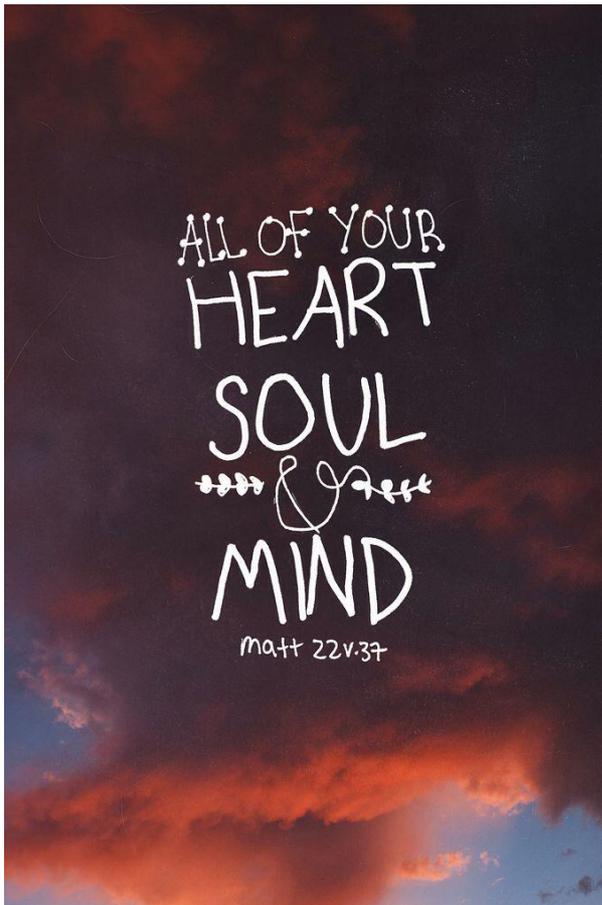


Monday 25th May

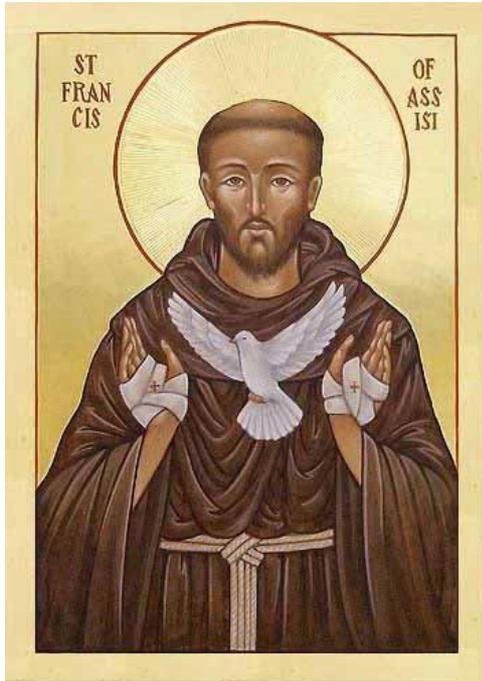


This week in our reflections I thought I'd share with you some of my favourite prayers; prayers which are skillful in language, insightful in their understanding of the human spirit and which draw us into a deeper truth about the character of God. It's important to say that we don't need fancy words to speak to God. We can pray with our own words, or with silence. We can pray through song or art or activity (perhaps lighting a candle, or walking a pilgrimage), but sometimes the words of others are of help. Allowing someone else to have done the 'crafting' of the prayer, frees us from stumbling around in poor attempts to express ourselves, and rather like a good poem, a good prayer gives us an insight into a truth that seems new, but somehow also we feel was within us all along.

The prayer for today is attributed to St. Benedict. It is a prayer that calls for the entirety of ourselves to be put to use in the quest for God. A reminder that faith calls for our intellect as much as our heart. The final petition telling that seeking God and proclaiming his love is a life's work. At this point of lockdown we may well be feeling impatient with the waiting, but St. Benedict reminds us in his words that a slow unfolding towards the end is sometimes what is required.

*O gracious and holy Father,
give us wisdom to perceive thee,
intelligence to understand thee,
diligence to seek thee,
patience to wait for thee, eyes to behold thee,
a heart to meditate upon thee and a life to proclaim thee;
through the power of the spirit of Jesus our Lord.
St. Benedict (480-543)*

Tuesday 26th May



Our prayer for today is one that some of you may recognize as a hymn. It is a prayer that is profoundly challenging. Often when we see the wrongs in the world we are moved to pray to God that he might change things, or change other people. Here this prayer is a recognition that we can 'be the change' that we so desire around us. Henri Nouwen (a priest and theologian of the last century) spoke of prayer as the unclenching of a fist. 'When we are invited to pray' he said 'we are asked to open our tightly clenched fists and give up our last coin'. St. Francis was a Christian who did exactly that. He gave up all wealth, to live a life of poverty and prayer. Here in his words we are invited to enter into that understanding that prayer is as much about changing ourselves as it is about changing anything else.

*Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved, as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen.
St Francis of Assisi (1182 – 1226)*

Wednesday 27th May 23



Some of us will know what it is like to lie awake in the early hours. That frustrating time of dearly wishing to be asleep, but our minds refusing to shut down. Sometimes it is anxiety or sorrow that keep us awake. Sometimes it is simply wakefulness for its own sake. But this prayer today reminds us that although we can feel alone at that time, we are not, there are many others who are lying awake with their own restlessness. I tend to think these early hours then are a good time to remember them and pray for all who 'wake, or watch, or weep'.

*3) Watch thou, dear Lord,
with those who wake, or watch, or weep tonight,
and give thine angels charge over those who sleep.
Tend thy sick ones, Lord Christ.
Rest thy weary ones.
Bless thy dying ones.
Soothe thy suffering ones.
Pity thine afflicted ones.
Shield thy joyous ones.
And all, for thy love's sake.
St. Augustine (354-430)*

Thursday 28th May



In this prayer we see a personal wrestle as the writer begins with a lament at their own incapacity to 'do'. The circumstances in which this was written I do not know, but its simplicity and starkness show to us an underlying void, as Mizuno Genza speaks from that place we perhaps all dread. Age, illness or disability is able to place each one of us, however active we believe we will always be, into a place of dependency. It is not always an easy transition. The Christian L'Arche communities, are places where people with profound

learning difficulties and physical disabilities live alongside those who are more able. However the existence of these communities has never been about those who give and those who receive, or those who can and those who can't, rather they grew out of a vision to acknowledge a mutual dependency of all human beings in relationship with one another. Here, this prayer expresses something of that. The writer turns from the acknowledgement of what can't be done, and turns rather to what can be done – and that is to be thankful. I remember a conversation I had with a bed-bound but wise woman who deliberately practised this art of thankfulness during long periods of ill health. 'I can be thankful for the cool sheets beneath me' she said 'and the tops of the trees I can see from the window.' This is the challenge Mizuno Genza gives to us in that final line 'just give thanks'. It is enough.

*I can do nothing
for my family
for people
or the Lord.
For the abundant love
of the Lord
of people
of my family
I just give thanks
just give thanks.
Mizuno Genza (20th century)*

Friday 29th May 20



Grief a 'creeping loathsome dark', 'a labyrinthic maze', 'iron gates of pain', this prayer-poem is obviously written from someone not shielded from the agony of loss and shattered hope.

The phrase 'Lord, I believe, help my unbelief' we first hear in Mark's gospel. It is the paradoxical cry of a father whose child is sick, in his plea to Jesus for the child's healing. It is perhaps something we also can understand, the fear of hope in despair, of wanting to believe in God's goodness but our battered hearts too terrified to contemplate being let down in our hopes again. Faith is trust – and often when we have been dragged into this dark maze of grief, trust that there is a world beyond it, and a light that will arise in it, is a deeply courageous act.

This prayer saw me through such an experience a number of years ago. I clutched to it, as Randle Manwaring became my companion walking, as it seemed, in the same labyrinth I was in. His belief, helped my unbelief, until I could see for myself the quiet dawn and healing sun.

*Lord, I believe, help my unbelief
For I believe in your deep love and mercy,
In your forgiving understanding
Of the human heart.
Through lonely watches of the spirit's night
Within the narrow tunnel of my grief,
I know a quiet dawn will come.
Tortured alone in the creeping loathsome dark
And dragged into a labyrinthic maze,
I still believe your healing sun
Will bring the birth of some new day
To break the iron gates of pain,
To bring life where hopes, broken, lie
Cripples among her ancient battlements;
Lord, I believe that there will surely be
Light, after the midnight burns to death.
Randle Manwaring (20th century)*

Saturday 30th May



There is an image of heaven that you may be familiar with of a ship that sets sail until she disappears over the horizon. As she leaves there are people gathered on the shore to wave her off, but as she disappears from their sight there is another shore where she is bade welcome. It's a useful picture I think, to remind us that there is much in life that we can't see, but that doesn't mean it doesn't exist. A child in a womb has no concept of the world outside, an ant in its colony does not comprehend the workings of the internet and we, who cannot see beyond this life, find it impossible to comprehend the next. That unknown can make loss a fearful time. This prayer however invites us to remember that nothing is lost with God. The uniting factor that holds both ourselves and our loved ones, is the eternal love of God. If we know this love, Charles Henry Brent asserts, then we somehow too remain close to the love of our dear ones too.

We give back to you, O God, those whom you gave to us. You did not lose them when you gave them to us, and we do not lose them by their return to you.

Your dear Son has taught us that life is eternal and that love cannot die. So death is only an horizon, and an horizon is only the limit of our sight.

Open our eyes to see more clearly, and draw us closer to you that we may know that we are closer to our loved ones, who are with you.

Charles Henry Brent (1862 – 1929)