

Vicar's Letter #20: 27 August, 2020

Gratefulness and prayer

Dear Parishioners

Most of us during these days of lockdown have the opportunity to slow down a little and to live in a more contemplative, unhurried mode. Some will be facing particular challenges made more difficult by the lockdown. But on a more day to day level, for those of us who are able, an attitude of gratefulness is something we can aim to develop. There are many things to be grateful for - the peace that comes in the stillness, the beautiful songs of the birds, the people who love and support us, the chance to spend more time praying or doing other life-giving things, and so on.

It is important that we notice these good things and give thanks to God for them. We will be aware of several reasons for doing this. First, it is right to do so. Ultimately all good things come from God. As the writer of the Epistle of James says in this Sunday's reading, "Every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17).

It is also helpful to recognise God's goodness and give thanks for it, because as human beings we can tend to focus on problems and difficulties - the things in our lives that are not working very well. If our worries 'fill our screen' they can cause us to lose sight of the many blessings we have been given, and this can rob us of joy or even affect our emotional health. The most fundamental truth in our lives is not the problems we face, but the love and goodness of God who created us and all beings. If we feel troubled by the issues of our life or worried about the future, we can turn our minds actively to the blessings that God brings into our lives every day, and thank God for them with grateful hearts.

A third reason for intentionally thanking God is that it builds our relationship with God and our love for God. Noticing the blessings we have received and thanking God for them creates layer upon layer of thankfulness within us. It becomes part of our prayer and part of our lives.

This week I invite you to notice the blessings that surround you and then to respond to God with words of thanks. "Blessed are you, God, for the singing of the birds." "Thank you, God, for the time I have to sit still." "Thank you for my friend's thoughtfulness in contacting me." I guarantee that if you make a regular practice of this over the week, you will feel closer to God and more aware of God's goodness to you at the end. And a heart that is full of gratefulness to God is a secure heart.

In fact, this invitation is not only for those who are doing less at the moment, because however busy you are, you can still find moments in the day when you can stop for a minute or two to be still, to relax, to breathe deeply, and to give thanks to God. If you are really busy, one idea is to set an alarm to ring at a time or times you choose, and pause for a few moments then to be aware of God's goodness, and to bless and thank God for God's blessings to you.

As the Psalmist says again and again in Psalm 136, "God's love endures forever." In the week ahead, let's notice the evidence of God's love that surrounds us. And together with all God's creatures, let's give to our God our thanks and praise.

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