

PASTROW BENEFICE YEAR OF PRAYER 2017

MARCH: WHAT IS PRAYER?

We know in human relationships that love and friendship are deep when we can enjoy the company of someone in silence. Words are not always needed to keep in touch. Prayer is not so much bombarding God with many words, but seeking a developing awareness of His presence and strengthening our relationship with Him. At its simplest, prayer is talking and listening to God.

In prayer we are not trying to impress God with our thoughts, but seeking to be more aware of His greatness, His nearness and His love. Within that awareness we can share our thanks, joys and concerns with Him in simple honesty. An old hymn begins with 'Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed.'

The Christian journey is from self and sin to God the Father, with Jesus as our companion and the Holy Spirit as our guide, through the experience of prayer. The Holy Spirit is our great helper in prayer, not least because He helps us to see the real needs of both others and ourselves. He also binds us together with all who seek to pray.

God would love us to develop a 'prayer habit', for example by finding encouragement to pray through daily Bible readings and reflections. However, Blaise Pascal, the French 17th century Christian philosopher and scientist, said, 'Most of man's troubles come from his inability to be still'. In our busy life, time to be still may be limited, but it can help sharpen our awareness of God's presence. We will become better listeners to both God and people when we are physically and mentally still.

We may have set times for prayer, but thoughts of others or stressful situations can pop up at any time of the day. Those offer us the opportunity to bring them to the Lord in short 'arrow prayers'. As we often sing, 'What a privilege to carry ev'rything to him in prayer' - anytime, anywhere.

We and others can benefit from the many prayer cards now available, and also from books about prayer and books of prayers written by others. There is nothing second best about 'hand-me-down' prayers; after all, the Lord's Prayer has been passed down to us over 2,000 years (*to be explored in more detail in May*).

Later in our Year of Prayer programme we will be thinking more about the different types of prayer. As a start, perhaps the simple mnemonic ACTS will help us remember an ideal sequence for our prayers, however long or short they may be:

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| A Adoration | Rejoicing in the wonder of God and His creation. Many hymns are prayers of adoration. 'How great thou art' must be one of the best. |
| C Confession | Telling God of wrong things done; of right things left undone; of seeking our way, rather than God's will; of ignoring the 'still small voice', the gentle divine nudge, because it's inconvenient; and so on. |
| T Thanksgiving | Thanks for God's forgiveness, for all Jesus means to us and did for us, for kindnesses received, and so on - the list is very long and can be added to daily. |
| S Supplication | Praying for others (intercessions) and for ourselves. 'The greatest gift we can give to others is our prayers' (author unknown). Normally we give gifts to people we know; the prayer gift has no limits. And it's not wrong to pray for ourselves; it's realistic, but not as a means for avoiding problems, rather for seeking God's grace and guidance to cope with them. |

A final thought from C.S.Lewis: 'Prayer does not change God; it changes me'.