

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
24th July 2022 - 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year C): 1st: Genesis 18:20-32. Psalm: 137. 2nd: Colossians 2:12-14. **Gospel:** Luke 11:1-13.

Prayer we all know is fundamental to any religious person of whatever faith. The Catechism of the Catholic Church's definition of prayer, one of the best is 'Prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God' to which Cardinal Hume always added, '**trying**' to raise the heart and mind to God.

Today's readings tell us that God is an approachable God - both Father and friend. Prayer is about our heart and mind connecting. Like plugging in electrical appliance or logging on to the internet. It won't work unless we enable the connection to be made.

Prayer is a way of connecting to God, enabling us to communicate; to listen and to speak. It doesn't have to be complicated.

More than any other evangelist, St Luke describes Jesus as someone who prayed. He prays at the most important events of his life. He prays before decisions. Time and again we hear Jesus withdraws, often early to lonely places in order to pray to his Father.

When Luke writes about Jesus as someone who prays, he always has the believing Christian in view. For Luke prayer is above all a way of surmounting the tribulations in life. Just as Jesus surmounts his passion with prayer, so Christians are to persevere in prayer to God, in order to attain glory through all their tribulations.

Prayer is a way of practising Jesus' attitude and being permeated by his spirit. Luke describes in images the effect that Jesus prayer had. Jesus prays at his baptism, and while he is praying heaven opens above him.

For Jesus, prayer is the experience of heaven opening, of always being in contact with his Father when living here on earth, and on the basis of this relationship also being able to open heaven to others. Jesus prays before he calls his disciples. He prays to the Father on the Mount of Transfiguration, and his face becomes bright and shining. He also struggles in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, and only Luke tells us the struggle there for his life. He needed an angel to strengthen him, and then the struggle really started 'In his anguish he prayed even more earnestly, and his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood.'

He was afraid as we are, but faced his fear. The author to Hebrews says; 'During his life on earth, he offered up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears, to the one who had the power to save.'

What his prayer was putting himself at God's disposal; to yield to God's will, and being ready to obey it. In prayer Jesus found the strength to go his way to his passion, and his prayer there becomes a climax as again only Luke gives us his prayer: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

And his last breath is a prayer 'Father into your hands I commit my spirit.'

Even in death he cannot fall out of the security that prayer has given him all his life. No wonder his disciples ask, 'Lord teach us to pray.'

In his last few days on earth Cardinal Hume shared a meditation on the Our Father. It was he said like discovering its meaning for the very first time. 'It is only now I begin to glimpse how everything we need is contained right there in the Lord's own prayer. He then prayed the opening three sentences adding each time a tiny commentary of his own:

Our Father, who are in heaven hallowed by Thy name:

to sing the praises of God, it is for that for which we were made,
and it is for that which will be for all eternity, our greatest joy.

Thy Kingdom come:

the Gospel values of Jesus – justice, love and peace –
embraced throughout the world and in all their fullness.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven:

that is the only thing which really matters.

What God wants for us is what is best for us.

Cardinal Basil died before he said any more.

I only add the central phrase of the Lord's prayer is

Give us this day our daily bread:

The bread Jesus gives is himself in the Eucharist.

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