

02 January 2022—The 2nd Sunday after Christmas, Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-19a

Think of someone you love and for whom you pray. What do you pray for this person? Health, safety, happiness, financial security? Paul offers this prayer for those he loves: *I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe.* Although the Christians in Ephesus faced discrimination and persecution beyond our imagination, his prayer concerned their growth in faith, their lives in Christ. Here is the cornerstone of praying for others.

Paul asks one thing on their behalf: *a spirit of wisdom and revelation.* Faith is not a merely rational process. Our minds are finite, we know so little; we are easily distracted, muddled and forgetful. Wisdom, not mere knowledge, is essential. He asks for a two-fold spirit: *a spirit of wisdom and revelation.* In Paul's view God reveals, we receive. We receive the Truth God yearns to give us. Receiving this spirit of wisdom and revelation requires receptivity, because God's Truth is both large and small—the Truth about God and the truth about ourselves. It is eternal, cosmic Truth, and it is the truth of how we are to live in and for Christ each day. This requires that we be inquisitive, self-aware, and teachable. As this *spirit of wisdom and revelation* is received specific results follow.

First Paul mentions, *so that the eyes of your heart* (may be) *enlightened...* 'Heart' refers to the center of our being from which all emotions, thoughts, actions, and words spring. In receiving God's revelation, the core of one's life is changed and made 'holy'. How important this is! We often assume that if we just get ourselves together, we will then be better Christians. This is a rabbit hole: God changes us; we offer ourselves and cooperate with God's sanctifying spirit. We do not change, then receive God; we receive God's wisdom and revelation and are thereby changed.

Next, receiving God's wisdom and revelation results in knowing *what is the hope to which he has called you.* This is not hope as wishful thinking. From our Prayer Book Catechism: "The Christian hope is to live with confidence in newness and fullness of life, and to await the coming of Christ in glory, and the completion of God's purpose for the world" (pg. 861). Christian hope is about the future *and* living now with "confidence in newness and fullness of life." As we receive the spirit of wisdom and revelation, we confidently live God's promises coming true in us and in creation—even if outward appearances indicate otherwise. This does not mean Christians are blind to or immune from tragedy. Rather, we have trust in One who is greater than the events of the moment, greater than the hurts done to us and in the world.

The next gift is *the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints.* This curious phrase—the *riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints*—refers to the Church. For Paul, the Church is both ideal and reality; the Church is the assembly of those living with hopeful confidence now, and is also the first fruits, the dawning of the coming kingdom. While our eyes look to heavenly realities, our hands and feet are doing God's will in the world. For early Christians, the Church was a movement defining one's life in every aspect. Significantly, Paul clearly states this *glorious inheritance* is *among the saints.* We are called into community. One's words, thoughts, and actions in the community of faith indicate one's progress in receiving this *glorious inheritance.*

Now Paul reminds us of *the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe.* God promises immeasurably great power working in and through us. The antidote for what holds us back is desire: our hearts' desire to receive from God, to serve God, to live the promises of God so that in and through us God is glorified, and many are saved. Our desire is to be of maximum service to God and those around us.

May the eyes of our hearts be enlightened with God's wisdom and revelation, so that we may know the hope to which he has called us, the riches of the glorious inheritance among the saints, and the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, now and for ever. Amen.