Prayer – Everyone, Everywhere!

Bishop Ruth’s Reflection transcript

I remember being taught a lesson in prayer by my 18-month-old son. He had few words but he could see I was in pain as I drew close to giving birth to his brother. As I bent double he placed his hand on my tummy and said ‘mummy…pray’. Despite my pain and even though prayer was a regular pattern in my life, it had never occurred to me. Yet here was a small child who had little language, who understood that prayer was as basic as breathing.

For me prayer isn’t a list of things to demand, or a ritual to engage in. It’s not ‘talking to’ or ‘at’ God, but rather a conversation I’ve entered into as part of that growing relationship between us. The image I have is one that comes right at the beginning of the Christian story, that of God with Adam and Eve in Eden in the cool of the day, walking with those made in his image, a conversation between the Creator and his creation. That’s how it all began. It was as natural as breathing.

The ‘conversation’ we know, got interrupted as the relationship was distorted. Guilt and embarrassment over their disobedience, caused a distancing between those early humans and their Creator God. And the story of redemption is about getting back to that easy, deep and fulfilling conversation between us and our Father, God.

As a child my parents instilled in me patterns for prayer. Simple thank you and please prayers at first, then, using the pneumonic ‘tcp’ – ‘thanks’, confession, petition… You may well have had similar experiences.

Much of my prayer was about words and I wonder if sometimes I’ve therefore focussed far too much on what I have to say to God rather than listening to what he might have to say to me!

Each day this week there will be different ways in which you can experiment with prayer, through reading the Bible, through play, through nature or art, through silence. You can hear the stories of others’ experience and try something new for yourself. I hope that at the end of the week, prayer might feel a little less frightening, or formulaic but rather more every-day, like breathing. And that your relationship with God might have deepened just that little bit.

Like many of us, I’ve read books on prayer but none of them have particularly helped me to get better at it. Yes, I’ve learnt some spiritual disciplines. Prayer, like any relationship takes working at. But that’s the point. Prayer is something you need to practice in order to grow in.

The title of one of the books on prayer has however stayed with me. ‘Gratefulness, the heart of prayer’. If there’s one thing I’ve learnt about prayer, it is to start from a place of gratitude. That’s why for me, the Ignation habit of ‘the Examen’ has been really helpful. Ending my day by looking back over it and noting those things for which I am grateful. Where have I seen God at work, glimpsed His grace, known His love? It’s not just positive thinking but rather a means of recognising God in my life and being thankful.

I don’t know what you might discover by the end of the week. I look forward to hearing your reflections on your prayer experiments as we gather online on Saturday. Remember prayer isn’t for the experts, for the religious but for everyone, everyone of us every day!

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