

Church Urges Hockey Fans to Pray for a Playoff Berth

Dear Teacher,

In churches across the continent, joys and concerns are lifted up in prayer each Sunday. Thanksgivings are offered for births, graduations and weddings, while requests are made for God to heal the sick, comfort the grieving and assist the afflicted. But recently, from Canada, came a new kind of prayer request: for a professional hockey team to make the playoffs.

Since the Montreal Canadiens are currently in 14th place in their conference, perhaps some divine intervention will be needed. But the request for fans to pray, made by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Montreal, is an unexpected action for church leaders to take.

The link between sports and faith is nothing new, with athletes giving glory to God for victories and pointing to heaven after scoring goals or touchdowns. But this request from the Catholic Church presents an opportunity to think about whether limits should be placed on prayer requests. Is it appropriate to ask for God to focus divine power on every human concern, including hockey playoffs?

In this week's installment of *The Wired Word*, we will learn what the Scriptures teach us about the power of prayer, and where our prayer requests should be most faithfully focused.

Remember, if you wish to provide your class members with an abbreviated copy of the lesson, [click here](#), and you can send them a copy via e-mail today.

May God bless you as you teach the Scriptures this week.

The Editorial Team of *The Wired Word*



Church Urges Hockey Fans to Pray for a Playoff Berth

The Wired Word for February 19, 2012

In the News

An ad has been placed in Montreal's French-language newspapers by the Roman Catholic archdiocese. It simply says, "Prions," French for "Let us pray." The object of this prayer request is not what you might expect: healing for the sick, shelter for the homeless, comfort for the grieving, peace between the nations.

Instead, the archdiocese is inviting people to pray that the Montreal Canadiens will make it into the NHL playoffs. At the time of the ad, the Canadiens were last in the Northeast Division, and second-to-last in the 15-team Eastern Conference. The ad lists the Eastern-conference standings with every team included except the Canadiens. In the slot for the team in eighth place -- the last one to make the playoffs -- is the simple request, "Prions." That's the spot that fans hope the Canadiens will eventually occupy.

Few people would be surprised to learn that fans are praying for their team, but a formal prayer request from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Montreal seems unprecedented. Do church leaders really believe that Almighty God will intervene with divine power on behalf of the struggling Canadiens? "It was a lighthearted wink, to ally with people who love sports," said Lucie Martineau, the director of communications for the Catholic Church of Montreal, to *The Star*. "And to pray they (the Canadiens) are in the playoffs." Martineau

went on to say that it tells average Montrealers that “we are there, we are present We have the same worries as you.”

Comparing the Montreal Canadiens to a religion is nothing new, although this is the first time that the church has bought an ad requesting prayers for the hockey team. Olivier Bauer, a theology professor at the Université de Montréal, has written the book *Hockey as a Religion: The Montreal Canadiens*, which explores the fervor of Montrealers for their team. The team and its jersey are called “La sainte flanelle” (the holy flannel), and former goaltender Patrick Roy is nicknamed “Saint Patrick.” The “religion” of the Montreal Canadiens has a Catholic form, explains Bauer, seen in the example of a fan who has created a Canadiens “temple” in his house, shaped like a Catholic church with an altar containing a replica of the Stanley Cup.

The newspaper ad is pitched to a public that has largely turned its back on organized religion, with fewer than 10 percent of Catholics in Quebec attending mass. Church spokesperson Martineau admits that the ad may not bring people back to church, but says that “maybe it can lead them to reflect and think about their faith.” Hugo Leger, vice president of the advertising firm that created the ad, told *The Canadian Press* that once people get past the humor of the ad, they will find a simple message encouraging prayer. “We just want to remind people that the church exists,” he said. “And when we say pray, that could mean for the Canadiens, or an invitation to pray in general.”

As for the Montreal Canadiens, team spokesperson Donald Beauchamp responded to the ad by saying, “It’s nice to count on their support.”

Christians have long used the word ACTS to remind them of the various facets of prayer: Adoration (praise of God), Confession (admission of sin), Thanksgiving (gratitude to God) and Supplication (requests for help). Unfortunately, our personal and congregational prayers often focus more on supplication than on the other three categories, shifting our view from God’s agenda to purely human concerns. This is the danger of the church’s ad requesting prayers for the Montreal Canadiens, since it presumes that Almighty God has any interest at all in the outcome of the NHL playoffs.

The Bible contains examples of prayer with many facets and focal points, from adoration to supplication. We can learn much about the power of prayer by turning to Scripture and discovering how to focus our prayer requests most faithfully.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Catholic Church Urges Montreal Canadiens Fans to Pray for a Playoff Berth, *The Star*](#)
[Catholic Church: Pray for the Woeful Canadiens, *USA TODAY*](#)

The Big Questions

1. Although the Catholic ad was tongue-in-cheek, it connected with the passion people have for their sports teams. When, if ever, is it appropriate to pray for athletes? What should be prayed?
2. Does a request to pray for the Canadiens, although lighthearted, have the effect of trivializing prayer? How could it lead people to see God as a cosmic puppeteer, pulling strings for faithful fans?
3. For what should we pray? Are there inappropriate prayers, or does God want to hear whatever is on

our hearts?

4. Are prayers of supplication more common than prayers of adoration, confession and thanksgiving? If so, why is this? What is the value of balancing the different facets of prayer?
5. How does God answer prayer? What are the different answers that we can expect? How is God's power revealed in these answers?
6. Why do we pray? What is its value to us, to the church and to an ongoing relationship with God?

Confronting the News with Scripture

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Genesis 24:12-14

“And [Abraham’s servant] said, ‘O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. I am standing here by the spring of water, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. Let the girl to whom I shall say, “Please offer your jar that I may drink,” and who shall say, “Drink, and I will water your camels” -- let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.’” (For context, read 24:1-27.)

One of the first prayers in Genesis is offered by Abraham’s servant. He has been tasked with finding a wife for Isaac. His prayer is very specific: He tells God what he wants, and what sign he wants to see to know he has found the right person. Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, turns out to be the answer to his prayer.

Questions: When should we make specific requests to God? What are the problems associated with being too specific?

Psalm 33:1-6

“Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous. Praise befits the upright. Praise the LORD with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts. For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD. By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.” (For context, read 33:1-22.)

Psalm 33 invites us to adore the Lord and praise him with instrumental music, new songs and loud shouts. God deserves this adoration because of his upright word, faithful work, righteousness, justice and steadfast love. The psalm reminds us of the greatness and goodness of God, especially his wonderful creative work.

Questions: How is it true that “praise befits the upright”? Why do we sometimes fail to offer prayers of adoration? What benefits come from taking time to rejoice in the Lord?

Psalm 51:1-7

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my

transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” (For context, read 51:1-17.)

This prayer for cleansing and pardon is attributed to King David and is believed to have been offered after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and was caught in his sin by the prophet Nathan. David honestly admits his transgressions, acknowledges God’s right to judge him and asks for God’s mercy. He pleads for God to forgive him and “put a new and right spirit” within him (51:10). David believes that “the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit” (51:17).

Questions: What is the value of a prayer of confession? How does such a prayer help us to discover “truth in the inward being”? Why is “a broken spirit” described as a sacrifice acceptable to God? How is the power of God revealed in the gift of forgiveness?

Matthew 15:34-38

“Jesus asked them, ‘How many loaves have you?’ They said, ‘Seven, and a few small fish.’ Then ordering the crowd to sit down on the ground, he took the seven loaves and the fish; and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all of them ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. Those who had eaten were four thousand men, besides women and children.” (For context, read 15:32-39.)

Jesus has compassion for a crowd of four thousand men (plus women and children) and does not want to send them away hungry. The disciples wonder where they will get enough bread to feed so many people, and Jesus asks them about their own provisions -- seven loaves and a few small fish. After ordering the crowd to sit, he offers a prayer of thanksgiving and then gives the food to the disciples to distribute to the crowd. All eat and are filled, and they end up with seven baskets of leftovers.

Questions: What do you imagine Jesus said in his prayer of thanksgiving over the bread and the fish? How does giving thanks shift us from a mindset of scarcity to one of abundance? Where do you see the power of prayer in this story?

Luke 11:1-4

“[Jesus] was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’ He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.’” (For context, read 11:1-13.)

The disciples know that they need help with their prayers, so they ask Jesus to teach them to pray. He responds by teaching them what we now call the Lord’s Prayer, which contains three of the four facets of prayer in three short verses: adoration (11:2), supplication (11:3), and confession (11:4). Jesus goes on to instruct them in the importance of perseverance in prayer (11:5-13), and offers them the assurance, “Ask, and it will be given you” (11:9).

Questions: Jesus instructs his followers to ask God to “give us each day our daily bread,” but are there other supplications about basic needs that we should make? What about shelter, clothing, work, health and security? What would be an appropriate request to make concerning our community, workplace, nation, world ... or favorite sports team?

Romans 8:26-28

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very

Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” (For context, read 8:18-30.)

The apostle Paul speaks of the sufferings of the present time and the challenge of waiting with patience for God to complete his work in the world. He says that the Spirit of God helps us in our weakness and assists us with our prayers, interceding for us “with sighs too deep for words.” Paul is confident that “all things work together for good for those who love God,” and that God will work out his purposes through the days that lie ahead. Clearly, prayer is not a purely human activity, but one that has a divine component as well.

Questions: What role does the Spirit of God play in our prayers? How can we open ourselves more fully to the Spirit’s involvement? How have you felt the presence of the Spirit in your prayers, and how has it affected you?

For Further Discussion

1. Is there a difference between praying for the Montreal Canadiens and singing “God Bless America”? How is this different from asking God to bless your congregation, family or friends? Explain the distinctions.
2. Are God’s blessings a zero-sum game -- that is, blessing one person or thing means taking blessings away from another -- or are God’s blessings unlimited? How does an answer to this question affect the way you pray?
3. Jesus specifically instructs us to “pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44)? What makes such a prayer difficult, and what positive effect does it have on us?
4. Prayers are not always answered in the ways that we desire, something that Jesus experienced near the end of his earthly ministry when he prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matthew 26:39). How do we benefit from answers that offer us not what we want, but what God wants? Give examples.
5. Many prayers of supplication ask for healing from illness. How can you see when a healing has been granted? Is there a difference between a healing and a cure, and can you describe a situation in which a person experienced healing but still died from a disease?
6. In 1904, Mark Twain wrote “The War Prayer,” a short story in which a church holds a patriotic service to send the town’s young men off to war. During the service, an old stranger enters and addresses the gathering. He is a messenger from God, and tells the patriotic crowd that their prayers are double-edged: When they pray for victory, they are praying for the destruction of their enemies. When is it ever justified to pray for victory? If so, whose prayers does God answer -- our prayers or our enemy’s prayers?

7. The prayer time in most congregations is filled with requests for healing from various ailments, aches and pains. How can churches broaden their prayer focus and include other concerns that are near to the heart of God? What would it mean to include prayers that lead to the glorification of God the Father in Jesus, in line with Jesus' words in John 14:11-14?

8. The vice president of the advertising firm that created the Catholic Church's ad in Montreal hopes that readers will see it as a simple message encouraging prayer in general. Suggest ways that churches can introduce the wider community to the power of prayer.

Responding to the News

Prayer is much wider and deeper than making requests to God, such as berths in the NHL playoffs. Find ways to broaden your practice of prayer, as individuals and as a congregation, to include adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. As you do, may you discover that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Other News This Week

In a related story, Religion News Service reports that a powerful media advertising watchdog in Britain has banned a Christian group from claiming on its website and brochures that God's powers can heal a variety of medical ailments. The "Advertising Standards Authority" watchdog ruled that the Christian group's ads are irresponsible and misleading, claiming that God "can heal you from any sickness." The group, "Healing on the Streets," says that "ulcers, depression, allergies, fibromyalgia, asthma, paralysis, phobias, sleeping disorders or any other sickness" can be cured with divine help. The watchdog concluded that the ads "could encourage false hope and were irresponsible." What claims can and should Christians make about the healing power of God? How can we make helpful distinctions between healings and cures, and affirm that certain healings are always possible, even in the face of terminal illness? (See 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 103:1-8, Matthew 8:5-13, James 5:16.)

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Healing on the Streets Ads Banned, *The Huffington Post*](#)
[UK Watchdog Group Bans Christian Ads, *God's Politics Blog*](#)

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, we praise you for your greatness and your goodness. We confess that we have often failed to see the needs of the world around us, focusing mainly on our private concerns. Expand our vision, Lord, and keep us thankful for the ways that you work for good in our lives each day. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Copyright 2012 Communication Resources

Church Urges Hockey Fans to Pray for a Playoff Berth

Dear Class Member,

In churches across the continent, joys and concerns are lifted up in prayer each Sunday. Thanksgivings are offered for births, graduations and weddings, while requests are made for God to heal the sick, comfort the grieving and assist the afflicted. But recently, from Canada, came a new kind of prayer request: for a professional hockey team to make the playoffs.

Since the Montreal Canadiens are currently in 14th place in their conference, perhaps some divine intervention will be needed. But the request for fans to pray, made by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Montreal, is an unexpected action for church leaders to take.

The link between sports and faith is nothing new, with athletes giving glory to God for victories and pointing to heaven after scoring goals or touchdowns. But this request from the Catholic Church presents an opportunity to think about whether limits should be placed on prayer requests. Is it appropriate to ask for God to focus divine power on every human concern, including hockey playoffs?

In our next class, we will learn what the Scriptures teach us about the power of prayer, and where our prayer requests should be most faithfully focused.

If you wish to start thinking about our topic in advance, below is some introductory material.



Church Urges Hockey Fans to Pray for a Playoff Berth

The Wired Word for February 19, 2012

In the News

An ad has been placed in Montreal's French-language newspapers by the Roman Catholic archdiocese. It simply says, "Prions," French for "Let us pray." The object of this prayer request is not what you might expect: healing for the sick, shelter for the homeless, comfort for the grieving, peace between the nations.

Instead, the archdiocese is inviting people to pray that the Montreal Canadiens will make it into the NHL playoffs. At the time of the ad, the Canadiens were last in the Northeast Division, and second-to-last in the 15-team Eastern Conference. The ad lists the Eastern-conference standings with every team included except the Canadiens. In the slot for the team in eighth place -- the last one to make the playoffs -- is the simple request, "Prions." That's the spot that fans hope the Canadiens will eventually occupy.

Few people would be surprised to learn that fans are praying for their team, but a formal prayer request from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Montreal seems unprecedented. Do church leaders really believe that Almighty God will intervene with divine power on behalf of the struggling Canadiens? "It was a lighthearted wink, to ally with people who love sports," said Lucie Martineau, the director of communications for the Catholic Church of Montreal, to *The Star*. "And to pray they (the Canadiens) are in the playoffs." Martineau

went on to say that it tells average Montrealers that “we are there, we are present We have the same worries as you.”

Comparing the Montreal Canadiens to a religion is nothing new, although this is the first time that the church has bought an ad requesting prayers for the hockey team. Olivier Bauer, a theology professor at the Université de Montréal, has written the book *Hockey as a Religion: The Montreal Canadiens*, which explores the fervor of Montrealers for their team. The team and its jersey are called “La sainte flanelle” (the holy flannel), and former goaltender Patrick Roy is nicknamed “Saint Patrick.” The “religion” of the Montreal Canadiens has a Catholic form, explains Bauer, seen in the example of a fan who has created a Canadiens “temple” in his house, shaped like a Catholic church with an altar containing a replica of the Stanley Cup.

The newspaper ad is pitched to a public that has largely turned its back on organized religion, with fewer than 10 percent of Catholics in Quebec attending mass. Church spokesperson Martineau admits that the ad may not bring people back to church, but says that “maybe it can lead them to reflect and think about their faith.” Hugo Leger, vice president of the advertising firm that created the ad, told *The Canadian Press* that once people get past the humor of the ad, they will find a simple message encouraging prayer. “We just want to remind people that the church exists,” he said. “And when we say pray, that could mean for the Canadiens, or an invitation to pray in general.”

As for the Montreal Canadiens, team spokesperson Donald Beauchamp responded to the ad by saying, “It’s nice to count on their support.”

Christians have long used the word ACTS to remind them of the various facets of prayer: Adoration (praise of God), Confession (admission of sin), Thanksgiving (gratitude to God) and Supplication (requests for help). Unfortunately, our personal and congregational prayers often focus more on supplication than on the other three categories, shifting our view from God’s agenda to purely human concerns. This is the danger of the church’s ad requesting prayers for the Montreal Canadiens, since it presumes that Almighty God has any interest at all in the outcome of the NHL playoffs.

The Bible contains examples of prayer with many facets and focal points, from adoration to supplication. We can learn much about the power of prayer by turning to Scripture and discovering how to focus our prayer requests most faithfully.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Catholic Church Urges Montreal Canadiens Fans to Pray for a Playoff Berth, *The Star*](#)
[Catholic Church: Pray for the Woeful Canadiens, *USA TODAY*](#)

The Big Questions

Here are some of the questions we will discuss in class:

1. Although the Catholic ad was tongue-in-cheek, it connected with the passion people have for their sports teams. When, if ever, is it appropriate to pray for athletes? What should be prayed?
2. Does a request to pray for the Canadiens, although lighthearted, have the effect of trivializing prayer? How could it lead people to see God as a cosmic puppeteer, pulling strings for faithful fans?

3. For what should we pray? Are there inappropriate prayers, or does God want to hear whatever is on our hearts?

4. Are prayers of supplication more common than prayers of adoration, confession and thanksgiving? If so, why is this? What is the value of balancing the different facets of prayer?

5. How does God answer prayer? What are the different answers that we can expect? How is God's power revealed in these answers?

6. Why do we pray? What is its value to us, to the church and to an ongoing relationship with God?

Confronting the News with Scripture

We will look at selected verses from these Scripture texts. You may wish to read these in advance for background:

Genesis 24:1-27
Psalm 33:1-22
Psalm 51:1-17
Matthew 15:32-39
Luke 11:1-13
Romans 8:18-30

In class, we will talk about these passages and look for some insight on the big questions, as well as talk about other questions you may have about this topic. Please join us.

Scriptures for The Wired Word Online Bible Study for February 19, 2012

Genesis 24:1-27

24Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. ²Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh ³and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, ⁴but will go to my country and to my kindred and get a wife for my son Isaac." ⁵The servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land; must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?" ⁶Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there. ⁷The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your offspring I will give this land,' he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. ⁸But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there." ⁹So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

¹⁰Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all kinds of choice gifts from his master; and he set out and went to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor. ¹¹He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water; it was toward evening, the time when women go out to draw water. ¹²And he said, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. ¹³I am standing here by the spring of water, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴Let the girl to whom I shall say, 'Please offer your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels' —let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master." ¹⁵Before he had finished speaking, there was Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, coming out with her water jar on her shoulder. ¹⁶The girl was very fair to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up. ¹⁷Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please let me sip a little water from your jar." ¹⁸"Drink, my lord," she said, and quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. ¹⁹When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." ²⁰So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. ²¹The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful. ²²When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold nose-ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels, ²³and said, "Tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" ²⁴She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." ²⁵She added, "We have plenty of straw and fodder and a place to spend the night." ²⁶The man bowed his head and worshiped the Lord ²⁷and said,

“Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the way to the house of my master’s kin.”

Psalm 33

¹Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous. Praise befits the upright.

²Praise the Lord with the lyre; make melody to him with the harp of ten strings.

³Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

⁴For the word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness.

⁵He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.

⁶By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.

⁷He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle; he put the deeps in storehouses.

⁸Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.

⁹For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

¹⁰The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.

¹¹The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.

¹²Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage.

¹³The Lord looks down from heaven; he sees all humankind.

¹⁴From where he sits enthroned he watches all the inhabitants of the earth—

¹⁵he who fashions the hearts of them all, and observes all their deeds.

¹⁶A king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.

¹⁷The war horse is a vain hope for victory, and by its great might it cannot save.

¹⁸Truly the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love,

¹⁹to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

²⁰Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and shield.

²¹Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name.

²²Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you.

Psalm 51

¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

⁴Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.

⁵Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

⁶You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

⁹Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

¹¹Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.

¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

¹⁴Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

¹⁵O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁶For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.

¹⁷The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Matthew 15:32-39

³²Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way." ³³The disciples said to him, "Where are we to get enough bread in the desert to feed so great a crowd?" ³⁴Jesus asked them, "How many loaves have you?" They said, "Seven, and a few small fish." ³⁵Then ordering the crowd to sit down on the ground, ³⁶he took the seven loaves and the fish; and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. ³⁷And all of them ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. ³⁸Those who had eaten were four thousand men, besides women and children. ³⁹After sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

Luke 11:1-13

¹He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." ²He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. ³Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial." ⁵And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' ⁷And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' ⁸I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. ⁹"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹²Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? ¹³If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Romans 8:18-30

¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we

ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.



Back to Catholic Church urges Montreal Canadiens fans to pray for a playoff berth

Catholic Church urges Montreal Canadiens fans to pray for a playoff berth

February 09, 2012

Andrew Chung

MONTREAL—With the playoffs just two months away and the hapless Habs currently in 14th place in their conference, perhaps there's only one thing left to do — pray.

If you were so inclined, then you might find a new ad for the Archdiocese of Montreal a tonic, knowing, perhaps, that God was on your side.

The ad, placed in Montreal's French-language newspapers, lists the current top teams in the league's Eastern Conference.

Then, at spot number eight — the cut-off for the playoffs — it reads: "Let us pray."

"It was a lighthearted wink, to ally with people who love sports," said the Catholic Church of Montreal's communication's director Lucie Martineau. "And to pray they (the Canadiens) are in the playoffs."

It tells average Montrealers that "we are there, we are present," Martineau continued. "We have the same worries as you."

Despite the longstanding comparisons of the Montreal Canadiens to a religion, the church has only now sought to ride the NHL club's jersey-tails.

The Archbishop of Montreal, Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte, was not available for an interview. But Martineau said he's a Habs fan and quickly approved the idea proposed by the church's outside ad firm, Bos.

Hugo Léger, the firm's vice-president of creation, said Bos has searched for a long time to "link the two religions" but had to wait for the right moment.

It saw that moment in the club's declining fortunes as the regular season clock runs out.

The reaction, Léger said, has been huge and positive. "I don't know," he added, "if it will make everyone fall to their knees Saturday night at the Bell Centre."

That the church would eventually attach itself to the religiosity of the Canadiens — real or imagined — is not surprising, since Montrealers are so fervent about their team, said Olivier Bauer, a theology professor at the Université de Montréal and author of the 2011 book *Hockey as a Religion: The Montreal Canadiens*.

Bauer senses a change. Even in recent years, he felt the church was hesitant to make the link.

But the treatment the Habs receive from some fans, bordering on the sacred, is unmistakable. Linking the two is "logical," Bauer said.

The team, and its jersey, are called "La sainte flanelle" (the holy flannel). Patrick Roy was called "Saint Patrick."

"The religion of the Canadiens in Montreal takes the form of Catholicism," he explained. He cited the example of one fan he knows who has literally created a Habs "temple" in his house, with the appearance of a Catholic church, complete with altar, the centre of which sits a replica Stanley Cup.

The ad is directed at a population that, more than elsewhere in Canada, has turned its back on organized religion. Fewer than 10 per cent of Catholics in Quebec attend mass.

In this way the ad might be an attempt to reach out to fill the pews again. "Is it a Hail Mary pass?" laughs Bauer. "I'm not sure it's so desperate. But the idea is definitely to use something that works."

Church spokesperson Martineau said, "We don't think it's something that will bring people to the church, but maybe it can lead them to reflect



The Catholic church has placed an ad in Montreal newspapers encouraging people to pray for an eighth-place finish and a playoff spot for the Montreal Canadiens. The line that says "Prions" translates to "let us pray".

Paul Chiasson/THE CANADIAN PRESS

and think about their faith.”

It's not the first time the church has comically commented on current events to make its presence known. Last year it placed a billboard ad at the entrance of the Champlain Bridge, whose state of disrepair has become infamous here.

“Say your prayers,” it read.

As for the Canadiens, what do they think of the newest ad?

“It's nice to count on their support,” Was all spokesperson Donald Beauchamp would say.



Catholic church: Pray for the woeful Canadiens

From staff and wire reports

Updated 2/9/2012 6:26 PM

Recommend 49

15



It's come to this for the Montreal Canadiens: The Catholic church is asking people to pray for the last-place [NHL](#) team.

The church has placed an ad in Montreal newspapers in hopes of an eighth-place finish and a spot in the playoffs. The ad shows the Eastern Conference standings with every team listed except the Canadiens. In eighth place, the final playoff spot, it simply says "Prions," French for Let Us Pray.

The Canadiens (21-24-9, 51 points) are last in the [Northeast Division](#), and in second-to-last-place in the 15-team Eastern Conference.

By Jean-Yves Ahern, US Presswire

Montreal centers Scott Gomez (11) and Lars Eller (81) stand for the national anthem prior to the Canadiens' game against the Winnipeg Jets on Feb. 5.

Ads by Google

Online Dating Ages 40+

Date Relationship Ready Singles Now
Sign Up Now & Meet Real Singles!

www.eMatureSingles.com/Baltimore

Church Member Directories

Pro photography, Free directories
Free portraits for your members

directory.HighBridgePhotography.com

Liberty University Online

Online Christian University Degrees
Get Free Info - It's Fast & Easy!

www.LibertyOnlineDegrees.com

STANDINGS: NHL team records, points

PHOTOS: The Montreal Canadiens in pictures

Faced with declining church attendance, the Archdiocese of Montreal is known for its clever campaigns to solicit funds each year. The one-time ad was designed by local firm Bos advertising and appeared in French-language newspapers on Thursday.

"You know, the Catholic church doesn't have the same means as other advertisers, so they need to make an impact," Hugo Leger, vice-president of Bos told The Canadian Press.

The firm says it has long been considering an ad that combines Quebec's two major religions — Catholicism and the secular passion of ice hockey.

According to [TSN](#), Leger said when people get past the joke, they will find a simple message that encourages prayer.

"We just want to remind people that the church exists," Leger said. "And when we say pray, that could mean for the Canadiens, or an invitation to pray in general."

The church has a recent history of using a popular issue to get some attention. Last April, it installed a billboard visible from the crumbling Champlain Bridge that urged motorists to, "say your prayers."

The billboard attracted public attention as the media were reporting almost daily about the need for a new bridge to replace the aging Montreal structure.

Thursday's ad was described as a one-shot deal; the spots were scheduled to appear in two French-language daily newspapers, for one day only.

A spokeswoman for the archdiocese says Jean-Claude Cardinal Turcotte saw the advertising pitch just a few days ago.

"He immediately accepted and loved the concept," said Lucie Martineau. It was a concept

Videos you may be interested in



Archdiocese mo...



Canadian group to Be Released fro...



Sponsored Link
ifeLock® Official Site
LifeLock.com

byTaboola
More videos

Most Popular

Stories

[Lin keeps improving as Knicks beat the...](#)

[ESPN fires employee over Lin headline](#)

[Video: Watch SNL spoof racist Lin...](#)

[Son of Fox's Chris Myers killed in car...](#)

[Carl Edwards wins Daytona 500 pole position](#)

Videos

[Whitney Houston fans say goodbye at funeral](#)

[Jennifer Love Hewitt Music Video](#)

[Whitney Houston remembered at hometown funeral](#)

Photos

[NBA Cheerleaders](#)

[Jeremy Lin takes the NBA by storm](#)

[The better half? Athletes' attractive pairings](#)

Most Popular E-mail Newsletter

Sign up to get:

Top viewed stories, photo galleries
and community posts of the day

Most popular right now:

[3 skiers killed in Wash. avalanche; 4th survived](#)



Sign up for USA TODAY E-mail newsletters

The latest news and more on Twitter

that allows us to be right there with what the people are preoccupied with right now, and send them a little message to pray for the Canadiens."

The Canadiens had high hopes entering the season, but the year has been marred by injuries, notably to top defensemen [Andrei Markov](#) and captain [Brian Gionta](#), and by the worst power play in the league. The coach was fired, and the choice of replacement — non-French-speaking Randy Cunneyworth — prompted a protest outside the [Bell Centre](#). The Canadiens would-be sniper, [Michael Cammalleri](#), was traded to Calgary after disparaging what he described as the team's losing attitude.

For more information about [reprints & permissions](#), visit our [FAQ's](#). To report corrections and clarifications, contact Standards Editor [Brent Jones](#). For publication consideration in the newspaper, send comments to letters@usatoday.com. Include name, phone number, city and state for verification. To view our corrections, go to corrections.usatoday.com.

Posted 2/9/2012 5:35 PM | Updated 2/9/2012 6:26 PM



Follow us on
twitter

Get the latest breaking news, USA TODAY features and blog items when you follow USA TODAY Sports on Twitter!

SPORTS: Follow USA TODAY on Twitter

More from USATODAY

Anthony: Lin is 'our Rudy' *USATODAY.com in Sports*

Report: Apple to unveil next iPad in March
USATODAY.com in Technology Live

ABC plays it straight on Lin coverage
USATODAY.com in Sports

Jennifer Love Hewitt unveils sexy 'Client' striptease *USATODAY.com in LifeLine Live*

Apple scores with digital textbooks and app
USATODAY.com in Tech

More from the web

Poll: Ronald Reagan 'Best' President! Guess Who's #2! Find Out Here *Newsmax.com*

Tom failed again? Blame Gisele! *espnW*

Whoa: Lucy Hale Wears a Completely See-Through Shirt on the Red Carpet (PHOTOS) *Wetpaint Entertainment*

Top 10 Hockey Vacations *HomeAway*

Video: Massive shifts in the geopolitical landscape in 2012 *Merrill Lynch: Wealth Management*

[?]

USA TODAY is now using Facebook Comments on our stories and blog posts to provide an enhanced user experience. To post a comment, log into Facebook and then "Add" your comment. To report spam or abuse, click the "X" in the upper right corner of the comment box. To find out more, read the [FAQ](#) and [Conversation Guidelines](#).



Add a comment...

Post to Facebook

Posting as Alva Baker ([Change](#))

Comment



Norm Robichaud · Seattle, Washington

So the firm that the Catholic Church PAID to create the ad (BOS, I think) feels that Quebec's two main religions are Catholicism and Hockey?

That's breaking the 1st Commandment, "...you shall have no other gods but Me.." They're statement illuminates just how high in regard Quebec places the sport, their team and their players.

Now, asking Quebec'rs to pray for IDOLS (hockey idols in this case, either the players or the teams) is a call to violate the 2nd Commandment "...you shall not worship idols...".

My message to the Catholic Church (as my Brothers in Jesus) is to backpedal - FAST! Read some Old Testament stories from The Prophets - WOW! When Israel idolized false gods, their team lost big time and everyone suffered. When israel turned back to God, their team won. God Blessed them when they did what was right by God's standards!

Re-affirm God's Commandments publicly and ensure that Quebec understands that God commands us to obey them, all of them. Re-affirm private prayer and family Bible-study so that we can all learn to love God even more. So we can all learn to REPENT, to turn towards God, especially when we're winning. Not just when we're losing.

Because all of our 'wins' come from Him. Repentance leads to Faith which leads to Blessing. In that order.

God Bless.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · February 11 at 9:46am



Dan Cusiter · Top Commenter

I go to bed at night and pray that the Montreal Canadiens continue to lose. Next to the Flyers Montreal fans are the worst in hockey. They deserve every loss. Go Leafs Go

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · February 9 at 5:50pm



Leo Fletcher · Pastor at New Life Baptist Church

now this is down-right dirty!

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · [Follow Post](#) · February 11 at 10:39pm

Facebook social plugin

USA TODAY Digital Services

[Mobile](#) | [E-Newsletters](#) | [RSS](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Podcasts](#) | [Widgets](#) | [e-Edition](#) | [USA TODAY for iPad](#) | [Kindle Edition](#) | [Subscribe to Home Delivery](#)
[Reprints & Permissions](#) | [USA TODAY Topics](#) | [Reporter Index](#) | [Corrections/Clarifications](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Archives](#)

The War Prayer

by Mark Twain

It was a time of great and exalting excitement. The country was up in arms, the war was on, in every breast burned the holy fire of patriotism; the drums were beating, the bands playing, the toy pistols popping, the bunched firecrackers hissing and spluttering; on every hand and far down the receding and fading spread of roofs and balconies a fluttering wilderness of flags flashed in the sun; daily the young volunteers marched down the wide avenue gay and fine in their new uniforms, the proud fathers and mothers and sisters and sweethearts cheering them with voices choked with happy emotion as they swung by; nightly the packed mass meetings listened, panting, to patriot oratory which stirred the deepest deeps of their hearts, and which they interrupted at briefest intervals with cyclones of applause, the tears running down their cheeks the while; in the churches the pastors preached devotion to flag and country, and invoked the God of Battles beseeching His aid in our good cause in outpourings of fervid eloquence which moved every listener. It was indeed a glad and gracious time, and the half dozen rash spirits that ventured to disapprove of the war and cast a doubt upon its righteousness straightway got such a stern and angry warning that for their personal safety's sake they quickly shrank out of sight and offended no more in that way.

Sunday morning came -- next day the battalions would leave for the front; the church was filled; the volunteers were there, their young faces alight with martial dreams -- visions of the stern advance, the gathering momentum, the rushing charge, the flashing sabers, the flight of the foe, the tumult, the enveloping smoke, the fierce pursuit, the surrender! Then home from the war, bronzed heroes, welcomed, adored, submerged in golden seas of glory! With the volunteers sat their dear ones, proud, happy, and envied by the neighbors and friends who had no sons and brothers to send forth to the field of honor, there to win for the flag, or, failing, die the noblest of noble deaths. The service proceeded; a war chapter from the Old Testament was read; the first prayer was said; it was followed by an organ burst that shook the building, and with one impulse the house rose, with glowing eyes and beating hearts, and poured out that tremendous invocation

God the all-terrible! Thou who ordainest! Thunder thy clarion and lightning thy sword!

Then came the "long" prayer. None could remember the like of it for passionate pleading and moving and beautiful language. The burden of its supplication was, that an ever-merciful and benignant Father of us all would watch over our noble young soldiers, and aid, comfort, and encourage them in their patriotic work; bless them, shield them in the day of battle and the hour of peril, bear them in His mighty hand, make them strong and confident, invincible in the bloody onset; help them to crush the foe, grant to them and to their flag and country imperishable honor and glory --

An aged stranger entered and moved with slow and noiseless step up the main aisle, his eyes fixed upon the minister, his long body clothed in a robe that reached to his feet, his head bare, his white hair descending in a frothy cataract to his shoulders, his seamy face unnaturally pale, pale even to ghastliness. With all eyes following him and wondering, he made his silent way; without pausing, he ascended to the preacher's side and stood there waiting. With shut lids the preacher, unconscious of his presence, continued with his moving prayer, and at last finished it with the words, uttered in fervent appeal, "Bless our arms, grant us the victory, O Lord our God, Father and Protector of our land and flag!"

The stranger touched his arm, motioned him to step aside -- which the startled minister did -- and took his place. During some moments he surveyed the spellbound audience with solemn eyes, in which burned an uncanny light; then in a deep voice he said:

"I come from the Throne -- bearing a message from Almighty God!" The words smote the house with a shock; if the stranger perceived it he gave no attention. "He has heard the prayer of His servant your shepherd, and will grant it if such shall be your desire after I, His messenger, shall have explained to you its import -- that is to say, its full import. For it is like unto many of the prayers of men, in that it asks for more than he who utters it is aware of -- except he pause and think.

"God's servant and yours has prayed his prayer. Has he paused and taken thought? Is it one prayer? No, it is two -- one uttered, the other not. Both have reached the ear of Him Who heareth all supplications, the spoken and the unspoken. Ponder this -- keep it in mind. If you would beseech a blessing upon yourself, beware! lest without intent you invoke a curse upon a neighbor at the same time. If you pray for the blessing of rain upon your crop which needs it, by that act you are possibly praying for a curse upon some neighbor's crop which may not need rain and can be injured by it.

"You have heard your servant's prayer -- the uttered part of it. I am commissioned of God to put into words the other part of it -- that part which the pastor -- and also you in your hearts -- fervently prayed silently. And ignorantly and unthinkingly? God grant that it was so! You heard these words: 'Grant us the victory, O Lord our God!' That is sufficient. the **whole** of the uttered prayer is compact into those pregnant words. Elaborations were not necessary. When you have prayed for victory you have prayed for many unmentioned results which follow victory--**must** follow it, cannot help but follow it. Upon the listening spirit of God fell also the unspoken part of the prayer. He commandeth me to put it into words. Listen!

"O Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts, go forth to battle -- be Thou near them! With them -- in spirit -- we also go forth from the sweet peace of our beloved firesides to smite the foe. O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with little children to wander

unfriended the wastes of their desolated land in rags and hunger and thirst, sports of the sun flames of summer and the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travail, imploring Thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it -- for our sakes who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask it, in the spirit of love, of Him Who is the Source of Love, and Who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Amen.

(*After a pause.*) "Ye have prayed it; if ye still desire it, speak! The messenger of the Most High waits!"

It was believed afterward that the man was a lunatic, because there was no sense in what he said.

Twain apparently dictated it around 1904-05; it was rejected by his publisher, and was found after his death among his unpublished manuscripts. It was first published in 1923 in Albert Bigelow Paine's anthology, *Europe and Elsewhere*.

The story is in response to a particular war, namely the Philippine-American War of 1899-1902, which Twain opposed.

Transcribed by Steven Orso (snorso@facstaff.wisc.edu)

Last update: October 8, 1995