

Evensong: Second Sunday after Pentecost (Luke 11:1-13)

29/5/16

“Our Father who art in Heaven...”

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

The Lord’s Prayer, which we read in the Gospel this evening, is pivotal to the Christian faith as it encompasses all that we as Christians aspire to, both in this life and beyond. Theologians think that the final form of the prayer we have today in Luke was written about 80 AD. The prayer in Matthew was completed in approximately 85 AD and is the form used most in liturgy today.

While the two prayers in the Gospels vary slightly, this does not detract from the kerygmatic vitality of the spiritual message being conveyed. NT Wright suggests that the Lord’s Prayer is not so much a set of commands to us as followers of Christ, but rather to be seen as an invitation to lead a life of prayer with Jesus. He goes on to say that by partaking in the Lord’s Prayer, we are in essence participating in the Divine.

“He is present to celebrate with his people and to grieve with them, to give them his rich blessings and to rescue them from all ills, because he is also sovereign over heaven and earth, sea and dry land, all the powers of this world, and even over the urgings of the human heart. The Lord’s Prayer is an invitation to know this God and to share his innermost life.” (NT Wright)

It has been mooted that the Lord’s Prayer in itself is a reflection of how Jesus led his own personal prayer life. From a theological and liturgical point of view, the Lord’s Prayer takes its rightful place alongside the liturgy for Baptism and the Eucharist. The Lord’s Prayer helps us as Christians to bring together both the “Now” of the Kingdom of God, as well as the future Heaven that we all look forward to. In essence, the Lord’s Prayer is a bringing together of both a Realised and a Futuristic Eschatology.

There have been times in my life when I have found myself distanced from both God and the church. It has often been during these times that the Lord’s Prayer has somehow remained accessible to me. It is familiar. It is comforting. It somehow encapsulated my faith for me when I was unable to unpack my personal faith narrative for myself. This is the beauty of liturgy. We are carried forward and through our lives with the energy of the

liturgy. It becomes familiar, traditional, integrated in our souls, essentially part of our spiritual selves. It could therefore be argued that the Lord's Prayer was perhaps the beginning of all liturgies, a liturgy started by Jesus Himself. He was instructing His followers and disciples how to lead a disciplined and spirit-filled life. Jesus knew that spirituality needed to be rooted in prayer... hence the start of the Lord's Prayer.

Theologians think that essential parts of the Lord's Prayer were present in all of Jesus' sermons and when He spoke or addressed the people. As the final forms of the Prayer were only written long after the death of Jesus, the Gospel writers were able to recall the spiritual meanings, or annotations, that Jesus was delivering. This essence was eventually captured in the written forms of the Lord's Prayer that we have today.

Sadly there has been a global move over recent years to exclude the Lord's Prayer from all school life, as governments and schools seek to become faith neutral in their pedagogies. This becomes a real problem when young teenagers, whose only exposure to the church and the teachings of Jesus is through an elective subject at school, or the occasional visit from a cleric. It is not uncommon today for many young people to have no knowledge of the Lord's Prayer at all.

This is concerning.

It thus falls on our shoulders to ensure that somewhere, somehow, we ensure that the basics of Christianity are shared with the youth we come across. Jesus taught this Prayer for everyone. It encapsulates our daily lives, our struggles, our hopes and our desire to be one with the Father and with one another.

We are thus called as Christians to keep the Lord's Prayer central to our lives at all times. If a time comes when you find yourself unable to visit church, perhaps feeling angry with the church or just too tired to do your daily offices, rest on the Lords' Prayer. Make it your own. Embody it. Think it. Embrace it. Make it your life and it will carry you through to the other side until you are once again strong enough in the spirit to embrace the full Christian life.

Do you keep the Lord's Prayer central to your daily life with Him?

May God bless you in this week ahead as you reclaim the Lord's Prayer and make it once again central to your spiritual life.

In closing, let us now say the Lord's Prayer together with a renewed vigour and gratefulness for the incredible liturgy that our Lord left for us.

Our Father in heaven

hallowed be your Name

your kingdom come

your will be done

on earth as in heaven

Give us our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours

now and for ever.

Amen.