

A Prayer On Lincoln's Birthday

Dear God of our Christian forefathers, the unseen yet all-powerful Creator of our Union and the Director of its destiny:

On this day, in memory of Abraham Lincoln's birth, we praise you for your past providence which has raised up for our land leaders with the honesty, leadership, and farsighted wisdom of Lincoln.

In this day of political folly and fanaticism, of hate and corruption, raise up for us men like Lincoln who would work solely for the good of our citizens: to protect the law-abiding, and to punish the law-breakers.

To that end, endow our elected representatives with ample wisdom to govern by transforming their minds through your biblical law and gospel passages, so that with your divine help they may aspire to act morally and unselfishly in the position entrusted to them!

Thank you for all of your past, national mercies!

Forgive us of all our present, national sins and of our national ingratitude toward you!

We pray this prayer with confidence and conviction, heavenly Father, because we pray it according to your stated will, assured by your express promise, and

in the blessed name of our divine Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, hear us! Remember your pledges to help! Act on them! Amen!

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Lincoln Quotes

In his first, inaugural address Lincoln correctly advised, "Intelligence, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him... are still competent to adjust, in the best way, all our present difficulty."¹

"We know that the Lord is always on the side of the right. But it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and this nation should be on the Lord's side."²

To the blacks of Richmond: "Don't kneel to me! You must kneel to God only and thank him for your freedom."³

"There has fallen upon me a task such as did not rest even upon the Father of his Country... I turn, then,

¹Carl Sandburg, "Abraham Lincoln" (Pleasantville, New York: The Reader's Digest Association, 1970), page 188A.

² Sandburg, 471B.

³ Sandburg, 561B.

and look to the American people and to that God who has never forsaken them.”⁴

As Lincoln substantially summarized the situation in a statement equal to that of the best keenly perceptive and articulate clergyman: “We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in number, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God who made us. It behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.”⁵

“As Lincoln visited the sick and wounded among avenues of hospital tents at City Point that week, Adelaide Smith, the nurse, heard the camp talk that when the

⁴ Sandberg, 175B.

⁵ Walter A. Maier, *Christ, Set the World Aright* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1945), page 368.

President’s party came to one set of tents young Dr. Jerome Walker of the Sanitary Commission pointing at them said, ‘Mr. President, you do not want to go in there’. ‘Why not my boy?’ ‘They are sick rebel prisoners’. ‘That is just where I do want to go’, and he strode in and shook hands from cot to cot.

“Shot-torn in both hips, lay Colonel Harry L. Benbow, who had commanded three regiments at Five Forks. And according to Colonel Benbow: ‘He halted beside my bed and held out his hand. I was lying on my back, my hands folded across my breast. Looking him in the face, “Mr. President,” I said, “do you know to whom you offer your hand?” “I do not,” he replied. “Well,” said I, “you offer it to a Confederate colonel who has fought you as hard as he could for four years.” “Well,” said he, “I hope a Confederate colonel will not refuse me his hand.” “No, sir,” I replied, “I will not,” and I clasped his hand in both of mine’.”⁶

⁶ Sandberg, 559f.

President Lincoln's testimonies from experience.

On the problem which Lincoln puts forth: "If we could first know where we are and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it,"⁷ Lincoln himself answers: "The pilots on our western rivers steer from point to point, as they call it – setting the course of the boat no farther than they can see. And that is all I propose to do in the great problems that are set before us."⁸

"I shall stay right here and do my duty. Here I shall be.... I shall never desert my post."⁹

"The purposes of the Almighty are perfect, and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to accurately perceive them in advance. We hoped for a happy termination of this terrible war long before this; but God knows best, and has ruled otherwise. We shall yet acknowledge His wisdom and our own error therein. Meanwhile we must work earnestly in the best light He gives us, trusting that so working still conduces to the great ends He ordains. Surely He intends some great good to follow this mighty convulsion, which no mortal could make, and no mortal could stay."¹⁰

"The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of

God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong. God cannot be for and against the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party; and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are the best adaptation to effect his purpose. I am almost ready to say that this is probably true; that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet. By his mere great power on the minds of the new contestants, he could have either saved or destroyed the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And having begun, he could give the final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds."¹¹

⁷ Sandburg, 342A

⁸ Sandburg, 454A

⁹ Sandburg, 454B.

¹⁰ Sandburg, 455A.

¹¹ Sandburg, 273Bf.