

Prayer and a God of Love



In my last leaflet I described our Trinitarian God of love, not so much as a mysterious being (which God is), but as a loving active relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that is shared by God with us and all God's creation. If this is so, God surely loves us today and is present within everyone, whether we know it or not, ignore it or give thanks for it and let it influence our lives. Christians who believe in such a God, may find that their loving relationship with God can guide how they pray.

Above is a maple tree showing its leaves in their autumn beauty. Each leaf is distinct and partly shelters other leaves from the wind and sun. Maple trees are deciduous, but all their leaves are originally given life by the one tree and contribute to the beauty and function of the whole tree. In part, at least, the maple tree images how a Trinitarian God who is a relationship of love, is present in differing ways in all God's creation, while also uniting it and being its source of life.

Although we can never fully understand the being and loving activity of our Trinitarian God, such a God makes sense of our lives as human beings created by God out of love and related to one another in God.

Our revealing of God's love to others, may vary. We may find that we tend to reject or criticise those people who have different opinions and views from ourselves. If so, we are forgetting that all people are loved and cared about by God, and we are called to accept and respect them, perhaps learn from them, and certainly pray for them.

Prayer can take many forms, vocal, mental, emotional or physical, depending on us, and when and where we are praying. In this leaflet I will focus particularly on contemplative and intercessory prayer.

Contemplative prayer is a way of praying that can take place when we are silent, open, but not feeling empty. As Richard Rohr in 'Silent Compassion' p.25 explains, "Real silence moves you from knowing things to perceiving a presence that has a reality in itself." It may be described as resting in the conscious presence of God's love, and joining our love with that of God's. In this state, we may wish to vocalise prayers of adoration and love, but it is also an opportunity for us to be aware of the presence of God's love surrounding all and in all.

When deciding to enter this way of prayer, we may find that various thoughts about ourselves and others enter our minds. We can choose to step back from them, or put them aside for the present, and perhaps gently focus on a cross or icon while holding ourselves open to God's love. We might be guided by Colossians 3:3-4 where Paul writes about our life being, "hidden with Christ in God", or knowing that The Holy Spirit is living and acting within us.

After a time of silence, we may begin to think of people we know who are in need of healing and guidance, including ourselves. We are drawn to fulfil Jesus' command in John 13:34, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." Our prayer, being based on love, will then become not just for ourselves, family and friends, but even for our enemies or those we would prefer to avoid. God's Trinitarian love, is always inclusive.

When we are praying for others, we, or I at least, often do not know what to pray for to best help a person, or a situation. We may not know the whole picture, but we can surround the person with God's love and ask God to help or heal them in the way that God knows is best for their well-being. This is putting into practise the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "...your will be done, on

earth as in heaven...". Instead of telling God what to do, when God already knows what is needed, we let God act as God wills and use us to help. God's way may not be what we expect, but it will be the right way, even if it involves suffering.

Although prayer, be it contemplation or intercession, can result in peace and joy, we may need to pass through suffering on the way. Suffering and pain is not something to be desired, but as we see in Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, it is through love and suffering that healing and new life can and does emerge.

In John 11:28-35, Jesus met with Mary of Bethany and others who were grieving over the death of Lazarus, his friend and the brother of Mary and Martha. Jesus was deeply moved and wept along with the others who were weeping.

As followers of Jesus, we also often share the suffering of others, especially those we love. I believe that God who created the world out of love, also shares in the suffering and pain of the world and its inhabitants. So whether our prayer be contemplation, intercession, thanksgiving, asking for forgiveness or something else, it will have as its source and life the love and suffering of our God which are present in us and in all God's creation, uniting us together in God's love.

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