

## *CRIBBS NOTES – July 29, 2007*

A group of us stood on the steps of the Federal Building in San Diego and prayed our various prayers. We came together as Christians (Protestants, Catholics, and Mormons); Jews (Conservative and Reformed), Sikhs, Muslims, Buddhists, Baha'i, Scientologists, and individuals with loose religious affiliations. We came speaking in English, Hebrew, Arabic, Spanish, and Japanese. Some of us resided in urban areas, others lived in suburbs, and a few were from rural communities. We were rich, modest, and poor. White people with Black folk; Mexicans with Nicaraguans; Islanders with Mainlanders; Asians and Europeans all gathered together. There we formed a circle and we prayed. Each of us prayed out of our own tradition and in our first language. We stood in Public Square and prayed aloud.

Immediately, as the voices began to rise, we listened to the prayers of each other. We spoke our words in conversation with God. We prayed and we listened. Then, we discovered the wondrous glee of public liturgy. As each person said the words that formed a human-divine connection, we realized all of us had the same prayer.

The prayer of the Sikh was the prayer of the Baptist. The prayer of the Mormon was the prayer of the Buddhist. The prayer of the Muslim was the prayer of the Jew. The prayers of others were the prayers of us all.

I believe in the power of prayer. It makes the difference we may not have expected, and definitely could not achieve void of its utterance.

Following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, a singular invocation went up across the United States. It slipped through the lips of baseball fans in crowded stadiums and appeared on bumper stickers of tractors, tow trucks and automobiles. "God bless America," became a chant and mantra in hovels and mansions. It became a refrain for every occasion. The prayer that swept the nation by storm took on political overtones as it expressed a desire for divine intervention exclusively reserved for us.

Those three words increasingly troubled my soul. They provoked a sense of narrow arrogance that dismissed the broader scope of suffering around the world. We who had more than most people and who believed this government is the greatest in the world, dared to pray for God to act and give us even more. More than being disturbed by such a dangerous incantation, I worried how God might respond.

"Be careful what you pray for," my parents often warned us as children, "because you just might get it."

Praying is an act that ties us to God and people of faith in every land throughout all times. It is a precious gift that erases distinctions and bridges divisions. As we pray, cosmic events are set into motion. Changes occur. We are transformed.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray with intimate expressions to God. He instructed them to recognize God as their Divine Parent. He told them to pray for the whole people of God and not just for themselves. Prayer is an act of faith. It propels us into a dimension without measure. The Apostle Paul encourages us "to pray without ceasing; in season and out."

In times like these we need to pray. We need to make time to pray together. Instead of fretting about the absence of prayer in schools, we would do well to

institutionalize prayer in our homes, Bible study, and every time we gather. And, yes, each of us is given voice and authority to pray publicly or privately.

When we pray, it is helpful to confess our failings, offer forgiveness to others, and seek God's mercy. That would expose the three words so prominent in American life for what they really are: a human provocation that tempts the wrath of God.