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The Eagle

The Season of Goodwill

Never mind a White Christmas we are having a White Advent with plenty of snow and as illustrated by the picture of the Rectory Porch very low temperatures.



As we move through Advent we prepare for the coming of our Lord at Christmas and we are reminded that the Birth of Our Lord Jesus is the greatest gift that we will ever receive. As we begin to think about what we will give to those we love this year, as Christians we also need to think of those who are alone, who have no one to give gifts to, or receive gifts from.

Many of us know people in that situation but fall short of actually making that first move of even saying hello, let alone offering the hand of Christian friendship. We just don't know how to break the ice! Pun fully intended. So why not use the cold weather to help, an excuse to say hello and make the offer of help and friendship. This edition of the Eagle has all the details of our Christmas Services so why not extend an invitation and perhaps offer a lift to our Carol Service, or any and all of our Christmas Celebrations.

I wish you a very Happy Christmas and a Blessed New Year.

Rector Cliff

What is prayer all about?

The answer to that question can be quite short or incredibly long. The short answer is quite brief. Prayer is conversation with God. That is true, however, like so much in life, it raises a great many other questions. These questions need to be answered before there is anything like satisfaction within us.



What I propose to do is to provide a slightly longer answer in this short article, looking very briefly at many aspects of prayer. If there is any response to this item, then over a number of articles, I will look at the aspects I mention at greater length and depth.

I imagine that the first question to be looked at is “Why pray?” One of the first things we learn as Christians is that the whole of God’s activity involving us comes from his overwhelming desire to love us. We can ignore that fact, but to do so will make us feel incredibly lonely. I don’t think we can survive such cold loneliness. The natural reaction to being loved, just for ourselves, as we are, warts and all, is to love in return. I am sure that great truth enabled Bishop John Taylor of Winchester to say these words, “It’s love, more than faith, that Jesus asks for. It’s love that he inspires, and faith grows out of that love.”

If we love someone we feel a desperate need to express that love in some way. The best way is to speak to them. So Prayer is a response to God and his love.

So far that is fairly simple. Now comes the part that everyone has trouble with, even someone as skilled in praying as Abbot Christopher Jamison. He is head of the Benedictine monastery at Worth, in Sussex, which featured in a recent remarkable television series entitled, without any attempt at originality, “The Monastery”. Abbot Jamison in his book “Finding Sanctuary” has written, “I have never found praying easy.”

If Abbott Jamison has never found it easy. then we should not be surprised to find that we have a similar experience.

So many people have told me that one of their problems is that they don't know what to say in their prayers, or how to say it. Anyone who uses a set liturgy in church services is tempted to think that their personal prayers should be composed rather like the prayers we use at services of Holy Communion. Actually our personal prayers should be in the normal language we use every day, not in the carefully composed committee creations that we have in our prayer books. Those prayers have taken a long time to write. When we speak to a friend we just let the words come out. Yes, such spontaneity does have drawbacks, but it is alive and it is the real person speaking, even if we may have to utter a retraction a few seconds or minutes later. God is our friend and he understands us much more than we realise. So let us treat him as we treat all our other friends.

When should we pray? Where should we pray? For how long should we pray? There is no correct answer to that first question. We should pray whenever we want to do it. We want to become good at it, so we should be doing it fairly frequently. The more often we do it the better at it do we become.

It is not always practical to do our praying in church. If you can manage that, marvelous! But we can pray anywhere, the whole world is God's world. It is advisable not to use any other form of prayer than what are known as arrow prayers when driving a car! If we can find somewhere quiet that is ideal. The question of how long we should do it for is tricky.

How long do we talk to our friends? For most of us the answer has to be, "As long as it takes!" Archbishop Temple was asked at least once about the length of time that we should pray privately. His answer was very revealing. "If you decide to pray for ten minutes," he said, "Spend the first nine minutes listening to God, you will find that if you do this then you will not have very much to say to God."

He makes the important point there that prayer is a conversation with God, so we should give him, the most important person in our relationship, the greater bulk of our available time. I have been asked what to do if God does not say anything to us. The prophet Elijah discovered at Horeb that the voice of God was a small, still voice. So we have to listen very carefully! It has to be admitted though that God will not always say something to us. But to be wrapped up in the presence and love of God for the greater part of our prayer time, has to be one of the greatest of gifts and benefits we can ever expect to receive in our lives.

From what I have just written it should come as no surprise when I write that there are two kinds of prayer, vocal and silent. Or if you like to put it this way, with words and without words.

Prayer with words can have many subdivisions. I will only mention the main sections. It is customary to have at least two prayer periods each day. Episcopalians find this to be quite natural for our official prayer books provide us with morning and evening prayer. We don't have to use these forms. We can make our own up. The great advantage in using the set forms is that we are spared the effort of creating our own. We will be guided to use the canticles, the psalms, a reading from the Old Testament and another one from the New Testament as well as appropriate prayers, day by day, week by week. In a year we will have read a large part of the bible, recited the canticles and psalms quite often and used the wonderful collection of collects. Getting the language of the Prayer Book and the scriptures into our hearts and minds can only be a good experience but it is not compulsory, unless you are an ordained minister, then you have no choice. It does take about twenty minutes for each session, but it is a wonderful discipline and quickly makes us really familiar with so many writings. This kind of praying is known as "Saying the Daily Office".

Most of the other methods of prayer using words fall into the category known as "Affective prayer". This involves the constant repetition of a short sentence or more. The idea is that saying these words or sentences continually lifts up our minds to another level in our consciousness and enables us to feel closer to God. In the Orthodox Churches, Greek,

Russian and Coptic, use of the 'Jesus' prayer is common. "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me", is slowly repeated many times. Some people have a favourite saying from Scripture which they use in the same way. It is this same idea, expressed in a rather more complicated way, that lies behind the idea of the Rosary. Using the 'Lord's Prayer', the 'Apostles Creed', the 'Hail Mary' and the 'Glory be', beads to count on and to keep our hands busy, the time is spent thinking about Our Lord's life. All of these methods have been worked out during the past centuries to help anyone who has experienced difficulty with prayer.

There is one other important method of prayer that uses words and that is meditation. This involves selecting a passage of scripture and using all one's mental skill to tease out as much of the meaning as is possible. Prayer without words is known as Contemplation and involves nothing more than time and a willingness to spend it in the sublime company of God himself.

Finally there is the kind of prayer that many think is the only kind of prayer there is, that is 'Intercession.' This is something we should do every day and basically involves asking God to provide others and ourselves with whatever we think is needed. Intercession involves quite a bit work from us if we are going to be systematic about it.

Finally, a little tip. When about to begin a time of prayer, spend a couple of minutes breathing deeply. Inhale slowly, filling the lungs as fully as possible, pause, and then exhale slowly, trying hard to get the last whisper of air out. Repeat several times. It helps to clear the mind and prepare the brain for prayer.

Father Ron Fleming



FROM THE REGISTERS

Recently we have said farewell to
Stanley Moseley



After a long struggle with cancer Stan died at the age of 80.
Stan's funeral was in Inverness on Monday 29th November.
May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

Loch Ness Challenge

It was a cold but bright morning when my son John and I set off from the Bucht Park. After a very short flat section along the canal the first climb of the day up to Dunain Hill gives a foretaste of the days climbs. At the top we were treated to a magnificent view of the snow-clad mountains to the north as we wound our way on single track towards Abriachan. A section of tarmac saw us bowling along briskly, the hum of the tyres lulling us into a false sense of security as we free-



wheeled down towards Loch Ness- far too near to the loch. Enquiring at a nearby house our fears were confirmed- we had missed the turn and had to retrace two miles back up the hill. Having regained the Great Glen Way it soon became apparent that my memory of the route was a little optimistic- it does indeed ascend and descend at the main towns en route but certainly is not flat between these points. From Abriachan the single track leads into forestry roads with long hard ascents but thrilling descents where the stopping power of the hydraulic disc brakes is more than useful. Then we were swooping down through the forest on the single track descent to Drumnadrochit, the trees a few inches away turning to a blur. Much needed mars bars were bought and it was off again on the; climb out of the town- not too steep but already my legs were aching a little. A similarly mixed section took us towards Invermoriston and our arranged meet with the support team (Dee and Michelle). The planned repast in the café with huge slices of cake did not materialise. It is the end of the season and everywhere is shut. Fortunately Dee had brought soup and sandwiches – a lifesaver.

Now for the last real off-road section to the head of the loch at Fort Augustus, commencing with a dramatic climb through forest to give wonderful views of Loch Ness. It was from this point on; that I was unable to stay with John on the hills, even though he was urging me on gently. Only very low gears allowed me to keep going and the tantalising view of the end of the loch did not seem to come any nearer. At last we found ourselves above the town and descended with relief to meet up again with Dee. A rest and massage from Michelle, and more food saw me recovered and after the steep climb to Foyers with the wind behind us we pedalled steadily towards our goal. However the hills and distance had taken their toll and as the light faded I decided to climb into the car, short of our starting point at Inverness but at the northern end of the Loch. Better start planning for my 70th.

Thank you all for your support which helped to raise £1000 for Highland Hospice.

Gareth



CHRISTMAS PUDDINGS, CAKES & PIES – orders are now being taken.

CHRISTMAS SERVICES - The choir have started rehearsals for services at Christmas. We will be pleased to see additional members over the next few weeks. Practices will take place on a Sunday morning at 9am (with the EXCEPTION of Sunday 12th December, when Sheila will be away). If possible a couple of additional practices will be fitted in before the Service of Lessons and Carols which takes place on Sunday 19th December.

TRAIDCRAFT STALL – the next sale is Sunday 5th December following the 10.00 am Service.

FELLOWSHIP GROUP - The December meeting of the Fellowship will be a meal at the Harbour Lights Cafe (Pitgaveny Quay: Lossiemouth Marina) on Monday 6th December, at 12.00 noon.

CHRISTIAN AID COFFEE MORNING - St Leonard's Church Hall, Forres on Saturday 11th December 10 am to 12 noon. Entry by minimum donation of £1.50 includes a mince pie! Please help support the poorest of the world's poor. It would be excellent to see as many of you there as possible as customers but offers of help on the day and contributions of baking would be most welcome, too. Please ring June Airey on 673667 if you can assist. Thank you.

CAROL SERVICE – Sunday 19th December at 7.00 pm, proceeds in aid of Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital.

BURNS SUPPER – Saturday 22nd January 2011.

AUCTION & PANCAKE PARTY – Tuesday 8th March 2011.

ST JOHN'S PRAYER CIRCLE – meets the first Monday in each month. Please speak to Barbara Fleming or Daphne Dann for details.

READERS ROTA

DATE	READER	OLD TESTAMENT	NEW TESTAMENT	GOSPEL
December 5 Advent 2	Handley Barrett	Isaiah 11.1-10	Romans 15.4-13	Matthew 3.1-12
December 12 Advent 3	Kirsteen Mitcalfe	Isaiah 35.1-10	James 5.7-10	Matthew 11.2-11
December 19 Advent 4	Gareth Whymant	Isaiah 7.10-16	Romans 1.1-7	Matthew 1.18-25
December 24 Midnight Mass	Anne Docherty	Isaiah 62.6-12	Titus 3.4-7	Luke 2.1-20
December 25 Christmas Day	Derek Bedford	Isaiah 52.7-10	Hebrews 1.1-12	John 1.1-14
December 26 St Stephen	Gill Horrocks	2 Chronicles 24.20-22	Acts 7. 51-60	Matthew 23.34-39
January 2 Christmas 2	Naomi Zair	Jeremiah 31.7-14	Ephesians 1.3-14	John 1.1- 18
January 6 Epiphany	Wiz Latham	Isaiah 60.1-6	Ephesians 3.1-12	Matthew 2.1-12
January 9 The Baptism of Christ	Sheila Biggs	Isaiah 42.1-9	Acts 10.34-43	Matthew 3.13-17
January 16 Epiphany 2	George Latham	Isaiah 49.1-7	1 Corinthians 1.1-9	John 1.29-42

This edition of the Eagle is available in full colour on St John's Website.

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