

'FIVE QUESTIONS ON PRAYER' - HOMILY 24 JULY 2016

Questions put to me about prayer -

1. Today's Gospel is from the Gospel of Luke. It is shorter than Mathew's account. Which do you prefer?

I like both. I like the familiarity with Matthew's version because it is closest to the form we pray at Mass, in the rosary, in communal prayer, in private prayer.

I like Luke's version for its reference to DAILY prayer.

And its CONTEXT has helped sustain me in my spirituality.

Context? Because it follows on from the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and the encounter of Jesus with Martha and her sister Mary.

The Good Samaritan parable challenges us to be inclusive, to act justly, to overcome fear, to break down prejudices, to respect each other.

It corrects the attitude of the priest and the Levi who walk by on the other side.

The parable calls us to be ACTIVE, SERVING, and FULL of COMPASSION.

The encounter of Jesus with Martha and Mary is also inclusive as Mary, and not only men, sit at the feet of Jesus, listening, as all Christian disciples are called to do.

Martha complains about Mary. So often we can do the right thing (offering Jesus hospitality) yet for impure motives (putting Mary down).

On a high, working long hours, surviving by adrenalin, sometime activists can burn out or miss the whole picture.

Their advocacy can be very important, yet we all need time to listen at the feet of Jesus, to be renewed.

That's why we are called to work with God, not for God.

Called to work with our neighbour, not for them.

There is Jesus on the final road to Jerusalem where he will face suffering and the cross, before rising from the dead.

He visits their house. Of course it is the TIME to LISTEN, to SIT at the Feet of JESUS.

Each day we too are invited to find some time to listen.

To invite Jesus to our house or flat or unit. To listen to him. To be Contemplative.

Having put both experiences together, ACTION and CONTEMPLATION, now the disciples want Jesus to teach them how to pray.

The 'Our Father' is a WAY of praying, not just a set prayer.

We bring our praise of God, we thank our God, we place our petitions, our need for the daily bread, our need to forgive others, our need for God to protect us from evil.

We include the extra petitions that Matthew includes.

Taking time to pray this way calls us to be Humble.

Following these three passages of Luke, we are asked to persevere, and to ask, to search and to knock. Searching and knocking suggest some time and energy is important.

I invite all to take time to ponder each section of the Our Father, before praying it. Open it up. Ask ourselves – how do we live out each step of praying over our day, over our week?

2. What do people ask you to pray for?

It is always a privilege to be asked by someone to pray.

People ask for prayers for many other people, for themselves and for special requests.

Sometimes they ask that I pray quietly for their intention, other times they ask others to pray also.

Public prayers for the sick, the recently deceased and memorial requests sometimes are printed in our parish newsletter so that others too can pray.

In preparation for class-masses, teachers can include special prayers concerning their classes.

Children have their own ways of expressing their prayers. They have a sense of wonder. Of thanking God for a sunny day, or a rainbow, or rain when it is too dry.

Children, more than adults, ask me to pray for their pets, and to ask God to help them care for their pets.

Before or after weekend Masses, people can ask a blessing for their birthday or wedding anniversary, or travel to come during the week.

Near the end of the year, some will ask for prayer for their study.

People expecting surgery or medical procedures or medical tests in the coming week might ask for prayer.

People who have recovered from surgery or from illness might ask me to join them in thanking God for the healing.

The Sacrament of Anointing is available on special occasions during the year, as well as before or after any Mass during the year, or by request.

It is a sacred moment when someone is anointed.

In all requests, the people are praying themselves first of all.

3. What do the local community pray for together?

According to Luke's Gospel, we pray daily.

Every Mass during the Eucharistic prayer, we include the Pope and the Bishop of the local diocese.

We pray for special intentions including those who have died.

During the Prayers of the Faithful, we pray for those who are sick, those who have died recently, for our sister communities in South Sudan and in Blackall in central Queensland, for vocations.

We hold bucket collections for South Sudan and more recently, also for drought affected Blackall. But collections are never enough. Prayer for them as a community is very important.

The last petition in the Prayers of the Faithful, is often a silent time where everyone is invited to pray for those people they would like to pray for in this Mass.

During weekday Masses, anyone can voice their intention respectfully at the prayers of the faithful. We take time to be inclusive.

4. What varies in the prayer from week to week?

Inspired by the "Our Father", we pray for ourselves, that we respond to God's will, that we forgive others, that we live in loving relationship with God and each other.

We pray for our children, and those over the next few weeks, as some prepare to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

On Friday we prayed on the Feast of Mary of Magdala for all women in ministry in the church, and for future ministries.

Last week we prayed for the forthcoming St Joseph's fete this weekend.

This week we thank God for the blessings we received at our fete.

In solidarity we prayed for the people of Nice in France and the people of Turkey.

On election weekend, we prayed that all members of our new Parliament would act with integrity, and act with justice and compassion.

We pray regularly for our new Iraqi and Syrian families as they settle into life on the Northside of Brisbane.

We pray at special times for our Indigenous brothers and sisters, for example, on the first weekend of July and the second weekend of July at the closure of NAIDOC.

We remember special nominated times during the year and bring them to prayer.

We pray for those who have suffered from domestic violence and church and institutional child and vulnerable adult abuse.

We pray for protection for the gift of life.

We pray for peace in our world, in our country and in our neighbourhood and families.

We respond in prayer when we hear of tragedies through the media and pray for those bringing healing and comfort and peace to that occasion.

On September 14th, we will join with others in Brisbane Archdiocese to pray for the Christians in particular, and for all people of Iraq.

September 14th, the Feast of Exaltation of the Cross, is the time when Archbishop Warda in northern Iraq asks the people of Brisbane Archdiocese to pray with them.

Other nations might have different prayer intentions, for example, the US Bishops are organising a national ‘Day of Prayer for Peace in Our Communities’ for the feast of St. Peter Claver, September 9. It is in response to recent racial tension and violent incidents.

5. Do you pray for others when you are not in church?

Last week I attended a regional meeting of social services, government agencies and community groups.

Vocal prayer was not on the agenda, but I still prayed silently to God for the meeting.

Seeing or reading the news on our mobile or on TV, do we take a moment to pray for people and situations that touch us?

Reading the newspaper, do we pray for someone mentioned?

After someone phones us, do we take a moment to pray for that person, or pray before we phone someone else?

If we are catching the train to the city for a meeting, it can be a wonderful opportunity to pray for all the people that I will meet that day.

Having a walk at the end of the day is a great time to pray for all the people whom we’ve met that day.

Washing up, doing the laundry, etc. can be an opportunity for praying for others or ourselves.

I have a chair at home where I love to sit and pray.

Praying in thanksgiving to God for so much.

Thanking God for our being loved by God.

May we grow in our love for God.

[Fr. Gerry Hefferan – ‘Five Questions On Prayer’ – 24 July 2016]

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/072416.cfm>]

[Parish Facebook post <http://tinyurl.com/j2o3qpg>]

*This printed homily is longer than normal. It is shortened for each Mass.