

After Jesus' Ascension what did those friends of his do?

We are told by Luke, writing in Acts 1:14, that a main characteristic of their life together was that "they all joined together constantly in prayer." His *physical* presence with them had ceased. But, nonetheless, it became clear to his friends, in a variety of ways (spoken of by Paul in his letters and Luke in the Acts of the Apostles), that he **was still present**. The Ascension points to a radical transformation of their experience of Jesus' presence – from being 'here' to being 'everywhere'. And so they prayed, to relate to him everywhere, that is, to relate to him spiritually. A bit like we did at communion on Thursday.

For us, here, during the lockdown certainties have been shaken, and turned upside down. Who can you trust? Where's it all leading?

I notice on social media that people have been wanting to know more about prayer. Amongst many others, Russell Brand has rapped online about the importance of prayer. It's suddenly become to 'go to' priority.

That's good! As fellow-learners about praying, not experts (all of us who try to pray never, ever become so good at it that we can remove our L plates!) you and I have a few things we can share with others. – Don't be shy of doing so! I'll give you some examples – but you will have to try it, and 'make it yours' for it to be authentic. But – don't be shy of sharing! This what people are asking for.

Okay. Well, of course, the first thing to say is that we **already have** prayer at the heart of what we're about. That is because, God is the spirit of life – the very life-force within each of us, and the whole cosmos – and God prays, kinda lovingly and gently murmuring his love to us, **all the time**, within each of us.

That prayer of God within us is no mechanical process – kinda, switch on, switch off - any more than trying to understand and relate positively to another person can ever be mechanical or easy. For sure, God doesn't change; but **we do** – *all the time!* Don't be surprised, therefore, that all the sudden and unexpected change we are experiencing at the moment leaves us, just sometimes, so emotionally volatile and disorientated that we find it hard to pray – in the same way as **all** of our close relationships are under stress – (you probably didn't need me to tell you that! Sadly, it's where we are.)

Therefore, it's even more important, under these volatile circumstances, that we remember the unchangeability of the heart of God. That is: God wants to connect us to love – quite simply, the source of life – and God prays within us as love, beckoning, pushing, steering us towards love; albeit, God never forces the issue, because, as we know, love doesn't force the issue.

Prayer, then, is a relationship with God that exists all the time, but needs our 'yes' for it to be mutual; and, importantly, although it's there all the time, it needs drawing into specific creative focus.

Take an imperfect parallel. You can be with a loving partner or close family member *all the time*; **but** if the two of you never take time out to draw what you are about into creative focus then you're on a low level relationship – barely functional! There needs to be time for mutual listening and even a bit of fun.

So it is with God.

Okay, you say: – “That’s the theory, what about the practice? Any ideas?”

You bet I have!

- A. Regularity – 20/30 mins 2/3 times each week.
- B. Be at ease: not tense, but not asleep. Sitting can be good, with both feet on the ground – find what works for you.
- C. Focus yourself: Maybe visual – icon, cross, candle
Maybe musical
Explicitly dedicate the time to God – asking the Holy Spirit to come in
The Lord’s Prayer
ACTS (Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving, Supplication)
- D. Sit through a quite long period of everything whizzing and whirring about in your mind and heart. Don’t worry about it, nor try to control it. It is you, as you really are, before God. And it will settle.
- E. Sit through a quite long period of slower motion grinding-over and over deeper lying issues which come to the surface. Sit there. There is no easy resolution to these concerns. Sit there with God. If you have an icon or cross, in your imagination, you look at Jesus, and he looks back at you – in love!
- F. Sit – in peace – and relish it. We are touched by eternal life and ‘the peace that passes understanding’.

This is what St John, in our Gospel reading, records Jesus as affirming to God that eternal life is, “that they may know you.” That’s what it’s all about. Relationship!

In this way, we begin to touch on the great truth of us as loving creations of God, - as Jesus said to God, “All that I have is yours, and all you have is mine.”

When you reach that point in your prayers, thank God fervently for this, and say the Grace. I hope that helps. It’s not a magic formula – because there isn’t one – but it’s about providing the conditions, over a lifetime, out of which a relationship can grow.

Relationships grow well out of gratitude – so, a prayer of gratitude directly from each of us, if we will, to God. Let’s pray:

Thank you.

I dwell upon the goodness in my life.

Thank you.

I cherish in my heart your gift to me.

Thank you.

I notice the blessings of life, breath, loving and sharing.

I am so very grateful.

Thank you, Lord. Amen.