

Tuesday Reflection 17 August 2021

Random thoughts on prayer - concluded

I suppose that for me what prayer comes down to in the end is fostering relationships.

First and foremost it is about our relationship with God - which like all good relationships should be a two-way affair; for this prayer, we need the right language - and as St John of the Cross wrote, "God's first language is silence", which was expanded by the Trappist monk Thomas Keating: "Everything else is a poor translation. In order to understand this language, we must learn to be silent and rest in God". This brings us back to Our Lord's words: "When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray". More than one writer has suggested that 'your room' is in fact 'your heart', our innermost being, and that the prayer consists in the main of listening for what God might have to say to us.

Secondly, our prayerful reflection leads us to our relationship with our fellow humans and the whole of Creation and to realise that we are in communion with them, 'that we are one', that our welfare depends on theirs and theirs on us, and that we do not prioritise our wants over their needs. This is perhaps part of what Jesus meant in today's Gospel reading, when he told the rich young man to sell all his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor.

It is right and proper that we should pray for our fellow humans and the rest of Creation, but it seems to me that this kind of prayer also involves other kinds of action - I think it is for example a fairly empty gesture if we 'pray for' the victims of the recent earthquake in Haiti but do not at least, say, make out a cheque for UNICEF or one of the other relief agencies.

It is when we are truly in communion with our fellows - primarily I suppose with our sisters and brothers in Christ - that we can join in communal prayer, the culmination of which is the Eucharist, when we all join together in giving thanks to God for all the many blessings he has bestowed on us and remind ourselves of our responsibilities for the welfare of all life on this planet.

Michael Townson