms 80; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45
FROM YOU, BETHLEHEM, WILL COME ONE WHO SHALL SHEPHERD HIS FLOCK
BY THE STRENGTH OF THE LORD. HE SHALL BE PEACE.

"Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you would be fulfilled."

During the day: The mind was made to recognize truth. Train it. Settle for nothing less. Learn to ally judgment with intuition. Allow both to be illumined by Absolute Truth. Then let the will kick in & make your choices accordingly.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is not planning. It's studying the Plans & consulting the Architect. Prayer brings both mind & will into focus on your responsibilities in the project, then moves into action with trust in both your own ability & His wisdom & power; after all, He gave the job to you.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ
December 31, 2006 Holy Family: 1Sam 1.20-28; 1Jn 3.1-2, 21-24; LK 2.41-52
HANNAH SAID TO ELKANAH HER HUSBAND, 'ONCE THE CHILD IS WEANED
I WILL TAKE HIM TO APPEAR BEFORE THE LORD & TO REMAIN THERE FOREVER.
I WILL OFFER HIM AS A PERPETUAL NAZIRITE.'

"His mother kept all these things in her heart.

And Jesus advanced in wisdom & age & favor before God & man."

During the day: You can't help advancing in age, but you can sure be a little wiser. Fit the situation, don't make it fit you. God'll take care of the details, & others will be friendlier. And ponder.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer ponders. Both the situation, & the things of the heart. Prayer searches the divine perspective. The Father-Mother obliges, & the mother who helped her Son discern, helps us too.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ
January 7, 2007 Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalms 72; Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12
ARISE! THOUGH NIGHT STILL COVERS THE EARTH & DARKNESS ITS PEOPLES.
LIFT UP YOUR EYES & LOOK ROUND, FOR YOUR LIGHT HAS COME.

"There in front of them was the star. It went forward to the place where the child was."

During the day - Look round. Look at people. SEE them! Forget yourself for a moment & wonder at the darkness in some, the light in others. Let this latter illumine you & lift your spirits. In all likelihood, it's their childlike innocence. Cleansed, reflect it to the ones who need it.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer lights the inner candle. For a while, it admires the beauty of the flame; then begins to notice the items its light reveals, resting in its warmth as it does so. Prayer ponders, allowing truth & love to work their magic.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ
JAN 14, 2007 2nd of yr.: Isa 62.1-5; 1Cor 12.4-11; JN 2.1-12

AS THE BRIDEGROOM REJOICES IN HIS BRIDE, SO WILL GOD REJOICE IN YOU.

"The mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' Jesus replied, 'Why turn to me?

My hour has not yet come.' She said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'"

During the day: Do whatever he tells you. God knows when & how to communicate with you, even if you don't with him. Listen. He speaks through people & situations. Be generous. God is never outdone in generosity.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is the subliminal antenna that picks up the Spirit's wavelength. Prayer conditions, not so much the mind to recognize, as the will to activate. 'Yes, Lord.' is the ultimate prayer.

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JAN 21, 207 3rd of yr: Neh 8.2-10; 1Cor 12.12-30; LK 1.1-4;4.14-21

EZRA READ FROM THE BOOK OF THE LAW OF GOD. 'DO NOT BE SADDENED, DO NOT WEEP. REJOICING IN THE LORD MUST BE YOUR STRENGTH.'

"The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free.'

During the day: Weep to grieve loss, but let tears water hope. There's a law for God, too: to keep his promises. He does; but in his own time & way. Hope turns to faith when charity perceives his love. Even in tragedy & failure, there's a good to be found. Look for it.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is the candle we light in the dark. That is, if you can see. If you're blind, you just grope. Whichever, there's security in recognizing the familiar. Prayer gets us familiar with the things of God. Infinite & absolute, they empower unlimited strength.

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JAN 28, 2007 4th of yr: Jer 1.4-5,17-19; 1Cor 12.31-13.13; LK 4.21-30

BEFORE I FORMED YOU IN THE WOMB, I KNEW YOU.

STAND UP & TELL THEM ALL THAT I COMMAND YOU.

"All spoke highly of him & were amazed at his gracious words.

He passed though the midst of them & went away."

Missing Jack's Thoughts for this week

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

FEB 4, 2007 5th of yr: Isa 6.1-8; 1Cor 15.1-11; LK 5.1-11

I SAW THE LORD SEATED ON LOFTY THRONE. 'WOE IS ME, I AM DOOMED! A MAN OF UNCLEAN LIPS, I HAVE SEEN THE LORD!' THEN A SERAPHIM TOUCHED MY LIPS WITH AN EMBER, 'YOUR WICKEDNESS IS REMOVED, YOUR SIN PURGED.' I HEARD THE LORD SAY, 'WHOM SHALL I SEND?' 'HERE I AM' I SAID. 'SEND ME.'

"Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.' Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid. from now on you will be catching men.'"

During the day:: Be sent. For what? For people, not projects. Purge your lips. Speak well of others as you go--your words proceed you. Recognize their effectiveness. Words touch hearts; truth prevails, love converts.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer purifies, rights the balance, calms the emotions, seeks the truth. Prayer penetrates it, ponders the good & the bad, finds God in the good, perceives fear in the bad. Prayer exacts the mission: serve the good, assuage the fear. Prayer evaluates the effort, offers it to God.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

FEB 11, 2007 6th of yr: Jer 17.5-8; 1Cor 12-20; LK 6.17-26

BLESSED IS THE ONE WHOSE HOPE IS THE LORD. HE'S LIKE A TREE PLANTED BY THE WATERS THAT STRETCHES OUT ITS ROOTS TO THE STREAM.

"Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh."

During the day: Keep your sense of humor; especially when it's all you've got left. If it's human loss you're grieving, may take a little time to reach the stream. If material, look around for others worse off & give them a helping hand--you'll find you're working shoulder to shoulder with the Lord.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer transcends experience, overcomes emotions with sentiments born of truths not rational but not unreasonable. Prayer seeks a God whose love heals all; first, tho, prayer rids the heart of hatred & resentment where Love can't penetrate. Prayer waits.

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Feb 18, 2007 7th of yr.: 1Sam 26:2, 7-13, 22-23; 1Cor 15:45-49; Luke 6:27-38

THE LORD WILL REWARD EACH MAN FOR HIS JUSTICE & FAITHFULNESS

"Love your enemies, do good to them. Your reward will be great, you will be children of the Most High. He himself is kind to the ungrateful & wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

During the day: Be more faithful in practicing divine justice than human justice. The latter protects you from the other; the former puts you at his service; which, after all, is the divine destiny of humanity. Your fulfillment depends on it. Like Father, like son.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer anticipates rewards, ponders their prerequisites. Prayer subdues blind resentment, tempers it, gives it a purpose: forgiveness. Not just emotionally, but materially as well. Prayer relishes the satisfaction of being Godlike.

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FEB 25, 2007 1st Lent: Deuteronomy 26.4-10; Romans 10.8-13; Luke 4.1-13

SAY 'I'VE BROUGHT YOU, O LORD, THE FIRST FRUITS OF THE SOIL YOU HAVE GIVEN ME.'
HAVING SET THEM BEFORE THE LORD YOUR GOD, YOU SHALL BOW DOWN IN HIS PRESENCE.

"The devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world: 'All this will be yours if you worship me.'

Jesus said, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, & him alone shall you serve.'

During the day: Authority, if abused, corrupts; don't. Used wisely, it's a service; serve. It's a gift, not a privilege; a responsibility to & for others, not a right. Exercised as authorized, the Author spins the tale that works his wonder.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is of the imagination & the will more than of the intellect & emotions. The latter have their place, but relative; the Absolute inspires dreams that bring order out of chaos, & prayer cherishes their realization.

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March 04, 2007 2nd Sunday of Lent: Genesis 15:5-18; Philippians 3:17-4.1; Luke 9:28-36

ABRAM PUT HIS FAITH IN THE LORD, WHO CREDITED
IT TO HIM AS AN ACT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

"From the cloud came a voice. 'This is my chosen Son; listen to him.'"

During the day: Be right, but not self-righteous. Be right because it's true, not because you think it is. If not sure, have an opinion, not a conviction. To clarify, go listen to someone with truth's authority--your inner sense of God's presence will confirm.

ABOUT PRAYER: The practice of prayer hones the inner quest for truth. Prayer expands the capacity to perceive it, assures the will the truth embraced is of God, is God; listening to him brings its own conviction.

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March 11, 2007 3rd Sunday of Lent: Exodus 3:1-8,13-15; 1 Corinthians 10:1-6,10-12; Luke 13:1-9

THE BUSH, THOUGH ON FIRE, WAS NOT CONSUMED.

"Sir, leave it another year, & I shall cultivate it;

it may bear fruit in the future. If not, you can cut it down."

During the day: Bear fruit. To do so, cultivate your virtues, discipline your vices; the former are you forever, the latter cut you down. Which do you prefer?

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer, cultivated, consumes. It purifies selfishness: discovers the true self, renounces the superficial. Prayer grafts us onto Christ, assured the fruit borne is his, ripe forever.

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MARCH 18, 2007 4th Lent: Joshua 5.9-12; 2Cor 5.17-21; LK 15.1-3,11-32

ON THAT SAME DAY AFTER THE PASSOVER ON WHICH THEY ATE
THE PRODUCE OF THE LAND, THE MANNA CEASED.

"I shall get up & go to my Father & say to him, 'I have sinned against heaven & against you. I'm not worthy to be called your son-- treat me as one of your servants.'"

During the day: Why die of hunger? Be humble & go begging. Go to those who can help you & want to. Just because you're cold-hearted & proud doesn't mean they are too. Mercy is unconditional love; give someone a chance to practice it, then learn to yourself.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer serves. It acknowledges truth; not emotionally but objectively. Prayer evaluates alternatives, makes the 'sensible' choice, activating the spiritual sense tuned to authentic love-- love that labors, beginning with forgiveness.

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March 25, 2007 5th Lent: Isaiah 43.16-21; Philippians 3.8-14; John 8.1-11

'Thus says the lord; 'see, I am doing something new!'

"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, Sir.' Then neither do I. Go, & sin no more."

During the day: Condemn the action, not the person. Better still, reserve judgement on the action till you've understood the person. The motive may not justify the action, but at least you'll sidestep your own self-righteous reaction.

About Prayer: Prayer climbs into the heart of Christ & looks at everyone with compassion. Prayer tunes to his concern for each's improvement. Prayer ponders what to say, what to do, when to say or do it, that Christ's healing love might touch the heart of the other. Something new happens.

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APRIL 1, 2007 Palm Sunday: Isa 50.4-7; Phil 2.6-11; LK 22.14-23,56

I OFFERED MY BACK TO THOSE WHO STRUCK ME. THE LORD COMES TO MY HELP --
I AM UNTOUCHED BY THE INSULTS.

"Father, forgive them. They know not what they do."

During the day: Be as sinless as you can in a sinful world. Expect & understand maliciousness in others-- be more concerned about its effect on them than on yourself. Sponge it out of them; then squeeze it out of yourself with compassion.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is the sun warmth that dries the sponge: the moisture of resentment & revenge slips away. Prayer turns to the One using us to absorb the insecurity of self-centeredness of others, his gratitude the soothing balm that heals our wounds.

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APRIL 8, 2007 Easter: Acts 10.34-43; 1Cor 5.6-8; LK24.13-35

TO HIM ALL THE PROPHETS BEAR WITNESS THAT EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES
IN HIM WILL RECEIVE FORGIVENESS OF SINS THROUGH HIS NAME.

"You foolish men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets!

Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer & so enter into his glory?"

During the day: Don't be foolish; only fools close their minds to truth-- the wise leave them open & discover unfathomable riches. Truth has its own authority, inner peace its confirmation.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is the agent of discernment--will & intellect interact. The will disposes; the intellect ponders, then judges; grace illumines, & the will embraces God's proposal & purpose. Prayer flows into action, & cost becomes reward.

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April 15, 2007 Acts 5:12-16; Psalm: Psalms 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24; Revelation 1:9-13, 17-19; John 20:19-31

MANY SIGNS & WONDERS WERE DONE AMONG THE PEOPLE
AT THE HANDS OF THE APOSTLES.

"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

During the day: Go. Sent, use time & energy, freedom & intelligence on the projects of Another. Being his, they imply his total commitment. In this case, a 'win-win' situation.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer refreshes the confidence & renews the indifference of working for the Lord; he knows what he's about & never fails to achieve his purpose. Prayer reminds us we don't, since he doesn't always clue us in. On his business, even when we fail, we succeed.

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APRIL 22, 2007 3rd Easter: Acts 5.27-32,40-41; Rev 5.11-14; JN 21.1-19

WE MUST OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN. WE ARE WITNESSES OF THESE THINGS,
AS IS THE HOLY SPIRIT WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN TO THOSE WHO OBEY HIM.

"Have you caught anything to eat? 'No!' 'Cast your net on the right side, and you will find something."

During the day: Obey legitimate authority, aware that immorality robs it of legitimacy. Obedience is freedom's wisest choice, when God's will not contravened. Indeed, Creator of both freedom & authority, He supposes it.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer confirms the right side of action, the only thing we're sure of: satisfying the Christ within. Prayer guarantees it's his will flowing through our actions, their results his purpose, whether we recognize it or not. Sometimes obedience is blind.

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APRIL 29, 2007 4th Easter: Acts 13.14,43-52; Rev 7.9-17; JN 10.27-30

I HAVE MADE YOU A LIGHT TO THE GENTILES THAT YOU MAY BE AN
INSTRUMENT OF SALVATION TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.

"My sheep hear my voice; they follow me.
I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish."

During the day: Be an instrument of salvation, a liberator. Look around, see the needs. Help free one from fear, another from embarrassment, still another from debt. We're all in this together, we all need a helping hand. The ripple effect goes 'round the world.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer takes our minds off our own worries, looks through God's eyes at those of others. Prayer wills what's good for them, then suggests gestures that might help--sometimes they do, sometimes they don't; but our own always end up back in perspective.

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MAY 6, 2007 5th Easter: Acts 14.21-27; Rev 21.1-5; JN 13.31-35

WE ALL HAVE TO EXPERIENCE MANY HARDSHIPS
TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

"I give you a new commandment.
Love one another just as I have loved you."

During the day: Will the other well, always. Then watch it happen. Choice made, it will. At no little price to you. Pay it. Literally, you'll never regret it. God'll see to that.

ABOUT PRAYER: All authentic prayer, willy-nilly, is the prayer of Christ. Prayer is action raised to the divine level. Thus prayer's fruit not always perceived. But infallibly effective.

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MAY 13, 6th Easter: Acts 15.1-2,22-29; Rev 21.10-14,22-23 JN 14.23-29

SOME WHO WENT OUT WITHOUT ANY MANDATE HAVE DISTURBED YOUR PEACE OF MIND.
WE SEND REPRESENTATIVES TO YOU TO CONVEY THIS MESSAGE.

"The word you hear is not mine but that of the Father who sent me. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid."

During the day: Loyal to your mandate, be careful with the words of the One who made & sent you. They have their own power of communication; share intuition, don't disturb with opinion. The Spirit of Truth conveys courage, not fear.

ABOUT PRAYER: Assimilating words, prayer ponders; the new life of truth gestates, eventually hatches, thanks to prayer's nourishment. Prayer's intuitions shared with others brings common faith to a common sense, & a community will assumes. The Kingdom of God has arrived.

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MAY 20, 2007 Ascension: Acts 1.1-11; Eph 1.17-23; Lk 24.46-53

JOHN BAPTIZED WITH WATER, BUT IN A FEW DAYS
YOU WILL BE BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

"It is written that the Christ would rise from the dead, & repentance for the forgiveness of sins preached in his name to all nations.'

During the day: Preach & practice forgiveness. The Spirit of God doesn't hold grudges, neither should yours. Your spirit, only if in harmony with God's, works the wonders that fulfill your destiny. Keep that harmony habitual.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is of the will: begins with the choice to discern God's will, ends with the choice to fulfill it. Inner harmony confirms unfolding discernment. Growing trust in the mercy of a forgiving Father dissolves resistance to pass it on to others.

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MAY 27, 2007 PENTECOST: Acts 2.1-11; 1Cor 12. 3-7,12-13; JN 20.19-23

THEY WERE ALL IN ONE PLACE TOGETHER. THEY BEGAN TO SPEAK IN DIFFERENT
TONGUES AS THE SPIRIT ENABLED THEM TO PROCLAIM.

"The doors were locked. Jesus came & stood in their midst & said 'Peace be with you.'"

During the day: Stick together. Be it family or friendship, community or company, don't let tensions boil over into conflict. Speak different tongues maybe, but let sincerity & mutual respect sustain the inner peace of communion.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer speaks a tongue that nobody else understands but God. Trouble is, he doesn't always answer in one WE understand! Prayer empowers the trust that brings the promised peace of Christ.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

JUNE 3, 2007 Holy Trinity: Proverbs 8.22-31; Rms 5.1-5; JN 16.12-15

THUS SAYS THE WISDOM OF GOD, "THE LORD POSSESSED ME, THE BEGINNING OF HIS WAYS.
FROM OF OLD I WAS BROUGHT FORTH, BEFORE THE EARTH. I WAS HIS CRAFTSMAN,
PLAYING BEFORE HIM ON THE EARTH, AND I FOUND DELIGHT IN THE HUMAN RACE.'

"When he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will speak what he hears. He will take from what
is mine & declare it to you. Everything the Father has is mine."

During the day: Be human, Be truthful. Be the craftsman of God. Delight in being guided by the Wisdom of God. Don't be shy: declare it to others, & play it out before him on the surface of the earth.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is plugging in to the love affair between divinity & humanity. It's fruit--the humanized wisdom of God--possesses as possessed, sharing everything that is of God. Prayer takes its time savoring it.

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JUNE 10, 2007 Body & Blood of Christ: Gen 14.18-20; 1Cor 11.23-26; LK 9.11-17

MELCHIZEDEK BROUGHT OUT BREAD & WINE.

BEING A PRIEST OF GOD HE BLESSED ABRAM.

"Dismiss the crowd so they can go & find provisions.' Jesus said,
'Give them some food yourselves.' They all ate & were satisfied."

During the day: Don't dismiss, feed. Not much, maybe, but enough to let the other know she's welcome; send her home happy. When shared, there's always enough to go around. The other is blessed, & God is glorified.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is the food the spirit needs. Feed yourself; & while you're at it, feed others. Praying for others is your way of sharing spiritually with them. At the same time, prayer gives God the opportunity to nudge you into action on their behalf.

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JUNE 17, 2007 11th of yr: 2Sam 12.7-13; Gal 2.16-21

WHY HAVE YOU SPURNED THE LORD AND DONE EVIL IN HIS SIGHT?

"The one to whom little is forgiven, little loves."

During the day: Don't spurn the Lord. Don't make choices irrespective of his regard. If self-love your motive, self-love your reward. Life & love go together; designed to live for others, put your heart into it.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer develops the two dimensions of forgiveness: forgiven, one forgives; forgiving, one is forgiven. Prayer lifts both to the divine: forgiving God the tragedies of life discovers his mercy. Exercised, mercy heals--love becomes life, & life becomes love.

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JUNE 24, 2007 John the Baptist: Isa 49.1-6; Acts 13.22-26; LK 1.57-66,80

THOUGH I THOUGHT I HAD TOILED IN VAIN AND FOR NOTHING SPENT MY STRENGTH,
YET MY REWARD IS WITH THE LORD, MY RECOMPENSE IS WITH MY GOD.

"Her neighbors & relatives heard that the Lord had shown his
great mercy toward her and they rejoiced with her."

During the day: Even when passed over, rejoice in the good fortune of others. Love lavished on another is a hidden gift to the openhearted bystander ever eager to wish the other well; such growth in the capacity to love guarantees its fulfillment in the Lover of us all.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is perseverance in hope. Prayer burrows into absolute truth & taps its strength. Prayer shrugs off defeat, spurns rejection, absorbs sadness, smiles at hardship. Prayer is the restful pause between rounds with reality. Prayer is the assurance of ultimate victory.

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JULY 1, 2007 13th of yr: 1Kings 19.16-21; Gal 5.1,13-18; LK 9.51-62

ELISHA LEFT THE OXEN, RAN AFTER ELIJAH. 'PLEASE, LET ME KISS MY FATHER & MOTHER GOODBYE, AND I WILL FOLLOW YOU.'

"No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God."

During the day: Don't let nostalgia for what was threaten the fulfillment of its purpose. Move on, not back. God is, & so are you. You're his, your destiny in his hands. Give him the freedom he gave you to realize it through love.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer seeks the mother in God, rests in her arms, nourishes at her breast. Prayer is the security of being hers, her being, sent out, up & away. Prayer is the inseparable bond that keeps her ever present.

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JULY 8, 14th of yr: Isa 66.10-14; Gal 6.14-18; LK 10.1-12,17-20

AS A MOTHER COMFORTS HER CHILD SO WILL I COMFORT YOU.
THE LORD'S POWER SHALL BE KNOWN TO HIS SERVANTS.

"Behold I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Cure the sick, eat what they give you, & say to them: 'The Kingdom of God is at hand for you.'"

During the day: Comfort each other. Be cured curing. Share a meal, nourish yourselves on the inner strength of truth & goodness. The kingdom of God is made up of little things--& makes the prowling wolves curious.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is the power cord to the heart of God. Kept plugged in, his power is always there. The day's first prayer gives it back to God; that's all he needs to make, 'Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done' come true.

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JULY 15, 2007 15th of yr: Dt 30.10-14; Col 1.15-20; LK 10.25-37

MOSES SAID, 'THE COMMAND I ENJOIN ON YOU TODAY IS NOT TOO MYSTERIES & REMOTE FOR YOU. NO, IT IS VERY NEAR YOU, ALREADY IN YOUR MOUTHS & IN YOUR HEARTS. YOU HAVE ONLY TO CARRY IT OUT.'

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart & all your being, all your strength & all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.' Jesus replied, 'Do this & you will live.'"

During the day: When another is in distress, be neighborly. Allow others to be neighborly when you're in distress. Neighborliness begets service, & service begets authentic charity: mutual love--which includes God, & lasts forever.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer of petition is for one's own needs, prayer of intercession for the needs of others. Both must be persevering & both must be action-oriented. We don't demand miracles, just the promised grace & strength to help ourselves & others.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

JULY 22, 2007 16th of y: Gen 18.1-10; Col 1.24-28; LK10.38-42

THE LORD APPEARED TO ABRAHAM AT THE ENTRANCE OF HIS TENT. 'SIR, LET ME BRING YOU A LITTLE FOOD THAT YOU MAY REFRESH YOURSELVES, THEN YOU MAY GO ON YOUR WAY.

"Jesus entered a village, & Martha welcomed him. 'Lord, do you not care that my sister left me to do all the serving?' 'Martha, you are busy about many things; only one is important."

During the Day: Be yourself, & allow the other to be herself-- don't gripe about apparent laziness. Be a little lazy yourself: slow down & enjoy life--enjoy God! He's all around you, giving himself in nature, in others, in success, in failure. Finding him is all that really matters. Everything else is distraction.

ABOUT PRAYER: Follow your heart. Trust it, but mark well the trail--you may have to find your way back! Distinguish clearly sentiments from emotions & appetites. Use your head as lamp of the heart, but not its judge or manipulator. Don't be afraid of making mistakes, but be humble enough to acknowledge them.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

JULY 29, 2007 17th of yr: Gen 18.20-32; Col 2.12-14; LK 11.1-13

ABRAHAM SAID, 'WILL YOU SWEEP AWAY THE INNOCENT WITH THE GUILTY? WHAT IF THERE ARE TEN INNOCENT PEOPLE THERE?'

'FOR THE SAKE OF THOSE TEN, I WILL NOT DESTROY IT.'

"Ask & you will receive; seek & you will find. If you who are wicked know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

During the day: When you need something, ask the person who can & wants to help--not one who can but doesn't want to, nor one who wants to but can't. Don't be discouraged by the first 'no'; foot in the door, keep asking--just make sure you want the right thing for the right reasons. If the 'no' is final, trust the Lord & look elsewhere.

ABOUT PRAYER: Perseverance in prayers of petition & intercession suppose the Lord can if he wants to; he tests our faith by delaying his response, counting on us to be instruments of the graces we're asking for: prayer & action go together.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

AUG 5, 2007 18th of yr: Eccl 1.2,2.21-13; Col 3.1-5,9-11; LK 12.13-21

WHAT PROFIT COMES TO A MAN FOR ALL THE TOIL & ANXIETY OF HEART WITH WHICH HE HAS LABORED UNDER THE SUN?

"Take care to guard against greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions."

During the day: Be on your guard against avarice. Stop being impressed by the other's wealth, & come to appreciate him for what he IS, not what he has. Qualities & character communicate inner security, the true measure of achievement. Grateful trust in a loving Father will be the everlasting measure of your own.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer settles us down comfortably in the Lord's presence, tunes everything else out & him in. The mind turns off & the will floats around in his, 'yes, Lord' murmured to the images & sensations that present themselves. Prayer is being just a grain of sand on the Lord's beach, enjoying the sunshine.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

AUG 12, 2007 19th of yr: Wis 18.6-9; Heb 11.1-2,18-19. LK 12. 32-48

YOUR PEOPLE AWAITED THE SALVATION OF THE JUST. THE HOLY CHILDREN OF THE GOOD PUT INTO EFFECT WITH ONE ACCORD THE DIVINE INSTITUTION.

"Your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival.

During the day: Follow your heart. But mark well the trail--you may have to find your way back if it leads you in the wrong direction. Distinguish sentiments of the heart from appetites & emotions, wholesome but blind. The head is the lamp of the heart, not its judge or manipulator. Don't be afraid of mistakes, just humble enough to acknowledge them.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer serves as lungs of the spirit. Prayerfully we breathe in God's vitality in the events of each day; then breathe out the resentment & anxiety that resist his Spirit. At times we hold each Breath that it might reach the hidden recesses of the soul. Prayer is the rhythm of renewal.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

AUG 19, 2007 20th of yr: Jer 38.4-10; Heb 12.1-4 LK 12.49-53

THE PRINCES SAID TO THE KING, 'JEREMIAH SHOULD BE PUT TO DEATH! HE IS DEMORALIZING THE PEOPLE BY SAYING SUCH THINGS TO THEM.

"Do you think I have come to establish peace? No, but rather division."

During the day: Don't let tensions boil over into conflicts. Takes two to make a crisis; if one backs off, no harm done. Truth, awaiting a better moment, isn't compromised by respectful silence. Stubborn anger-- more emotional than rational--will with time ponder firm but patient convictions. Relationship secure.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is the vanguard of truth. In prayer we consider others' attitudes from God's point of view, with open mind & heart. Prayer presupposes the vastness of truth, presumes our common quest for it, seeks it in the opinions & beliefs of others, defends without imposing our own. God does the rest.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

AUG 26, 2007 21st of yr: Isa 66.18-21; Heb 12.5-7,11-13; LK 13.22-30

I KNOW THEIR WORKS & THEIR THOUGHTS; I COME TO GATHER NATIONS OF EVERY LANGUAGE.

"Strive to enter by the narrow gate. After the master has locked the door, you will stand outside knocking. Some are last who will be first, & some are first who will be last.

During the day: Enter by the narrow gate: honest responsibility. Don't be attracted by quick-fix solutions. Doing things the hard way may mean turning up last, but better last with a job well-done than at the top of the heap with hollow prestige. Aim to please God, not others.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer knocks on the heart of Jesus & asks, 'May I come in, Lord?' The answer is always yes. But once inside, he lectures us gently but firmly on our own self-centeredness. Prayer listens with humility, & responds with generosity; neither last nor first, the niche of each secured.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

SEPT 2, 2007 22nd of yr: Sirac 3.3.17-20,28-29; Heb 12.18-24; LK 14.1,7-14.

MY SON, CONDUCT YOUR AFFAIRS WITH HUMILITY; YOU'LL BE LOVED
MORE THAN A GIVER OF GIFTS. HUMBLE YOURSELF THE GREATER
YOU ARE, & YOU WILL FIND FAVOR WITH GOD.

"When you've been invited, go sit in the lowest place. Your host will
approach you & say, 'Friend, come up higher.'"

During the day: If in your own mind you're superior to others, that's the way you'll treat them. Fact is, you're neither better nor worse than anyone else--just better or worse than yourself. Observe & listen with an open mind; you'll learn, & be the better for it.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer leads back to childhood innocence. Children don't see poverty or race or social standing--they just play together; maybe a little maliciously at times; but observant adults correct their behavior. So too with prayer: an inner sense of right & wrong ponders our choices, & God attracts to goodness.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

SEPT 9, 2007 23rd of yr: Phlm 9-17; Wis 9.13-18 LK 14.25-33

WHEN THINGS ARE IN HEAVEN, WHO CAN SEARCH THEM OUT,
UNLESS YOU HAD GIVEN WISDOM & SENT YOUR SPIRIT FROM ON HIGH?

"If anyone comes to me without turning his back on his father & mother & indeed on his very self,
he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple."

During the day: Love of family & friends is rooted in loyalty to the Kingdom of God. Only if God holds first place in our hearts will family ties & friend- ships be divinized.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is the liberating agent that frees the soul of the junk the flesh accumulates. In prayer we acknowledge the things that matter. It's prayer that enables us to see God in others, & love them for his sake rather than our own.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

SEPT 16, 2007 24th of yr: Ex 32.7-14; 1Tim 1.12-17; LK 15.1-32.

MOSES IMplored THE LORD, 'WHY SHOULD YOUR WRATH BLAZE UP
AGAINST YOUR PEOPLE WHOM YOU BROUGHT OUT WITH SUCH GREAT
POWER & A STRONG HAND?' THE LORD RELENTED.

"My son, everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate & rejoice.
Your brother was dead & has come to life, was lost & has been found."

During the day: Rejoice when the offender seeks to repair the ruptured relationship. If your grudge runs deeper than his sincerity, then it's you who are at fault & bear the greater responsibility. In the solidarity of sin, forgiveness is the only key to peace.

ABOUT PRAYER: In prayer we wrestle with God for those we love (Col 4.12); we want the dead to come back to life! God doesn't communicate grace on our schedule--his delays test our faith. Not always a peaceful plea, prayer at times cries to heaven in frustrated agony. The Lord gives & the Lord takes away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

SEPT. 23, 2007 25th of yr: Amos 8.4-7; 1Tim 2.1-8; LK 16.1-13

HEAR THIS, YOU WHO TRAMPLE THE NEEDY & DESTROY THE POOR OF THE LAND! THE LORD HAS SWORN BY THE PRIDE OF JACOB: NEVER WILL I FORGET A THING THEY HAVE DONE!

"No servant can serve two masters. You cannot give yourself to God & money."

During the day: Be trustworthy, the one others turn to for a job well done. Take little requests as seriously as big ones--serve the little people as diligently as you serve the important. God is no respecter of persons, & appreciates our likewise attitude.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is not about manipulating God, getting him to do our will; rather it's an expression of our willingness to do his. Thus positioning our will through prayer, we discern his better, & receive the strength to realize it. In persevering prayer, doubts & misgivings diminish, & prayer flows into action.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

SEPT. 30, 2007 Amos 6. 1, 4-7; 1Tim 6. 11-16; LK 16.19-31

WOE TO THE COMPLACENT OF ZION, TO THE OVERCONFIDENT ON THE MOUNT OF SAMARIA. THEIR WANTON REVELRY SHALL BE DONE AWAY WITH.

"If they will not listen to Moses & the prophets neither will they be persuaded if someone would rise from the dead."

During the day: Have fun, but always within reason & with dignity. Free spirits relish the wholesomeness of good taste; concern for the sensibilities & realities of others leaves none excluded from their revelry. Joy is contagious.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer immerses the reality of here & now in the security of eternity. Absence of prayer inflates the here & now & renders it valueless. Hopefully, a Moses will make a difference.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

October 7, 2007 27th of yr: Hab 1.2-3&2.2-4; 2Tim6-8,13-14; LK 17.5-10

HOW LONG, O LORD? I CRY FOR HELP BUT YOU DO NOT LISTEN!

THE LORD ANSWERED, 'THE RASH ONE HAS NO INTEGRITY; BUT THE JUST ONE, BECAUSE OF HIS FAITH, SHALL LIVE.'

The apostles said, "Increase our faith." "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'be uprooted & planted in the sea,' & it would obey you."

During the day : Cultivate your mustard seed. Faith is of the will, not the intellect--in fact, doubts help. Faith is trusting Someone, not believing something. Friendship is a gift, not a right; if I know the other loves me, I let him. Trusting his goodness, in spite of doubts I make his will mine, test of my integrity.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer immerses doubts & fears in childlike confidence in a parent's care. Prayer seeks not to understand, simply to embrace, to entrust oneself to the will of Another. Prayer is of the moment, secure in the love that ignores past failures & defies future dangers. Prayer is gratitude of the beloved.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

OCT 14, 28th of yr: 2Kings 5.14-17; 2Tim 2.8-13; LK 17.11-19

NAAMAN PLUNGED 7 TIMES INTO THE JORDAN

AT THE WORD OF ELISHA, MAN OF GOD.

One of them, realizing he had been healed, returned, glorifying God,
fell at the feet of Jesus & thanked him.

During the day: When a person you know is 'of God' speaks, listen. If what he/she is saying makes sense--to the gut--, do it. Faith is intuitional, both in God's spokesperson & the rest of us. Trust God, not the prophet; it's God's purpose you're fulfilling, & his the consequence.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer begins & ends with gratitude. Gratitude is both the alpha & omega of love. In prayer, our utter dependence on God is acknowledged, with wonder at the gratuitousness of all we are & have; & in prayer, we relish the beloved Lover's gratefulness for our own complete surrender.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

OCT 21, 2007 29th of yr: Exodus 17.8-13; 2Tim 3.14-4.2; LK 18.1-8

AS LONG AS MOSES KEPT HIS HANDS RAISED UP,

ISRAEL HAD THE BETTER OF THE FIGHT.

AARON & HUR SUPPORTED HIS HANDS TILL SUNSET.

"Will not God secure the rights of his chosen ones who call on him day & night?

But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

During the day: Join the chosen: depend on God day & night. Quick to offer support, be as quick to accept it--we're all in this together, Christ included; the common good our goal, his norms the rule.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is our guarantee that Christ find faith on earth: prayer at the beginning of the day, to underpin our wills with his; & pray at sunset, to look back & see what it was. Closing the gap 'tween ours & his spells victory.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

OCT 28, 2007 30th of yr: Sirach 35.12-18; 2Tim 4.6-8,16-18; LK 18.9-14

THE LORD IS A GOD OF JUSTICE WHO KNOWS NO FAVORITES. THE

PRAYER OF THE LOWLY PIERCES THE CLOUDS, NOR WITHDRAWS TILL

THE MOST HIGH RESPONDS, JUDGES JUSTLY & AFFIRMS THE RIGHT

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

During the day: Be right. Not by purely human criteria, but by a standard that requires & seeks the best for all concerned. Humble enough to request God's guidance, count on it. Make decisions with courage & fidelity to the truth as he reveals it to you. Rest secure in his Providence.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer breathes deeply & rests in the inner reality. Prayer moves in orbit around the fact of God. Existing because loved, the one at prayer trusts; possessed by Justice, prayer strengthens his resolve to be its instrument of communion with others. Prayer is the medium of harmony between those who can & those who can't.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

NOV 4, 2007 31st of yr: Wis 11.22-12.2; 2Thess 1.11-2.2; LK 19.1-10

BEFORE YOU THE WHOLE UNIVERSE IS AS A GRAIN FROM A
BALANCE, OR A DROP OF MORNING DEW. YOU OVERLOOK
THE SINS OF MEN THAT THEY MAY REPENT.

Jesus looked up & said, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.
Today salvation has come to this house, for the Son of Man has come to seek & save what was lost."

During the day: Just be a drop of morning dew--don't take yourself so seriously. You belong to Someone Else who can & does take good care of you & yours. May not seem like it at times, but trust him; it's not simple to save someone who is lost. Stop resisting.

ABOUT PRAYER:: Prayer faces down anxieties, & cuddles up in the arms of a loving FatherMother. Prayer assuages emotional insecurity with thoughts of utter dependence on a Providence that never loses control. The will embraces, & pays the price of love.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

NOV 11, 2007 32nd of yr: 2Macc 7.1-2,9-14; 2Thess 2.16-3.5; LK 20.34-38

YOU ARE DEPRIVING US OF THIS PRESENT LIFE, BUT THE KING OF THE WORLD WILL
RAISE US UP TO LIVE AGAIN FOREVER. IT IS FOR HIS LAWS THAT WE ARE DYING.

"That the dead will rise Moses made known when he called 'Lord', the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. He is not God of the dead but of the living. To him, all are alive."

During the day: Keep the law of God; respect the order he placed in creation. Death is not God's idea--he wills unending life. Death is the choice of a person who lives without God. Anyone concerned about the 'dead' areas in his daily routine & attitudes need but be more law-abiding; an invigorating sense of inner harmony confirms fulfillment.

ABOUT PRAYER: At prayer we live the after-death dimension of our true selves. Regretting disobedience, we are alive in the hereafter, here- and-now. Prayer reveals our true identify: Emmanuel, 'God is with us'; prayer nourishes the life that lasts forever.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

NOV 18, 2007 33rd of yr: Mal 3.19-20a; Thess 3.7-12; LK 21 5-19

LO, THE DAY IS COMING WHEN ALL THE PROUD & EVILDOERS WILL BE LIKE STUBBLE!

"I myself will give you a wisdom that all your adversaries will be powerless to refute. You will be hated by all because of my name. By your perseverance you will secure your lives."

During the day: Persevere. Don't give up, be it for fear or frustration, laziness or disappointment. Measure the project by its worth to God & to others, not just to you. If just for you, it's mere stubble & eventually worthless; if for others, per God's plan, it's everlasting.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is risky--it's either authentic or it's word play. If the latter, it nourishes a shallow, superficial spirituality that fails when put to the test. If the former, it deepens to a degree of generous abandon that welcomes hardship as the medium of both love & faith. No turning back.

Prayerful thoughts from the Banks of the Mighty Mississippi by Rev. Jack Vessels, SJ

NOV 25, 2007 CHRIST THE KING: 2Sam 5.1-3; Col 1.12-20; LK 25.30-43

THE LORD SAID TO YOU, 'YOU SHALL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL,
& SHALL BE COMMANDER OF ISRAEL.'

Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'

He replied, 'Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.'

During the day: Live today in paradise. Lift yourself out of your own doldrums, & look around you: there's Truth, Beauty, & Goodness everywhere! Nourish yourself on that side of reality, then roll up your sleeves & get back to work on the other. That's what you exist for.

ABOUT PRAYER: Prayer is what enables us to find the essential truth, the authentic beauty, & the lasting goodness in every person & every situation. Taking time to immerse ourselves in the living source of love at the beginning & end of each day strengthens our character as its transforming agents in our little corners of the world.