

Thoughts on Prayer, a personal journey:

Just before Easter we went to Spring Harvest at Skegness, where we were part of a group of over 50 from the Wellingborough Deanery. Spring Harvest is an annual assembly of diverse people, lay and ordained, who are at different stages of their journeys of belief and from different worship backgrounds. And it's led by the Bishops of Lewes and Willesden.

You can choose to listen to the core teaching material in one of three distinct styles, each relating to a radio station - Radio 2, Radio 4 or Edge FM. So there's something to suit everyone. And after a day of bible study, seminars and workshops, sport and leisure there's a choice of evening entertainment. We very much enjoyed listening to Adrian Plass (who's a somewhat irreverent humorist and an enthusiastic Christian). Some of you may have heard him.

Here are some examples of his humour.

Definition of Pillar of the church: (1) Person who is consistent and reliable in their commitment to the well-being of the congregation (2) Big thick thing that holds everything up and restricts vision.

"Pray and Display": special car park designed for use by modern Pharisees.

"Prayer of Humble Access": Definition (1) magnificently worded Anglican prayer offered immediately prior to the celebration of communion. Definition (2) pathetic request from a husband and father living under the yoke of a wife and teenage daughters, that the bathroom might possibly be free for him to enter and use at some indefinable point in the future.

When I'm listening to a speaker I like to make notes and looking back over my Spring Harvest notes I see that the very last thing I wrote and underlined was "We need more prayer".

Now this is something that I know I could be much better at than I am. Yes, over the years I prayed in church and last thing at night. But is prayer part of my every conscious and unconscious moment, is it my instant reaction to what is happening around me? Am I shot through like a stick of rock with the word 'prayer'. No. And as for praying out loud in a group situation - well, frankly that makes me uncomfortable. Well it did. I'm not saying I've cracked it completely, but I'm working at it. Why should I be worried about anything when God the Father loves me and is with me?

It doesn't matter if we feel angry, sad, happy, unworthy or inadequate, He **really** wants all of us to speak to Him as well as listen to Him. Looking back I can see the Holy Spirit gently nudging me along. Maybe we all have a particular prayer that means something to us. The prayer of St Teresa speaks to me - the one that goes: Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which must look out Christ's compassion on the world. Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which He is to bless men now. I believe that.

This is me, so I need this reminder that I have pinned up on the wall:

"I got up early one morning and rushed right into the day. I had so much to accomplish that I didn't have time to pray. Problems just tumbled about me and heavier became each task. Why doesn't God help me I wondered? He answered you didn't ask. I wanted to see joy and beauty, but the day toiled on, grey and bleak. I wondered why God didn't show me. He said but you didn't seek. I tried to come into God's presence. I used all my keys at the lock. God gently and lovingly chided, My child you didn't

knock. I woke up early this morning and paused before entering the day. I had so much to accomplish that I had to take time to pray.”

But why else pray? We all need time and space to contemplate and meditate, time to think about things that really matter. To start with I need to work continually on improving my relationship with God, because only in that way can I be the person He wants me to be and reflect His great love in the world.

But there are so many reasons to pray. They're summed up in the word A-C-T-S, where A is for adoration and praise for the greatness and power of Almighty God, C is confession and asking for forgiveness, T is for thanksgiving for God's goodness and S is for supplication where we ask God for what we want (or think we want!). You can use this format to bring what you want to say to God.

At Spring Harvest I met Sally. She used to be in a wheelchair because of ME, trying to cope with an autistic son and had come close to suicide. Her parish priest arranged a service of prayer for healing for her and at that service she got out of her wheelchair and walked. She now works for God.

OK this is a pretty dramatic answer to prayer and I'm not saying that prayer is always answered - at least not in the ways we expect. We may ask God to remove our problems and He may choose to do so, but we must recognize that often He will leave a problem and give us the strength and courage to deal with it. God will respond at the right time, and sometimes it's only when looking back that we can see that.

From his prison in Rome Paul was always writing to encourage the young church and in his letter to the Ephesians writes “Constantly ask God's help in prayer and pray always in the power of the Spirit. To this end keep watch and persevere, always interceding for all God's people.” Today's reading from Paul's letter to the Colossians teaches us how to pray for others. We can ask that they understand what God wants them to do, gain spiritual wisdom, honour and please God, produce every kind of good fruit, learn to know God better, be strengthened with His glorious power, have endurance and patience, be filled with joy and give thanks always.

As a people, as a church, we need to pray more. These are some of the things I try to do as I go through the day - use an arrow prayer (which is just a one line praise or appeal) in response to what I see around me - the beauty of the world, an ambulance going past, someone I meet or who passes me by. Before I knock on a door to say a prayer both for me and the person I'm visiting.

A Pastoral Assistant friend of mine in another parish told me she'd been feeling bad because she couldn't give as much time to her parish as she'd like, but then it hit her - what she could do was to pray - anywhere and everywhere. I pray with the Vicar and Gill Metcalfe, one of my fellow Pastoral Assistants, in this church in the middle of each week.

You could have a prayer partner or be part of a prayer triplet - who meet on a regular basis to support each other and the world in prayer. Did you know they exist here in this church? They do, but we can always do with more. Start your own, ask a friend. If you're a member of one of our church committees make sure that prayer is a part of each meeting you attend. Read about prayer, there are many excellent books on it and quite a number of them in our church's library. Some of them are listed on the handout you'll be given as you go out.

There's a prayer cross in the corner for anyone to pin their request on. And also a prayer box. The requests will be prayed for. Gill and I have produced a one month cycle of prayer for you to use in your own prayers.

Continuing our plan of 'growing together' we're going to hold fortnightly get-togethers in Church called "Powerhouse" whose purpose will be prayer. If you're at all interested please have a word with me or Gill or the Vicar with no obligation - or why not just come along - and I **promise** you won't be put 'on the spot'! We'll alternate between Tuesday evenings and afternoons. Dates are on the handout. Who knows what we could achieve. As it says in Jeremiah "Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord.'

Prayer should be our first resort, not our last - remember the stick of rock! If you look at the Gospels and count the number of times Jesus went off to pray, there are so many - because prayer was integral to his life. If we want to work towards being Christ-like we must be people of prayer - for if Christ needed to pray, why don't we? Amen.

*Sue Suter*

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