

Trinity 7, 2010
Twente & Nijmegen

Amos 8:1-12
Colossians 1:15-28
Luke 10:38-42

Time (for Worship and Prayer)

The Church of England's Canon Law C 24, titled 'Of priests having a cure of souls' says that 'Every priest having a cure of souls shall provide that, in the absence of reasonable hindrance, Morning and Evening Prayer daily ... shall be said [in the parish] of which he is the minister.' In practical terms, this means that the incumbent vicar says some form of morning or evening prayer every day, whether alone or with others. (And this does not preclude House Groups, Bible Study groups, Church Councils & others from doing the same.)

When I was at theological college at Durham University, provision was made for ordinands to attend or lead morning and evening prayer every day. We learned to lead both Common Worship and BCP Morning & Evening Prayer. We were obligated to attend MP at 8:00 Monday to Friday, and 3 EPs, as well as the Tuesday evening College Communion. If we did not come to services in college, we were expected to do some sort of prayers at home.

So, whether with others or alone, we were grounded in the habit of daily prayer. The Revd Steven Croft, our warden, now Bishop of Sheffield, told us, 'It may seem a burden now, but daily prayer will become something you will lean on in future.' He was right.

I was grateful some exceptions were granted. When Francisca was born, I did not have to subject to the pews or cold stone floors of St Mary-the-Less, our chapel, all 5 mornings of the work week.

The habit of daily prayer, though, is one of those yokes which has become light. Besides, Anglican clergy have it easy compared to the Benedictines, who traditionally had 8 times of daily prayer: *Horarium* at midnight with the 'office', of *Matins*, followed by the morning office of *Lauds* at 3am. (Before candles were invented in the 14th century, monks would say this office in the dark, doing it from memory.) They'd

sleep a bit then rise at 6am to attend the office of *Prime*. They then gathered in *Chapter* to receive instructions for the day and to attend to any judicial business. Then came private Mass or spiritual reading or work until 9am when the office of *Terce* was said, and then High Mass. At noon came the office of *Sext* and the midday meal. After some recreation, the monk could retire to rest until the office of *None* at 3pm. This was followed by manual labor until after twilight, the evening prayer of *Vespers* at 6pm, then the night prayer of *Compline* at 9pm, and off to blessed bed before beginning the cycle again.

Archbishop Cranmer, the main author of the C of E's 1662 Prayer Book, cut the daily offices down to Morning and Evening Prayer (though many also do Compline).

I bring all this up not to impress you with clergy diligence. Far from it. In fact, we find it just as easy to be drawn away from our duty to pray by pastoral and administrative demands as any other working people get distracted by comparable things. But prayer and worship are supposed to be central, if not the most important, work we do.

Worth remembering because of our general tendency to be Marthas rather than Marys.

Bishop Geoffrey has often said that in the battle between work and prayer, work usually wins out because it is easier. It is far easier to be obedient to the demands of clients or, if you work in a household, the demands of family, than it is to be obedient to the call of God on our time. Though those other things are urgent and often important as well, we will be distracted and defeated by them if we lose touch with God.

God created time. Even he determined to have a rest day to reflect on what he had made and give thanks, for it was good. Why do we find it so hard to do this?

I'm sure virtually every one of us here has lots of urgent things we could be doing at this very moment, instead of gathering for worship. But if we do not worship the creator of time, if we do not pray for comfort,

wisdom and guidance, then we will misspend the rest of our time.

Coming to worship and also taking time out to rest at the feet of Jesus in our daily prayer are bold and courageous things to do in today's world. But they are also liberating. Prayer and worship are the sources of our power, our capacity to cope with the rest of our workaday lives. They replenish our faith and refresh our souls.

Bishop Tom Wright, the world-renowned biblical scholar who also finds time to bishop one of the largest Dioceses in England and has a family, too, once challenged a group of newly ordained curates. He said something like: 'Commit to daily prayer, morning and evening. Because if you shun the main source of energy and inspiration and support that God gives, you should not be surprised if you run out of steam, get depressed, or lose your way that day.'

From another great mind, I quote this – see if you can guess who said it: 'Prayer has saved my life. I had my share of the bitterest public and private experiences. They threw me into temporary despair. If I was able to get rid of that despair it was because of prayer... And as time went on my faith in God increased and more irresistible became the yearning for prayer. Life seemed dull and vacant without it. In spite of despair staring me in the face..., I have never lost my peace... That peace comes from prayer. Let everyone try and find that as a result of daily prayer he adds something new to his life.' Which Christian saint? A non-Christian one: Mahatma Ghandi.

Jesus looked at Martha, the indignant, hard-working, and no doubt well-meaning sister, and said plainly, 'Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.' Mary had discovered the source of all power, and determined to sit at his feet and listen.

So now I will be quiet. And allow you to re-read that hymn of praise Paul wrote in Colossians 1:15-23. Take time to ponder the wonders of Christ, and what He means to you, and why coming to Him in prayer and in worship matters so much.