There is an old Baptist hymn called “Jesus on the mainline” that admittedly I only know about because it was in the film “Forest Gump,” one of my favorites, when Forest is singing in a Baptist church. And while we use many a Protestant hymn in the Catholic Church such as “Amazing Grace,” that one hasn’t quite made the rotation in the nearly 20 years I’ve been a priest.

Nonetheless, if you want a nice theology of prayer, the hymn checks a lot of boxes; as we are invited to call Jesus up if we want our body healed, our soul revived - all we need do is to call up the Good Lord.

Prayer. It’s what plugs us into God - and it’s where we open our souls to God. I remember the first prayer I learned was the Lord’s Prayer; I’d pray that before going to bed each night with my dad. But from an early age what I also learned was prayer was a whole lot more than words - it was about a relationship. For instance, I remember my dad having a tattered paperback Bible he got from Saint Lawrence Church, where he had gone through RCIA right after he got married to my mom, and he’d read that each night. There was the well-worn prayer book my grandpa Henry had that my mom had gotten him when she was growing up in the 1960s and he’d pray faithfully each morning and evening. And my Godmother Gen gave me her collection of prayer books too

when I was a child that she had used, all with a lot of miles on them. And as I got to know these people in my life, what I could see was prayer was always a part of how they lived and made such a big difference in their lives.

The saints show us this too in that they turn to God over and over again, but would teach us that prayer takes many forms.

For instance, though not canonized (yet), there was Nicholas Herman, who would become a monk, Brother Lawrence. He lived during the early 19th century. From a poor farming family, he spent his days as a cook for the Discalced Carmelites in Paris. One cold winter day, while carefully observing a desolate tree deprived of its leaves and fruit, he imagined it waiting soundlessly and patiently for the hopeful return of summer's bounty. In that seemingly lifeless tree, Herman saw himself. All at once, he glimpsed for the first time the magnitude of God's grace, the faithfulness of his love, the perfection of his sovereignty, and the dependability of his providence.

On the face of it, like the tree, Herman felt like he was dead. But suddenly, he understood that the Lord had seasons of life awaiting him in the future. At that moment, Herman's soul experienced "the fact of God," and a love for God that would burn bright for the rest of his days.

Eventually, Herman retired from the army after suffering an injury. His spiritual journey led him to the Discalced Carmelite monastery in Paris, where, upon entering, he adopted the name Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection.

Lawrence lived out the remainder of his days in the monastery. Rather than seek advancement or a higher calling, Lawrence chose to retain his humble status as a lay brother, serving for 30 years in the monastery kitchen as a cook. Lawrence cultivated a simple way of communing with God in his everyday duties of cooking, cleaning pots and pans, and whatever else he was called upon to do, which he termed "practicing the presence of God." Everything he did, whether it was spiritual devotions, church worship, running errands, counseling and listening to people, no matter how mundane or tedious, Lawrence saw it as a way of expressing God’s love. Instead of treating prayer as something that happened only at designated times, he practiced turning his attention toward God throughout the day.

While cooking, he could offer his work to God. While cleaning, he could remember God's nearness. When distracted, he could simply return his attention to him.

Then there was Saint Therese of Lisieux, who saw prayer as a loving relationship with God; living quietly in a convent doing ordinary tasks and often battling illness, she describes prayer as a movement of the heart toward God — a loving gaze, a cry of gratitude, or even a wordless longing.

She believed holiness could be found in small acts of love: patiently bearing an irritation, helping someone without being noticed, or offering a difficult moment to God.

And there was Saint Augustine, who famously said my heart is restless until it rests in you, recognizing that prayer is coming home to God for whom we are made.

This great feast of All Saints, we ponder our hope to come home to God - and our lives our meant to bring us into a deeper relationship with God so that His love flows through us as people of hope in the world.

This day we think about the countless men and women who have followed Christ faithfully and now share fully in the glory of heaven, but with that we also think about how we will follow them there. Last week, we began our stewardship conversation by talking about "seeing."

Our first reading gives us a beautiful vision: a great multitude… from every nation, race, people, and tongue" standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They are clothed in white, holding palm branches, and they cry out, Salvation comes from our God."

This is not simply a picture of a distant reality. It is a glimpse of our destiny. God created us for holiness. He created us to belong to Him, to become more like Christ, and ultimately to see Him face to face.

Our second reading reminds us of this promise: We are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

The saints are witnesses that this promise is real. They were not all extraordinary according to the standards of the world. Some were famous; many were hidden, like Brother Lawrence in the monastery cooking for 30 years. Some were martyrs; others lived quiet lives of service. Some were religious, some were parents, workers, teachers, farmers, and neighbors. What united them was not a perfect life without struggle. What united them was a heart continually turned toward God.

That brings us to the Gospel and to the theme of stewardship—especially stewardship of prayer.

We often speak of stewardship in terms of time, talent, and treasure. We recognize that everything we have is a gift from God, and we are called to use those gifts generously. But before we can faithfully offer our time, talents, or possessions, we must first offer God our hearts. Prayer is how we place our lives in God's hands.

Prayer is not merely one activity among many. It is the foundation of Christian stewardship. In prayer, we remember that our lives do not belong entirely to us. Our time is a gift. Our abilities are gifts. Our relationships and possessions are gifts. Prayer teaches us to receive these gifts with gratitude and to return them to God through loving service.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus shows us what a life rooted in God looks like:

Blessed are the poor in spirit… Blessed are they who mourn… Blessed are the meek… Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness… Blessed are the merciful… Blessed are the clean of heart… Blessed are the peacemakers." If the 10 Commandments are the basics, the Beatitudes are how we take our faith to the next level.

These teachings are not simply ideals to admire. They are a way of life that grows through prayer. Prayer forms us to become poor in spirit—to recognize that we need God. Prayer gives us compassion for those who mourn. Prayer teaches us meekness, mercy, purity of heart, and a hunger for righteousness.

Without prayer, the Beatitudes can seem impossible. With prayer, they become the work of God's grace within us; this is the wisdom of Brother Lawrence and The Little Flower, who connected more deeply to God, but recognized that our actions - often ordinary - can glorify Him.

Prayer also changes how we understand our burdens. In the Alleluia, Jesus says, Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." Jesus does not promise that faithful people will never suffer. The saints knew suffering very well. But they discovered that no burden has to be carried alone.

To pray is to bring our burdens to Christ. It is to say, Lord, I cannot do this by myself. I need your strength, your wisdom, your mercy, and your peace." Prayers do not always remove the difficulty, but it changes us within the difficulty. It allows Christ to carry what we cannot carry and to transform our trials into opportunities for trust and love.

The saints became saints through this daily surrender. They prayed not only when life was easy, but especially when it was difficult. They prayed in joy and in sorrow, in success and in failure, in clarity and in uncertainty. Their prayer was not always filled with beautiful words. Sometimes it was simply a cry: Lord, help me." Sometimes it was silence. Sometimes it was the faithful decision to attend Mass, kneel before the Blessed Sacrament, pray the Rosary, read Scripture, or offer the day to God.

That is the stewardship of prayer: making a generous gift of our time and attention to God. It means setting aside time each day to listen, to give thanks, to ask forgiveness, and to intercede for others. It means praying for our families, our parish, our nation, the suffering, the forgotten, and those who have no one else to pray for them. **Right here in our own parish, we have the beautiful opportunity to offer that time before the Blessed Sacrament during our scheduled Adoration. Whether you can stop in for just a few minutes, or commit to a longer time of quiet, know that those moments before our Lord are never time lost—they are the very heart of your stewardship. (As a reminder, we have that the First Friday of each month and will soon have a chapel where we hope to have it more often, but**

where you will be able to also have some time with the Lord as we will have a Tabernacle in there and a more intimate prayer space).

The saints remind us too that prayer is never wasted. A prayer offered in secret may strengthen a family. A prayer for forgiveness may heal a relationship. A prayer for someone who is suffering may become a channel of God's grace. A parish that prays becomes a living sign of God's presence in the world.

Today, as we honor all the saints, we should also remember that we are called to join them. Heaven is not reserved for a select few. It is the home God desires for every one of His children. The path begins here, in the ordinary circumstances of our lives, as we allow prayer to shape our choices and our relationships.

Let us ask the saints to pray for us—that we may become faithful stewards of prayer, generous with our time before God, attentive to His voice, and willing to serve wherever He calls us. **I encourage you to look at the bulletin or our parish website to see the times we gather for daily Mass or Confession, finding the rhythm of prayer that fits your life. Let us make our church not just a place we visit, but a home where we consistently come to rest in Him.**

Lastly, never forget when we pray - use what works. In my life, I like formal prayers like the Liturgy of the Hours. I also like the Rosary. There is the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. There is also silence and meditation. And of course, the Mass - the perfect prayer - which we again now have on Wednesdays at 5:15 along with Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays at 8:30 in addition to our weekend schedule. I've had such powerful feelings of God from gazing on the mountains to sitting in front of the Blessed Sacrament where I'd go often late at night in the seminary, to just sitting next to Emmett with my Breviary (Liturgy of the Hours) - there are many ways we plug into God. The important thing is to get God on the mainline and to indeed tell Him what you want - because He listens and loves us more than we can ever imagine.

May our prayer lead us to holiness, our holiness lead us to love, and our love lead us at last to that great multitude standing before the throne and the Lamb.