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Prayers Under Fire

From Bad To Worse

The current political kerfuffle now is not the actual shooting at a Minneapolis Catholic church which killed two children and injured 17 others, it is over the seemingly innocuous calls for thoughts and prayers while the horrific incident unfolds. The attack happened on August 27th and it sent shockwaves through the news cycle with many from all political persuasions decrying it and even agreeing that the best thing anyone can do is ask God to help. However, the firestorm is now about those prayers. And it really shouldn't be. Here is just a sampling from the politicians who obviously got the talking points down [starting](#) with a former White House press secretary: *The phrase, frequently used in the aftermath of violence or [tragedy](#) in America, is increasingly seen as insufficient by some gun violence prevention advocates.*

Jen Psaki, a host on MSNBC and former Biden White House press secretary, expressed her frustration on the social media platform X, stating, "Prayer is not freaking enough. Prayers do not make parents feel safe sending their kids to school. Prayer does not bring these kids back. Enough with the thoughts and prayers."

Then we [hear](#) from a presidential wannabe Governor Gavin Newsom:

[Gov. Gavin Newsom](#), D-Calif., disputed the effectiveness of prayers after the Minnesota Catholic school shooting on Thursday, saying students were "literally praying" when they came under attack ... "These children were literally praying as they got shot at," Newsom wrote.

And the mayor of Minneapolis, Jacob Frey, trying to sound presidential himself got into the fray by [saying](#) this:

"Don't just say this is about thoughts and prayers right now, these kids were literally praying," the distraught mayor added. "It was the first week of school, they were in a church."

A few more politicians added their opinions as well:

"I'm tired of being told this is normal — and you should be too," Rep. Brittany Pettersen, D-Colorado, said [in a post on X](#). "Thoughts and prayers aren't going to do anything to fix this." Rep. Maxwell Frost, co-chair of the House Democratic Policy and Communications Committee, echoed that sentiment, [stating on X](#) that "these children were probably praying when they were shot to death at Catholic school."

"Don't give us your [expletive] thoughts and prayers," Frost added.

The implication is that prayers are an ineffective way to deal with the violence done. Of course they are all pushing for more gun control measures as the best way to stop something like this from happening again. The back and forth in the public discourse is yet another sign of our digital age and the efficacy of prayer is the soup DuJour right now. And that might turn out to be a good thing.

The Other Side

Fortunately those who understand the power of prayer are [speaking](#) out as well:

In response to Psaki's comments, [Franciscan University explained through its X account](#) that "prayer is not an escape from reality" but is rather "the very place we meet Christ, who himself was unjustly slain."

"We will continue to pray, not because we are passive, but because we know only God can bring true justice, healing, and peace," the university added. "Evil wants us to stop praying and to despair. We will not. We cling to Christ, who has conquered death."

The university president added these comments:

University President Father Dave Pivonka, TOR, told CNA: "It makes sense that Catholics would come together and pray given that [the shooting] took place at a Catholic church." He added: "One of the things that Catholics do is we pray."

The insinuation of anti-prayer rhetoric, Pivonka said, is that "prayer isn't doing something." He rejected that notion, saying "prayer has a great impact." In the midst of tragedy, he noted that many people are looking to help and offering prayers for "the Lord's peace to be with them [and] the Lord's presence to be with them" is a "beautiful way to do that."

More public figures wanted to make it clear that they also want to take actions, but prayer is one of them, starting with Pivonka:

Pivonka said he also prays for public officials, "that God would give them courage, that God would give them wisdom" to address political issues. He said Catholics should also engage society, the culture, and the political world.

He noted that Minnesota's Catholic bishops [had been asking state lawmakers](#) to provide funds for security, which was ultimately not given. He said: "That's a very active thing that they were trying to do."

"Yes, we're praying, but yes we're doing actions to try to bring about this change," Pivonka said.

Another Catholic leader wants people to know that Christians are putting legs to their prayers: *Bishop Michael Burbidge of the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia, wrote in [an op-ed for the National Catholic Register](#), CNA's sister news partner, that his diocese established a Mental Health Council to provide "guidance, responses, and resources to support those experiencing mental health issues as well as to their family members."*

He noted that Catholics can do "certainly, more than one thing," such as security, mental health resources, engagement with public officials, and acts of charity and compassion.

"Above all, we can and must pray with daily fervency, calling out to the Lord, striving to remain close to him, and asking him to grant us all the peace only he can give," Burbidge wrote.

Exactly What Is Needed

A Catholic bishop also spoke out what should be obvious to the true faith community:

Bishop Robert Barron of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota, [told Fox News Digital](#) that "prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God, which strikes me as altogether appropriate precisely at times of great pain."

"Prayer by no means stands in contrast to decisive moral action," he said. "... This is not an either/or proposition."

Bingo. And the US Vice President added a key component of prayer that seems to be altogether lost in all the other talking points:

Vice President JD Vance, who is Catholic, also joined the conversation, [posting on X](#) in response to Psaki that any criticism of prayer is “bizarre.”

“We pray because our hearts are broken,” he wrote. “We pray because we know God listens. We pray because we know that God works in mysterious ways and can inspire us to further action. Why do you feel the need to attack other people for praying when kids were just killed praying?”

Vance knows very well that prayer is not a trite religious response to tragedy. He, like billions of other believers, understands that prayer isn’t a one way street when he boldly declares that God listens, He hears us and then He answers us giving us ways to act going further than mere words. In the book of **James** we’re told this:

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. ([James 2:26, NKJV](#))

In my opinion to have all these politicians using the same sentiments criticizing prayer as just a silly trope that doesn’t do anything and in fact does harm because people feel they are helping when they are clearly not is not an accident. It was a manufactured and pushed line of attack by political operatives who clearly want gun control and somehow felt that it would resonate in the zeitgeist. It instead brought attention to the true value and power of prayer which is a very good thing. Clearly these political pundits and planners underestimated those of us who not only know their Bibles but have an intimate relationship with its Author. This is a perfect opportunity for us to storm social media and educate the intellectually honest among us about the true power of prayer. I like this [quote](#) from noted Bible writer E. M. Bounds:

God shapes the world by prayer. The more praying there is in the world the better the world will be, the mightier the forces against evil.

Now that is the power of prayer.