

## Shall we pray for world peace?

**Question:** *When I pray for world peace, what exactly am I praying for? There won't be peace until the New Heaven and New Earth become reality. The clockwork of the world is going to run its course as foretold in the Bible. How does prayer fit in? Truly perplexed.*

**Answer:** Yours is a very challenging question. I would approach the answer this way.

First, let us separate the Eternal Peace of the fulfilled Kingdom of God from the relative and historical peace from which we benefit day by day.

We pray most usually for *relative* peace, meaning the temporal well being of the world, the nation, the city and the community. Paul urges Christians to pray for rulers, kings and all in authority that we may live "quiet and peaceful lives in godliness" (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

We know that all peace between nations is relative and temporary. Jesus already told us there will be "...wars and rumors of wars..." "Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom" (Mark 13:7-8).

War marks a world under the power of human sin. No sin, no war. With sin, war will happen now and then here and there. After a period of relative peace, the human being is so constituted that the will to power will emerge again. The conflicts of national and ethnic interests will collide producing a spiral of hostilities often (but not always) culminating in the extreme of the continuum of conflict: war. It is always our prayer that we can solve international quarrels and domestic conflicts without violence erupting into the horrors and insanity of all-out war.

However, the peace for which we pray most often is for the *relative* and *temporary* cessation of hostilities and the just governance of the nation and the city. Such peace is fragile. It is easily disrupted. However, we pray for justice and wisdom, honesty, domestic tranquility, transparency, and care for the weakest and most vulnerable members of society. Our prayers may make a difference in the consciousness of the leaders of the city and the nation, and possibly on a global scale.

What we pray for *moves us to towards the fulfillment of the prayer in our own lives*. As children of God we pray, and by so doing we bear witness to a higher power, the ONE who wills the peace and well being of all people.

Certainly prayers were answered in the defeat of the Axis powers by the Allied forces in 1945. God answered many prayers when the Khmer Rouge were defeated and Cambodia liberated from Pol Pot's Killing fields. Prayers prevailed in the ending of the genocide in Rwanda. God answered prayer when the Alliance routed the Taliban from its tyrannical rule over Afghanistan. It remains for us to see how the tides will turn in the present war in Iraq.

We cannot always see the immediate cause and effect of our prayers in the perceived historical circumstances. Many of our prayers may go unanswered (at least to our perception) when a nation descends into the insanity of war. God offers avenues of peace but we humans can obstinately refuse. We are often determined to destroy one another. God allows war as a punishment upon all.

Israel interpreted their wars and especially their defeats, not as signs of God's ineptness, but as God's temporary abandonment of their nation as a form of judgment. Abraham Lincoln, the 16<sup>th</sup> President of the United States interpreted the American Civil War as a just judgment for the hypocrisy, injustice and arrogance on both sides of the conflict. Certainly, there were many prayers offered to avert that war, but the recalcitrant South and the evils of slavery brought on a period of God's judgment. The Civil War destroyed many lives and left the land devastated. After that, God gave a chastened nation a relative and temporary peace.

Prayer matters. However, prayer is no guarantee that everything will be sweetness and light. In our prayers, we announce God's first desire: the benevolent will of God to give peace. But we also know that God allows revolt and violence to spread, should a people or a nation choose to pursue unjust gain, exploitation of the weak, corrupt courts of justice, violent acquisition of property, mistreatment of the poor, exploitation of aliens and practice bribery and graft. God may mercifully offer a season of patience to allow for mass repentance. Nevertheless, the day and time may finally come when God says "No more" and the die is cast. The only path then is through the crucible of national suffering. Once that time of repentance has passed, God withdraws the protective shield and lets sin have its sway. Judgment must take its course. At such a point in ancient biblical history, God told Jeremiah, *"Then the LORD said to me, "Do not pray for the well-being of this people. Although they fast, I will not listen to their cry; though they offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Instead, I will destroy them with the sword, famine and plague."* (Jeremiah 14:11-12)

We also pray for the Eternal peace of the fulfilled Kingdom of God. Every time we say together the Lord's Prayer, "Your Kingdom come; Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" we witness to the final consummation which we can only now anticipate in hope.

Both prayers are wholesome. Both prayers should occupy our minds and hearts when we gather as community of faith.