Prayer for the people

O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that we may know and understand what things we ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them;

Please keep all of those who we raise in prayer to you today both outload and those that we keep silently in our hearts. May your will be done, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Offertory prayer

Gracious God, as we bring our offerings before you in this Pentecost season, we acknowledge the gift of your grace, freely given and yet calling us to respond. Help us not to accept your grace in vain, but to let it bear fruit in our lives and in our communities. May our actions reflect the transforming power of your grace as we open our hearts to love, to vulnerability, and to relationship, trusting in the abundance of your grace to guide us each and every day. Amen.

Stay with Jesus

Sympathy vs Empathy. Sympathy is where we acknowledge someone’s pain or affliction and empathy is where we make an effort to feel the pain and situation of the other person.

As we read the old testament, we read the story about David and Goliath. The Israelites were about to be slaves to the Philistines, all was looking pretty grim for the Israelites and nothing but dark days ahead. Then along comes this small shepherd named David, not known but to those locally and definitely not a soldier. Seeing the despair ahead for the Israelites, he volunteered to go up against Goliath. They suited him up in the best armor they could muster and to no avail, as David states he could not move in that stuff, so he took it off. Then David approached Goliath with nothing but a sling and 5 rounds stones. What Goliath did not realize was the accuracy that David had with the stones, as he had a lot of practice fending off lion and bear from the sheep using his slingshot skills. So the first stone dropped Goliath to the ground.

In the gospel message today, we read about the disciples boat trip across the sea with Jesus when a wind storm approaches and tosses the boat about.  
Scared to death, all of the disciples were sure this was going to be their demise and that they would perish even with Jesus on the boat. But when they awakened Jesus, he stood up and calmed the winds and sea but all the disciples could say was, where were you Jesus. The reply from Jesus, I was right here, I am always here.  
There is the story of Daniel in the lions’ den, were the people who did not like Daniel, tricked King Darius into passing a 30-day decree that said anyone who prayed to another god or man other than the king would be thrown into the lions' den. Daniel being a devote man of God, daily prayed to God out his window and the people who tricked King Darius knew that, and made sure that Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den. And of course we know that Daniel escaped the lions’ den unscathed and the King praised the God of Daniel. Again, the Israelites had to be thinking that this is the end for Daniel and nothing good would come out of this situation.

Then there is the story of Joseph son of Jacob being sold into slavery. Why? Because his brothers were jealous of him receiving special recognition from their father Jacob as he gave him a coat of many colors. They were originally going to kill him but decided that they would sell him into slavery and then rip the coat up and put goats’ blood on it, take it home and tell Jacob that Joseph had been killed by a fierce animal. Doing all of this because they were jealous no matter how it affected their father. Of course we know the ending that Joseph is made second in command to the Pharoh in Egypt and Jacob is reunited with his son. But again, how Joseph must have felt, abandoned, alone, forgotten, but God does answer in his time and Joseph never gave up.  
Then there is Moses taking his people to a location in the Red Sea where there was no escape as Pharoh’s army of chariots was bearing down on them, they were trapped and ready to be eliminated by Pharoh’s army. But the God of Moses provided a strong wind that separated the sea and allowed the Israelites to walk on dry ground and escape their demise. At the same time crushing the army of Pharoh after they had crossed the sea.

There are many, many stories/parables in the bible that teach us a lesson on patience and to have faith in the Lord. Sometimes it is not in the timeframe we would like, but the God will fulfill his plan in his time.

So it is today, as we look at the political landscape around us, no one is talking about unification, instead it is about how they are bad and we are good. Shun them because they do not think like us. Why can’t we have differences of opinions and still respect each other and each other’s ideas. We have people professing that we are destroying the earth and if we do not act today, all is lost. If you look at the stuff people were saying back in the mid 80s, you would think they were talking about the events of today. Times change, but do they. We have wars around the globe that seem to be getting worse and worse and do not have a good end in sight. Sometimes it seems like things are out of control and what can I do, we do? Then to bring it closer to home, there is a person by the name of Ryan Corbett of Dansville NY, who has been captive in Afghanistan for over 22 months with no sign of him returning alive. He is allowed to go outside once a month and his body is failing him. The family keeps praying and urging our government representatives to pressure the Taliban to release Ryan and other captives, but currently to no avail. Put yourself in the place of Ryan’s wife and two children (empathy) and try to understand (even though we never fully understand other people’s feelings in situations) so we can have a closer connection to God when we pray. There are times when you first meet someone and they give you a bad impression, never let that be a reason not to pray for them because you never know what they are going through at that moment or time. Never stop praying. So many times we only pray when things are darkest, but we need to make the effort to pray for not only the bad things we see, but the good things that God gives to us each and every day. Remember, God is in control, whether or not we see it. If we use empathy and put ourselves in the place of the people we are praying for, you will find it brings you closer to what it means to really Pray for someone instead of just saying the words. Paul tells us that we should not pray in vain or have empty prayers. The saying, say what you mean and mean what you say, can also be translated to, pray what you mean and mean what you pray. Stay with Jesus, because he has our backs. Amen