

No.19.

4th February 2021

Dear Friends,

Last week we touched upon some of the difficulties in prayer. This week I have chosen an introduction to prayer from a book by a Canadian priest, Fr Ronald Rolheiser. I find it very helpful and hope, God willing, to continue with further extracts from his book in the weeks to come.

Each week a special prayer is part of the newsletter - usually a prayer which means something special to a member of our RCIA team. This week it is my own choice. Some years ago when my paternal Grandmother died at the age of 90 I had the sad duty of sorting out her effects. In her handbag I came across a prayer card. It is called the Confederate Soldier's prayer. My Grandmother had not had an easy life - especially as a young girl - and this made this prayer for me especially moving.

As ever I have included the Sunday Sermon by Bishop Barron - an especially important homily on why we should be disciples of Jesus - not just because of what he says or does, but because of who he is. As an extra I have added another sermon by Bishop Barron delivered on the occasion of the annual Requiem Mass for the Unborn on 30th January - especially relevant for the USA at the moment. I would urge you to stick with it.

Take care and God bless,

John de Waal.

Prayer Ronald Rolheiser

Spirituality is as real a science. But that is not easy to understand or believe. We live in a world where what is real has been reduced to what is physical, to what can be empirically measured, seen, touched, tasted and smelled. We live in a world that is for the most part spiritually tone-deaf ... And so prayer is a struggle. So are lots of things. When the surface is all there is, it is hard to be enchanted by any-

thing, to see depth, to be deeply touched by poetry, faith and love. But these are what we long for ...

Indeed we are made for love. We are made for intimacy with each other and with God. As St Augustine put it :”Thou hast made us for Thyself O Lord, and our hearts are restless ‘til they rest in Thee.” But the deep meaning of our longing is not always so obvious. Today most of us do not see our restless longing as pushing towards the infinite. We have trivialized and tamed our longing. Instead of longing for the transcendent, we anesthetize and distract ourselves by focusing our desires on the “good life”, on sex, on money, on success, and on whatever else we think everybody has. There is nothing inherently bad about these things but if we define our deepest longings as directed towards these things in themselves, we end up mostly disappointed and empty. Our disquiet persists and we remain restless, tired ...

Ultimately, our restless aching is a yearning for God. We need to connect with God. We know this in our more reflective moments and in our more desperate moments. It is then that we feel our need for prayer and try to get to that deep place. But given our lack of trust and lack of practice, we struggle to get there. We do not know how to pray or how to sustain ourselves in prayer. ...

There is no bad way to pray and there is no one starting point for prayer. All the great spiritual masters offer only one non-negotiable rule : You have show up for prayer and you have to show up regularly. Everything else is negotiable and respects your unique circumstances.

These reflections are intended to get you beyond some of your habitual struggles with prayer, so that it no longer feels as though you are simply doing some drab duty, wasting precious time, talking to a wall, entertaining yet another daydream, or simply rehashing your heartaches and headaches. The reflections will try to offer a healthy combination of consolation (everyone struggles with prayer) and challenge. Mostly, though, they will try to help open you so that in the most intimate part of yourself you can more clearly hear God and others say : “I love you!” For only that can make us whole.

There is a beautiful text in the Gospels that captures, in a stark metaphor,, our need for prayer. One morning, after Simon Peter, James and John have “toiled all night” and caught nothing - no fish, only their own emptiness - Jesus comes to them and invited them to go out to the deeper waters, “to put out into the deep”. They do, and they catch so many fish their boat begins to sink. (St Luke 5 : 1-7).

The reflections on prayer in this book are an invitation that echoes that invitation from Jesus: When we are catching nothing but our own emptiness, it is time to “put out into the deep.”

(From : “Prayer - our deepest longing” by Ronald Rolheiser).

A CONFEDERATE SOLDIER'S PRAYER

Author Unknown,

(Attributed to a battle weary soldier near the end of the Civil war).

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve;
I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.
I asked for health, that I might do greater things;
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.
I asked for riches, that I might be happy;
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men;
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life;
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for, but everything I hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.
I am among all men most richly blessed.

Bishop Robert Barron's Sunday Sermon.

This is about the readings from the 4th Sunday - including the Book of Deuteronomy and St Mark's Gospel and is chiefly about who Jesus is and his authority. Please click on the link below.

<https://youtu.be/Bz1GrJeAHfg>

This week I have included another Bishop Barron sermon - delivered for the annual pro-life Requiem Mass for the Unborn.

https://youtu.be/7qwQJMNj_Z0

Final Prayer - taken from Compline (the Night Prayer of the Church).

Antiphon. Save us, Lord, while we are awake; protect us while we sleep; that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with him in peace.

Nunc Dimittis.

At last, all-powerful Master,
you give leave to your servant
to go in peace, according to your promise.

For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared for all nations, the light to enlighten the Gentiles and give glory to Israel, your people.

Antiphon. Save us, Lord, while we are awake; protect us while we sleep; that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with him in peace.

A short time for silent prayer.

Concluding prayer.

Lord our God,
restore us again by the repose of sleep after the fatigue of our daily work; so that, continually renewed by your help, we may serve you in body and soul. Through Christ our Lord. Amen

Blessing. Lord, grant us a quiet night and a perfect end. Amen.

A final thought.

“Good parents give you two things : they give you roots, and they give you wings.”

(Lynn Jolly, The Path to Rome, p.12).