



GOSPEL GOSSIP

They asked Jesus, 'Teach us to pray.'

St Luke 11. 1-13

Sunday 27 July

The disciples approached Jesus with a simple request: Teach us to pray. In response, he taught them to pray in the words that we still use today – the Lord's Prayer, the only prayer which all Christians have in common. But Jesus goes on beyond merely giving a form of words. He provides the reason for praying and encouragement to do so. The English translations of his teaching lend themselves to a simply acronym: ASK; Ask, Search, Knock. These three things should be at the heart of prayer.

It goes without saying that part of prayer should be asking. Intercessory prayer – asking on behalf of something or somebody – is one element of the prayer we should offer. Searching? Well, many people don't know who to ask, and turn to all sorts of places and people. As a result, too often prayer is seen as a last resort, to be used when all else has failed. And knocking? Well, it's easy to shove a note through a letter box, but it takes more to knock and speak directly to the one at the door.

- Who or what do you first turn to when you are in need?
- Do you consider prayer a last resort?
- Is prayer a daily and natural part of your life?
- Are your prayers about yourself or others – or both?
- Are you prepared to listen as well as to talk?

Jesus reassures his listeners that anyone well disposed towards another is not likely to trick or short-change the request. And if they are not minded to listen out of love, then even the most hard-hearted will eventually acceded if perseverance is shown. Jesus reassures us that the Father loves us, whoever we are, and actually welcomes and answers prayer, although not always saying yes. It is hard to accept that as well as 'yes' other answers may include 'no' and 'not yet'. That is why we are told in the Lord's prayer to pray that 'thy will be done'. God is not a divine Mr Fix-It, or the one to sort out playground bullies on our behalf, but one who primarily demands respect as one 'who art in heaven', whose will is paramount and universal, and the supplier of all our needs. It is only when we can truly pray the Lord's Prayer, that is, accept and live it in its entirety, that we can be confident in our praying.

- Do you truly mean 'thy will be done' or are you actually more concerned about your own?
- How do you accept 'no' or 'not yet' as an answer?
- Are you accepting that our 'daily bread' is God's gift not your right?
- Is God's kingdom a future hope or a present reality?
- How serious are you in your request not to be led into 'temptation'?

The Lord's Prayer is not the sum total of our prayer, but it is the pinnacle. Prayer takes all manner of forms. Here another acronym may help: ACTS. Adoration – acknowledging and giving thanks to God as the almighty. Contrition – owning up to wrongdoing with honesty, confident of forgiveness. Thanksgiving – recognising all that God gives to us as individuals and as his creation. And only then, finally, Supplication – asking.

People still ask today, 'Teach us to pray'. And today the answer still is the Lord's prayer. Not just its recital, but its living. Perhaps we can focus on this by just spending a few minutes each day mulling over in our minds one phrase at a time, and being confident that when we do pray in accordance with the Lord's Prayer, come to know that whatever you ask will be given to you.