

Silent Reflections

Tuesday 26th August

Pray and Don't lose heart



Prayer is central in the life of the church . It is a key aspect of almost every act of worship in the shared life of the church and Christians are encouraged to develop their own prayer lives as an integral part of their devotion to God. Christian writers down the centuries have written much about the importance of prayer as a means of deepening our relationship with God and helping us to feel closer to Him.

Prayer can take many forms but perhaps the most common to many is intercession when particular people or situations are presented to God so that He may intervene in some way. During intercessions in church the congregation is often invited to respond to the words "Lord, in your mercy" with the words "Hear our prayer".

In simple terms, prayer is often seen as calling out to God for help in situations which are of concern to us now in our daily lives. These can be concerns about the state of our world, events in our national or local communities and also about people who are facing challenges which may be making their lives more difficult as a result. Sometimes prayer is offered that a person may come to know God for themselves. Whilst prayers don't usually include a request specifically expressed in words of "Lord please can this be sorted now" perhaps that might sometimes be inherent in the petition ? What might be the effect if a prayer request is presented repeatedly and there seems to be no change in the situation ?

Can you recall a time when you or someone you know offered a petition and received no "obvious" response. How did the person feel or respond?

The teaching of Jesus

Jesus encouraged his followers to be persistent in prayer - and don't lose heart. He told the following parable to illustrate this point.

The parable of the widow and the unjust judge - Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. ²He said, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. ³In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, "Grant me justice against my opponent." ⁴For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, "Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming." ' ⁶And the Lord said,

'Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? ⁸I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?'

In this parable Jesus presents an uncaring judge who respects neither God or his fellow human beings. He does not care if his judgements are right and just. He does not care about the people who come to him for help. He finds himself in a situation where a persistent widow is asking for help. He finally gives her a just decision not because he is a good man who wants to help her, but because she was persistent and he wanted her to leave him alone.

Jesus uses this parable to point out a profound truth - If the unjust judge would give the widow a just decision purely because of her persistence, how much more will the all just, merciful and loving God give to his followers if we persist in prayer?

In the stories of the saints we can see that they too were faced with challenges in this area. The feast day of St Monica is August 27th and her son Augustine of Hippo is celebrated on August 28th. She is respected as an example of someone who showed persistence in prayer throughout her life.

An example of persistence in prayer - St Monica mother of St Augustine of Hippo

Monica was a Christian woman who lived from 332-387AD. As a young woman she married a Roman pagan who had a violent temper. They had three children the oldest of whom was Augustine born in Africa in 354 AD. The picture on the cover depicts mother and son.

Life at home was not easy -chaos and fighting being frequent due to her husband's erratic behaviour. Monica wanted to raise her children in the Christian Faith but her husband refused.

When Augustine was seventeen years old he attended school in Carthage and became a student of Manichaeism, a form of Gnostic heresy. Augustine mocked Christianity and labelled it as ignorant and irrelevant.

Monica continued to pray for Augustine as she had throughout his life praying particularly for his conversion to Christianity. For many years there was no evidence that this was going to happen. After the death of her husband Monica followed Augustine to Rome and the Milan. In Milan they met St Ambrose who

was influential in bringing about the conversion of Augustine and finally Monica's prayer had been answered. Augustine was to become an important theologian and father of the church. He was to see his own painful process of returning to God as an instance of the return of the entire creation to God:-

" You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you " (St Augustine in "Confessions")

Monica died six months after Augustine's conversion.

What might we learn from the story of St Monica?

Monica's prayer for her son's conversion was her petition to God over many years. In her persistence she remained constant to that hope regardless of what she saw happening which may have made her question whether it would ever become a reality. Her story doesn't show how or if her faith wavered in that time. Her story is an example of how persistence in prayer was answered - by the grace of God **but** in **his** time.

For so many people the temptation is to give up on prayer when things do not seem to go the way they would choose.

Prayer - Being faithful when we are tempted to give up (from Prayers for Daily Living)

When we feel regret, shine your light on the path to a better way

When we feel anguish, touch us in our distress with fingertips of grace

When we are humiliated hold your cross before our eyes and remind us of the joy that was set before you as you bore such shame for us

When we are jaded refresh us with your living water, so that we, like Peter, may turn and find you are still calling us to love and serve you.

In your name, we pray, Lord Jesus. Amen

You may like to reflect on this prayer and consider how it may reflect on your own experience.

Practical help?

As Christians we are taught that all things are possible through the power of God. As Jesus told his disciples before He left them they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Christians often open prayers by saying "in the power of the Spirit we pray" and so it is His Spirit who provides the power to persist in prayer even when we feel discouraged or the answers to prayers seem delayed.

Perhaps with this focus of Spirit-empowered prayers we will not lose heart but rather have the endurance to persevere in praying to the God who is:-

"Able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think " Ephesians 3:20

A final thought.....

"The value of persistent prayer is not that He will hear us but that we will finally hear Him "

William McGill

Amen