

The Reading of the Prayers

Rev. Peter R. Hook, State Chaplain

As Department Chaplain, one of the main things that I am called upon to do at almost every event I attend is to offer a prayer. As a Post and District Chaplain, there are at least three prayers that are part of every meeting. The first prayer takes place at the opening of the meeting. The second is a prayer for our National Home, and the third one is the prayer that is part of our closing ceremony.

In addition, the Chaplain will have a prayer when a Post takes in a new member during the initiation ceremony. And, of course, when Memorial Services are held on behalf of departed comrades, prayers are offered. These are just a few of the many times the Chaplain will be called upon to lead in prayer.

All individuals in every culture have an awareness that there is something called prayer. And, almost everyone has observed someone praying at some time. The disciples of Jesus became aware of prayer by observing Him praying. One of the Gospel writers records this fact when he states, "And it came about that while He was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray.'" (Luke 11:1).

And, most people have uttered a prayer sometime during their lifetime. Many of the prayers offered on an individual basis are what some call "prayers from the heart." They are simply a spontaneous communication offered by an individual and directed to a supreme being. One writer says that *prayer, essentially, is the expression of the human heart in conversation with God. It is intimate dialogue with the Creator.* Souter, John C., Personal Prayer Notebook . Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. p.9.

While some prayers are spontaneous communications, others are written down and read. The prayers found in the VFW Ritual fall into this second category. When a Chaplain reads a prayer publically, it should not only be his/her personal prayer, but it is a collective prayer offered to God on behalf of everyone present. In essence, it is "our" collective prayer offered by one person, and if done well, everyone will mentally participate in the prayer. When a person reads a book, the author attempts to get into the head of the reader. And, when a Chaplain reads a prayer he should do it in such a way that the persons listening mentally follow along.

An effective oral reading of the prayers, will not only get others involved in the prayer, but can greatly contribute to an audiences understanding and appreciation of the ritual. In light of this, here are some tips to improve the reading of your prayers.

- Speak slower than normal and speak clearly. You may think you are speaking too slowly, when really you appear to be speaking thoughtfully and meaningfully. Unlike printed stories, those listening can't ask you to stop and repeat yourself. You need to speak slowly enough that they can understand you. Obviously, don't overdo it!

- Speak naturally, but remember, it is your responsibility to be heard and understood. Many readings simply aren't loud enough.
- Enunciate. Don't read the words in a garbled or low-toned voice. Droning or speaking in a monotone, sends a signal to the brain of the listener that this is simply a sound without information and thus not important or meaningful.
- Hold your prayer at eye level and do not look down. You are reading your prayer to the people, not the book or the table.
- Observe thought and sentence units. Remember, punctuation marks are there for a reason. A period means pause and count to two. A comma means pause and count to one.

Practice. Read your prayer several times out loud. Finally, remember that when words are spoken, the meaning is not in the words alone, but in the emphasis, the phrasing, and the expression given to those words.