

Collects for Trinity 7

Here are two collects for this week.

You may like to use them both, or to use one on Sunday, and the other as a prayer to use throughout the week:

Lord of all power and might,
the author and giver of all good things:
graft in our hearts the love of your name,
increase in us true religion,
nourish us with all goodness,
and of your great mercy keep us in the same;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

Generous God,
you give us gifts and make them grow:
though our faith is small as mustard seed,
make it grow to your glory
and the flourishing of your kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Reading

This week's Reflection is based on the Epistle, Romans 8. 26 – end

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed

intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

‘For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.’

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Gospel reading can be found at Matthew 13.31-33 and 44-52 in your Bible

Reflection

How have you found praying during the time of the lockdown? Obviously, Sundays have been different, without the opportunity to attend worship with others in church, and no receiving of Holy Communion. Even now that services are being held again, you may not be able to attend, or may not feel it would be safe for you to do so. We do hope that following services from the sheets we have been sending round has felt meaningful to you, and that you have sensed that you are worshipping with others and in communion with God, even when you read the services alone.

But on other days? How has praying been for you? Have you just carried on as normal, ‘saying your prayers’ in the way you have for years, or have there been changes – even developments? Maybe, in that early stage of lockdown when everything seemed quieter – no roar of distant traffic, no planes in the sky - you found yourself being more aware of nature, and that became part of your praying. You might say, perhaps, that you became a bit more ‘contemplative’. Perhaps you have found material on the internet, on the Daily Hope phone line, or in books, you’ve had time to read, which has deepened, changed or expanded your ways of praying. With more time on your hands, it could be that you’ve been able to spend more time simply being aware of God. If there are new insights you’ve gained about praying, we’d love you to share them. We could put your ideas about how to deepen prayer on the St Mary’s website, to help others too, if you can send them to me. Please do, and don’t be shy. (Your thoughts could be contributed anonymously if you preferred.)

For those reading this who live with someone else, maybe you found new meaning in praying together. I know that Malcolm and I have revived something we had dropped- in our too busy lives - reading the church’s office of Evening Prayer together and interceding especially for our absent family,

and for people we know who were working on the front-line of medical care. We haven't done this every day, of the lockdown, but I'm glad that over all we've picked up the habit again, which somehow in our busy lives we had dropped. I hope we don't become too busy again to keep it going! Praying with others certainly helps ... *'Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst...'*, as Jesus said.

But, if you're reading this with a sinking heart, feeling you've not been good at praying during the lockdown, or haven't had the opportunities to grow in this way, or share with others, please don't despair. Difficult and disruptive times, loneliness and anxiety, can all lead to a state which is best described as 'discombobulation' (it's a real word in the dictionary – first noted in 1916); it describes that feeling of inner confusion and being thrown off kilter which comes from disruption to your life, or a sense of worry which it's hard to shake off. And it makes lots of things difficult, including praying. I think we've all experienced some degree of discombobulation over the last four months.

The good news is that when we're too discombobulated to feel that our prayer is getting anywhere – when it feels like effort that is wasted in distraction, when the words won't come and God seems far away – that's precisely the time that God's Holy Spirit is praying within us: As St Pau said in our reading: *'The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.'* (Romans 8.26,27).

What a wonderful thought! The very times when we feel we're failing in prayer may well be the times when, whether we feel it or not, we are closest to God! Our distracted minds, the inner sighs of our anxiety, our disjointed thoughts and words, all become part of the Holy Spirit's conversation with the Father, through the love of Jesus.

Never judge your prayer by how you feel about it. There's more going on than you think. This truth is part of the greater Gospel message, found at the end of today's Reading where St Paul, (who had been so much which must have discombobulated him) these words, which are worth engraving on our hearts:

'I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.' (Romans 8. 31)

Maggie Guite

Hymn (Gradual) O God, You Search Me

O, God, you search me, and you know me
All my thoughts lie open to your gaze
When I walk or lie down, you are before me
'Ever the maker and keeper of my days
You know my resting and my rising
You discern my purpose from afar
And with love everlasting, you besiege me
In ev'ry moment of life or death, you are

Before a word is on my tongue, Lord
You have known its meaning through and through
You are with me beyond my understanding
God of my present, my past and future, too

Although your Spirit is upon me
Still I search for shelter from your light
There is nowhere on Earth I can escape you
Even the darkness is radiant in your sight

For you created me and shaped me
Gave me life within my mother's womb
For the wonder of who I am, I praise you
Safe in your hands, all creation is made new

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Hymn (at Offertory)

1 Thine forever! God of love,
hear us from thy throne above;
thine forever may we be
here and in eternity.

2 Thine forever! O how blest
they who find in thee their rest!
Savior, Guardian, heavenly Friend,
O defend us to the end.

3 Thine forever! Lord of life,
shield us through our earthly strife;
thou, the Life, the Truth, the Way,
guide us to the realms of day.

4 Thine forever! Saviour, keep
these thy frail and trembling sheep,
safe alone beneath thy care,
let us all thy goodness share.

5 Thine forever! Thou our Guide,
all our wants by thee supplied,
all our sins by thee forgiven,
lead us, Lord, from earth to heaven.

Mary F. Maude, 1847