

How many times in your life do you suppose someone has asked you to pray for them? Many, many times, I'm sure. It's a privilege to be asked. To pray for someone is the greatest thing we can do for a person. Have you ever been told not to pray for someone? For whatever reason, they did not want your prayers?

This is Jesus in Gethsemane. He leaves Peter, James, and John, and tells them: "*Watch and pray.*" He is not forbidding them from praying for Him, yet He is clear that they are to pray for themselves, rather than for Him.

But if anyone was ever in need of prayer, it's Jesus here in Gethsemane. He is "*greatly troubled and distressed,*" it says. He tells Peter, James, and John, "*My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.*" If someone said those words to you, would you simply give them a pat on the back and say, "Take care...see ya!" You would pray for them, wouldn't you? Maybe right then and there.

But Jesus goes on a little further, falls on the ground, and He begins to pray. And He prays all by Himself. No one prays with Him, or for Him. No one.

Peter, James, and John aren't even praying. They are sound asleep. I know, it's easy to fall asleep when praying, especially when you're tired. But when you are, point blank, told to watch and pray, shouldn't you try a little harder to stay awake?

Jesus is just as tired, even more so. He is exhausted in every way imaginable. But He prays. For an hour He prays. Three times He does this. He prays to His Father, and He prays all by Himself.

That has never been true of you. You have never been alone in your prayers. There is always someone praying both with you, and for you. Always. Within Jesus' Church, the members of His body pray with and for each other.

But Jesus in Gethsemane is all alone. And this is actually how it must be. His disciples have been with Him up to now. But here in Gethsemane, His agony begins. He prays to His Father, and yet it is here that Jesus begins to suffer His Father's wrath. This is why He is so distressed. Not just because He knows what is coming. Here in Gethsemane, Jesus is already feeling it.

And He must face this agony alone. James and John said they could drink the cup Jesus had to drink. No, they couldn't. They can't even stay awake to watch and pray. Jesus prays alone. He faces His accusers alone. He suffers alone. And He dies alone. Because Jesus, alone, is our Savior. Jesus did everything for you by Himself so that you would not be alone by yourself.

"Watch and pray" are the words He gives to His disciples. These are not singular verbs. They are plural verbs in the Greek. Jesus wants none of His disciples to watch and pray alone. We are to watch and pray together with each other.

It is Satan who wants us alone by ourselves. He is the one who separates the disciples of Jesus from each other. When Judas goes off by himself, Satan has him. When Peter is by himself in the courtyard, Satan is there, and Peter denies Jesus three times, falling headlong into sin.

The devil has his greatest success when he can separate a Christian from the body of believers, from those who faithfully gather together with Jesus in the Divine Service.

During one exorcism, a demon was quoted describing hell in the following way: “Everyone lives folded within himself and torn apart by his regrets. There is no relationship with anyone, and everyone finds himself in the most profound solitude.”

Heaven is the opposite of this, where believers are together with each other, and with their Lord. The gathering together of Christians here on earth, therefore, anticipates our togetherness in heaven. But the isolation and separation here is a sad and tragic foretaste of what is coming to those who refuse to be joined together with the body of Christ. Oh, how we need, therefore, to pray for them!

When Jesus entered Gethsemane, He knew He would have to endure everything all alone. He was already, then, feeling the foretaste of hell – the isolation and separation. On the cross, Jesus was thrown headfirst into hell, His own Father forsaking Him, abandoning Him. In profound solitude Jesus suffered and died.

My friend, He did this for you, and for your loved ones, so that you will never know that isolation. Jesus knows that you and I fail to watch and pray as we should. He sees the evil one attempting to separate us from the gathering of the faithful. He died to shed His blood for you in this, to forgive you of it, and to keep you together with Him and with your fellow believers.

By himself, Peter fell deep into sin. But Jesus, later, restored Peter and forgave him. And He returned Peter to his place within the fellowship of believers.

You, too, have fallen headlong into sin, as have I. Do not retreat into isolation because of this. We are all sinners here. And we need each other just as we need Jesus. He forgives you. Each one of you He forgives. And He continues to tell you to watch and pray, not alone, but together. The evil one has no chance when you watch and pray together with each other and with your Lord. Amen.