

(choir singing) ♪ Amen ♪

- Heavenly Father as we present these offerings onto thee for thy work, help us in our hearts to understand why it is more blessed to give than it is to receive, in Jesus name we pray this, amen. (organ music)

- Let us pray, let the words of my mouth, and that the meditation of our thoughts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord our strength and our Redeemer, amen. A prevailing habit of our secular and religious culture, is the setting aside of a season or a day each year, to record a particular emphasis, or enthusiasm, thus in addition to Independence Day, and Labor Day, there are Boy Scout Week, National Pickle Week, and the like. Someone is bound to come up with the idea of a be kind to your mother-in-law day, though it will probably last only an afternoon. Now, the church early caught onto this idea of such periods for concentrated interest, Advent, Epiphany, Lent, Christmas, Palm Sunday, Easter, and most of us appreciate the value of such regulated and, recurring accentuation's, they renew our remembrance of the high seasons, in our religious faith. Now in our university community, it is wisely inevitable that certain days in the academic year, also receive a special religious underlining. Freshman Sunday, Homecoming, Founder's Day, Dad's Day, Mother-Daughter Weekend, though a Father-Daughter weekend has even more enthusiastic jollity, as the girls prep schools have discovered to their advantage. Edgemont Sunday in our own community, and Baccalaureate Sunday, now today at the request of the denominational chaplains, we recognize a unique academic religious interest. On this Lord's day, the One Student Christian Federation, has once again called upon the church everywhere, to make intercession for the universities of the world. This is the universal day of prayer for students. The call has been given in the words of St Paul, which were read as our Scripture lesson: "Rejoice always," "pray constantly," "Give thanks in all circumstances," "for this is the will of God," "in Christ Jesus for you." Now to symbolize the student aspect of this day, two students have shared in the Ministry of Worship, a Hungarian and an American, this service is interdenominational and international, it has some of the marks of universality. Now as we look at this matter of a Student Day of prayer, there are two assumptions to be kept in mind, the first is that we do pray, that we believe in prayer, that we have faith in a God who hears and answers prayer, otherwise, why are we in the Lord's house? The second assumption is that we pray as Christians, we seek to pray the kind of prayer on which our Lord would put his approval. There is one implication of the phrase through Jesus Christ our Lord. Assuming then that we do pray as Christians, what form should our prayers take in an academic community? For each one of us alone in his or her solitariness and for us together in the corporate university service of worship. Let us look at the whole gamut of prayer, from the moment when we enter consciously into God's presence, until we whisper "Amen" as we receive his benediction. The mood of the worshiper as he comes into the presence of God should be one of adoration. He may not take the shoes from off his feet, but he does take the hat from off his head, in adoration we praise God for what he is, for what is he? God, he is God with all the content that these three letters can carry, he's great, the all-great, the omnipotent, he's also all knowing and all present, the omniscient, and the omnipresent, he is the creator and sustainer of the universe, he is truth, the author of truth, the end of truth, that we must always remember as students. He is holy, morally perfect, spiritually complete, when men of religious sensitivity try to express all this they pen in such phrases as "before the

brightness of whose presence" "the angels fail their faces," or "whose majesty is unspeakable," "whose power is incomparable," "whose goodness is inestimable," therefore, it behooves one to come into his presence, with dignity, and quietness, on the tiptoe of expectation, and yet very humbling. That is the spirit and much to offer this prayer from the liturgy of Saint James which goes back to the fourth century, "Almighty God whose glory," "the heavens are telling," "the Earth thy power," "and the sea thy light," "and whose greatness all feeling" "and thinking creatures everywhere proclaim," "to thee belongeth glory and honor" "might, greatness," "and magnificence," "now and forever and onto ages and ages." One doesn't, if he is wise, immediately chat to such a God, or treat him as a friendly second cousin. I know that Jesus taught his disciples to say our father, but do you remember what comes after it, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, majesty and holiness inseparably united, call for reverence, the odd reverence, which is at the heart of adoration. However almost as soon as one begins to approach such a God, we hesitate, and start to withdraw, how dare we stand in the presence of such a deity, his Majesty overwhelms us, his glory blinds us, this is the creator, and we over against him are but small and puny creatures, it is well to remember that, it keeps us in our proper place. I well recall an old Baptist minister from London, in his eighties, Doctor S B Meyer, telling a congregation of Glasgow Presbyterians but it wasn't wise for them to desire to see God face to face. He commented, "In two minutes, "you will be crying to get out," "you couldn't stand his glory." Now that didn't sit well with an elect Calvinistic congregation, but after 40 years, I still remember it, the greatness of the creator overwhelms the littleness of the creature. I think it's the realization of that caused the Breton fishermen to write and to use this prayer: "Dear God, be good to me," "thy sea is so wide," "and my boat is so small," "thy sea is so wide," "and my boat is so small." If only the creator God will be involved it would be reason enough for hesitation to approach him, but add to that his holiness, his complete spiritual perfection, he's the all good, and in the white radiance of such purity, our spiritual imperfections, infirmities and inanities, embarrass us, frighten us, and cover us with guilty confusion. To put it simply, we discover that we are miserable sinners. Oh maybe not miserable in the sense that we go around in a droopy sort of way, but with the connotation that when we compare the perfect holiness of God, with our shreds and patches of righteousness, then we are miserable, in the sense of worthy of pity. That's the meaning of miserable in the phrase miserable sinners, sinners who are worthy of pity, that's why in any understandable worship private or corporate, confession follows on the heels of adoration, in fact the very act of adoration causes confession, the prayer of penitence, here are a few lines from such a prayer, written between 150 and 50 BC, one in which Jesus would have given his information, it's known as the prayer of Manasseh, you'll find it in the Apocrypha, here are four lines from it: "My sins are more numerous "than the sands of the sea," "my transgressions are multiplied," "Lord they are multiplied," "I am unworthy to look up and see the height of heaven," "now therefore," "I bend the knee of my heart," "begging you for kindness." "I bend the knee of my heart," that is the fitting portion of the anatomy to bend, and yet, once again, something unexpected happens, just as our approach in adoration was halted by the remembrance of our sin, so our confessional withdrawal is brought up short by the remembrance that he is a God, who forgives sin, who has always kept the sinner in his love. This is the good news of many of the Psalms, of Hosea, of second Isaiah, of the parables of the lost sheep and the lost boy. We hear anew these comfortable words, comfortable in the sense that they make us spiritually strong again, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He didn't come to save those who thought they were righteous, he knew he couldn't, you can't save that kind of a person, he didn't come primarily to damn sinners, he knew he shouldn't, he came to save, salvation, salvos, it's the Latin word for health, he came to give spiritual help to

those who were in bad shape, and knew it and were sorry and troubled about it, that is the gospel. This Almighty all holy God is actually a God of goodwill, he has no desire to blast us, or to give us an inferiority complex, but wishes to adopt us, adopt us as his sons and daughters. And if one believes they know the reaction to it, a prayer of thanksgiving, thanksgiving for his mercy and his mercies, for his great goodness, and his good greatness, for his willingness to be interested literally, vitally interested in us. Forgiving us minds to know him, and hearts to love him, and wills to serve him. This is what we are thankful for as Christian students, but God has given us minds to seek after him until we know him. And hearts to feel after him until we love him, and then when we have done that, with joy we devote our self to his service, as engineers and nurses, as foresters and teachers, as doctors and librarians, and lawyers, and dieticians. If adoration leads to confession, then the remembrance that he is faithfully at work to forgive us our sins, leads to thanksgiving. Now, having recognized God worthily, withdrawn from him awkwardly, and return to him gratefully, we are ready for what? next? In appreciation for all God has done for us, it's time for us to remember others before him, in intercession. This prayer of intercession will tell what kind of Christians we are, do we pray only for folk like ourselves? to the effective exclusion of all others? oh Lord, bless me and my wife, brother John and his wife, us four, no more. Or do we pray for folk who neither love nor like us? because we remember, it can't always be easy for God to love or to like us, whom should we pray for in the University? the trustees? those unseen controllers of our destiny, who needs must be moribund stagnant and petrifying, because they pay little or no attention to our wishes for desegregation or longer vacations or bigger and better parking lots, yet we are supposed to pray for them, and love. And then there is the administration, that multitude of Deans, unpredictable, yet shrewder than we are, tough when we least expect it, and sometimes generous when we don't deserve it. The professors ought to be in our prayers, as well as in our implications, the dour stodgy ones, as well as the ones who never call the role, and occasionally let us out early. And let us remember the help, in the dorms, and the dining halls, from the campus who make this place livable, despite what so many of us do to abuse it and then, you know better about your fellow students than I, not only your fraternity brothers in Row Dammit Row, and the sisters in Triple Zeta, but those night owls who stage Song fests in the quadrangle at 3:30 AM and awaken the patients in the hospital, those who treat Myrtle Drive as if it were a 16 lane throughway, those who cannot understand East campus and so become literary misogynists, those who claim to be grown up, and cannot distinguish duties from rights in an honor system. They may not be the sons and daughters of God, but they are his creatures, and with understanding and humor, especially with humor, we remember them before God. And let us remember also, our fellow students, overseas, in Russia, and in China, in Poland, and in Hungary, in East and West Germany, in France, in Britain, in Africa and Asia and Australia, and in the Americas. Our families too deserve a place in our prayers The wealthy families who can afford to send us here but who strangely enough still miss us, and the poor families, who must do without so that we may have the privilege of a college education, let our prayers rise for them, for all of them, night and day. Well, when we have prayed for others, we have a right to pray for ourselves, we have the privilege of asking for anything which Jesus would put his okay upon: health, studies, dates, hopes, careers. There's one beautiful prayer of supplication often sung in this chapel: "God be in my head," "and in my understanding," "God be in mine eyes," "and in my looking," "God be in my mouth," "and in my speaking," "God be in my heart," "and in my thinking," "God be at mine end," "and at my departing." That's a 15th century English prayer worthy of committing to memory and using daily. Well there is only one prayer left in the gamut of prayer, an act of dedication or re-dedication, it's the giving of ourselves to God as his willing servants, here we often

present unto the oh lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies to be reasonable holy and lively sacrifice unto thee. We do it here in the University in our studies and in our leisure, in our eating and in our sleeping, in our down sitting and in our rising, in our coming in and our going out. He has made us for himself, he has a right to us, we give him his due, ourselves, and in return, he gives us himself, in the benediction, and the love of God, in Jesus Christ will be with us ever more. Adoration, confession, Thanksgiving, intercession, supplication, dedication, that is the gamut of prayer in private devotion or in corporate worship for our students and for all men. Well, what are we going to do with all this? here are two suggestions: try it privately, in the first instance, next time we pray, let us take enough time and give enough thought to working our way through from adoration to re-dedication, with the period of quiet at the end, while we await God's blessing, which is his answer. In addition, pray at all times, short arrow prayers: at breakfast, thanks for eggs and butter toast, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, simple as that, at the striking of the clock, Lord grant that my last hour may be my best hour. On entering the hospital, Lord help me to remember that there are no diseases, but only sick people. In the second place, demand this comprehensive grasp of prayer at all corporate services of worship, some of the edifices mentioned here are found in other forms in the University service of worship, the first hymn is normally one of adoration, the words of assurance remind us of the God who forgives, the offering should be symbolic re-dedication, but we have a right to expect at the great service that all those aspects will be recognized, on our behalf. In our introduction we talked about the value of the setting aside of a given day to record a particular emphasis, yet such a day is but a reminder of some truth that should be ever before us, as students, we ought to pray daily, as we need to be prayed for daily. There are various books of prayers which will help us in our private devotions, A S T Fisher's, An Anthology of Prayers for Use in School and Home, Student Prayer, published by the Student Christian Movement Press, but the one we ought to own, is John Bailey, a diary of private prayer, over 300,000 copies have been sold, each year I give away at least a dozen of them, it's a compilation of prayers for the morning and the evening, to cover one month of 31 days plus two prayers for Sunday. When John Bailey preached here at Duke two years ago, he met a group of 35 Duke folk in the afternoon, and of the 35, 20 brought copies of a Diary of Private Prayer for John Bailey's autograph. After signing, he shyly inquired, would you like to know how I came to write this book? And he told us, when John Bailey was professor of divinity in the University of Edinburgh, his son Ian, to whom the book is dedicated, had gone to Oxford for his undergraduate studies, he wrote his father that while he was well supplied with the resources for corporate worship, he did need some help in his own private periods of prayer. And his father began writing prayers for his son, dealing with the whole round of a man's relationship to his God and to his fellows, but praising the prayers especially for a student within an academic environment. His son saved those prayers during his four years at Oxford, and brought them back to his father, his father re-edited them, selected 64, and published them in this little volume, A Diary of Private Prayer. It was first published in 1936, and in Great Britain in 1956, it was in its 21st impression, that's not counting the American edition published by Scribner's, let me commend it to you, it will discipline our praying, pinpointing our confessions, nothing general about the confessions in here, they are particular, pinpointing our confessions, widening our intercessions, and deepening our supplications. People have told me that time after time this little book says what they want to say, but can't find the words to say, and they are so grateful for it, it vocalizes their desires. I think there's more than that to it. It suggests to us what we ought to pray and don't have the courage to pray. The right use of this little volume will make every day a day of prayer for students. And now Miss Sable will lead us in a prayer of dedication for students, and then you will receive the blessing of God,

let us stand.

- Oh God our heavenly Father, we commit ourselves into thy hands, commit ourselves to do what thou will and to desire thy desires, to serve when thou shalt stand up, and to be ready for thy call, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.