

FINDING JOY IN OUR PRAYER : WEEK 7

Praying through the rhythm of daily prayer.

From the earliest of days, the Church has created patterns of prayers that pay attention to the coming of the day and the arrival of the night. In other words corporate prayers have been said at the beginning and at the end of each day as well as in the middle of the day.

For myself this has slowly become a habit that has developed not from effort on my part but from a slowly dawning realisation that I need to do it and that I am happier and more balanced in praying the daily rhythm, morning and night.

I gain huge encouragement from meeting with those who live in community because they do this so much better than any of us who do not live in community. The religious communities to whom I refer, whether they are monks or nuns, Franciscans or Benedictines etc, actually pray five times a day, morning, noon (twice), evening and bedtime. I also gain inspiration from the Celtic saints who probably prayed with the rhythm of the tides, praying as the tide reached its full and as it reached its low. What I so love about the religious communities is that they don't ask the question, 'Shall I go to pray?' or 'Shall I finish my e-mails and pray in twenty minutes?'...they just pray at the allotted time. It is never a question of when or if. When I go to a Franciscan friary for my annual retreat, they always arrive early (five minutes early) for each prayer time and they sit in silence before praying. They have already worked out who reads the different Bible readings or who leads the intercessions etc.

Similarly, the friars don't seem to notice or care if the chapel is full or not. There might be thirty guests or maybe there are no guests but they pray anyway. This is something I take into my pattern of prayer at Trinity College where I have undertaken to lead evening prayer every day at 5pm. I try not to be pleased if ten students arrive or be disappointed if no-one arrives. I focus on the corporate commitment of praying to God in the company of 'angels and archangels' and the number of people present is no longer the issue.

Possibly the person who has most helped me is Mother Theresa of Calcutta. She is best known for feeding the poor of Calcutta but she was also a prioress (a leader of a group of nuns) who led daily prayer. Her social care arose out of that prayer.

One of Mother Teresa's most recognized prayers came to be known as her "business card:" "The fruit of silence is prayer; the fruit of prayer is faith; the fruit of faith is love; the fruit of love is service; the fruit of service is peace." Many view these words as the secret to her success in ministry and her care for the poor.

I like these thoughts because they do not pit prayer against social action or against mission. Her routine in practice was....

- 4:30-5:00 Rise and get cleaned up
- 5:00-6:30 Prayers and Mass
- 6:30-8:00 Breakfast and cleanup
- 8:00-12:30 Work for the poor
- 12:30-2:30 Lunch and rest

- 2:30-3:00 Spiritual reading and meditation
- 3:00-3:15 Tea break
- 3:15-4:30 Adoration
- 4:30-7:30 Work for the poor
- 7:30-9:00 Dinner and clean up
- 9:00-9:45 Night prayers
- 9:45 Bedtime

This rule of life for Theresa allowed her to be highly effective, but she was still often criticised. I love her response to criticism....

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.

What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.

Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.

In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

For myself, I am fortunate to belong to a community that prays every day at Trinity College. We pray at 8.30 every morning and at 5pm every evening. The 8.30 prayer time is a requirement for all those training to be ordained into the Church of England. The 5pm prayer is optional.

We use the Common Worship Prayer Book to pray and this has a different service for morning and evening. It also has seasonal variations (for Lent, Easter, Common time, Advent and Christmas). When you pray these prayers daily, you become familiar with the changes in daily readings and psalms and the consistency of the liturgical framework (canticles and patterns). When I am not able to be at prayer, I use the Daily Prayer App in my car (or through ear buds on my bike) and so I sense that I am joining in with corporate prayer.

Howard Worsley 31st March (Easter) 2024