

ADDRESS

Christ the King

The Bishop of Durham

I speak in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ the father of glory may give you. Here is the wonderful truth:

When we pray, we are communing with God the Father of glory. What a privilege. What an enormous reality. Prayer is not speaking into thin air, but being with God. We are in the presence of Christ the King, the one who is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named. So in the current call for prayer for the nation, we are not stopping for five minutes at 6:00 p.m. each day to whistle in the wind.

We are rather standing for our nation before the King of all creation. We heard from our interviewees, Noah, Lucinda and Nicholas, that prayer is not always easy. They have had extra challenges, felt disconnected, alone, they've lost sight of God and asked new questions during this period of the pandemic. Yet in these difficulties they have each discovered fresh realities about prayer. They have found calm, the value of the Psalms, and new ways to pray, particularly, outside. They have discovered more about being with God and God being with them intimately.

Phil reflected for us on four tips, pause, rejoice, ask, yield. In prayer, we can be ourselves. We express our sorrow and contrition for our own and our humanity's sin. We call out in thanksgiving and praise for the wonders of God's creation and love seen supremely in Jesus Christ. We lament at the pain and suffering we see. We cry out 'how long, Oh Lord'? When God seems absent, inactive, indifferent. We bring to God our requests. We intercede for others and for ourselves. But above all in prayer, we place ourselves in God's presence and offer ourselves to this God of glory. This God who is the loving shepherd of his people. As we simply are in God's presence, so our loving just shepherd changes us. God gives us a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.

God opens our eyes to the hope to which He has called us. This changes us to be ever more Jesus shaped. God does this with us as individuals. God does this with us together as the family, the body, the household, the sheepfold of God. God helps us learn in faith as we trust Him. I was really struck recently by a reflection in CMS Magazine, The Call.

It was written by M locked down with their family in Oxford awaiting their return to their home in North Africa. They write, 'somehow it means resting in the fact that God knows what is going on that although the consequences of this virus are terrible, God's greater purposes are not thwarted. Somehow, He is shaking us out of our busy, comfortable lives and making us all face the unknown.

Faced with this mystery, it's been hard even to pray'. I'd always thought that prayer is about getting God to act and asking for things, isn't it? God, I don't even know what to pray. All I can do is mutter a feeble, "help". As the days of COVID-19 go on and the uncertainties mount in the silence, I hear a still small voice whispering back again and again, 'be still and know that I am God'. Be still, I am. Be. Learning in faith. Whether you are a school pupil, a student, in training, an office worker, a waiter, an actor, a teacher, retired or whatever else, learning in faith is at its heart learning to know God more deeply. It is a lifetime's and an eternities calling. Prayer is core to this and the core of prayer is being with God. We have the enormous privilege and gift in prayer of being with Christ the King.