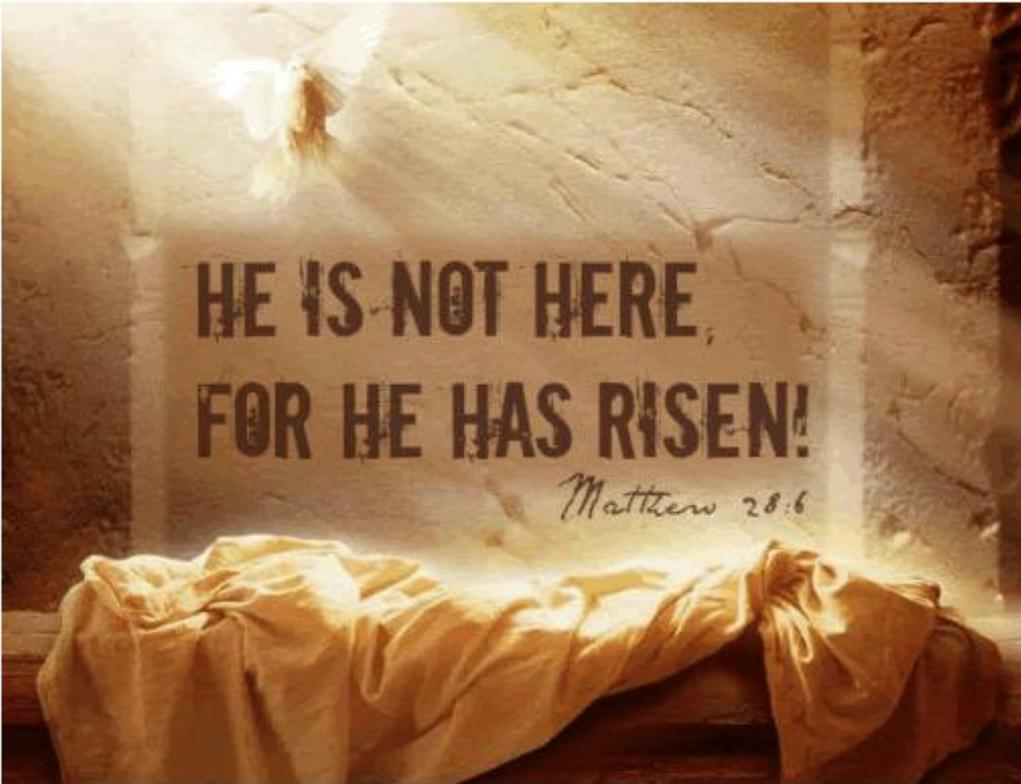




The Mar Thoma

ECHO



A Publication of the Council of Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe



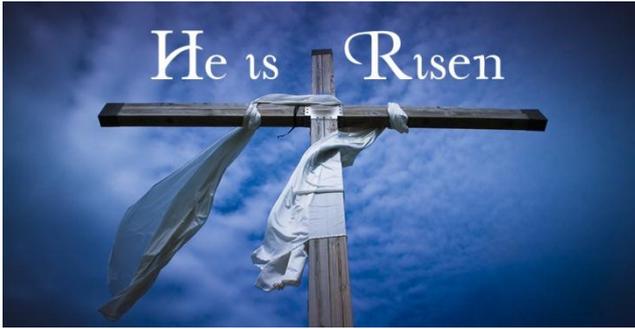


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Message from Diocesan Episcopa



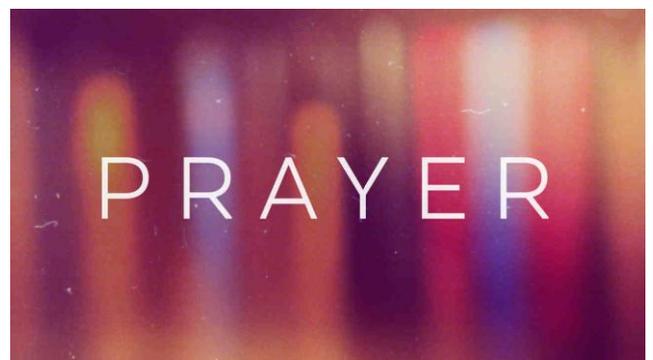
Dearly beloved in Christ

Greetings from *Sinai MarThoma Center!*

The Christians all over the world is observing the Great Lent remembering the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross to save the humanity from the bondage of sin. It also brings the hope and joy of resurrection where the eternal presence of the risen Christ is experienced with renewal and everlasting life. The prayer and fasting especially during lent season is oriented to develop a disciplined life with devotion and spiritual growth. The need to keep the relation with the creator God and to enrich that relationship is vital in our spiritual journey. Often the worldly desires tend to create disconnect to the bond of relationship with the Divine; we may call it sin or estrangement. Prayer life will stimulate in us the longing for the Divine and also help in creating a sense of commitment to God, discerning the will of God. Jesus practiced the prayer life all through his ministry. To keep the relation to the Father by doing His will and obeying His wish was made possible through the prayer

life which strengthened him at every moment of his earthly life. Whether in solitude, at the mountain top or in the desert and even at Gethsemane, Jesus kept the core value of prayer that strengthened him on his way to the cross for giving up his life for the salvation of humanity. That is the model for the church to follow in keeping its prayer life.

The disciples at a certain point ask Jesus to teach them how to pray. The Lord's Prayer that we recite gives us some guideline for our prayers; how to pray and what to pray. As a community of faithful we follow personal prayer for the self as well as interceding for others. Prayer is power and the worshipping community needs to pray for the world and for all human beings. In the early church the faith community experienced power through prayer, and in the present time the gatherings of people in prayer have significant value. Only a praying church can experience the Divine power to face the challenges and temptations that destroy the bond of relationship and mutual fellowship among people in the world. It becomes a means to listen to the voice of God and respond to the needs of the people. Let our prayer life bring peace and hope to all those who are distressed and perplexed. Let God's abundant grace and blessings be showered on all of us.



With prayerful hearts we come to the throne of grace for renewed strength as Mar Thoma

community in UK & Europe. Let us thank God for the blessings that we received and the Divine guidance we experience in the life of the church. We are happy to note that the long cherished dream of the Mar Thoma community in United Kingdom and Europe found its fulfillment with the formation of a Zone from January, 1, 2018, the first Zonal Assembly meeting on February, 10, 2018 and the official inauguration to be held in June 2018.

I am happy that ECHO continues to inspire the minds of faithful through the messages and spiritual insights. Appreciate the commitment and leadership of the editorial board that make it possible to carry on this special task. I wish to express my appreciation to the editorial board for the service rendered. Pray that the insights and information passed through ECHO be useful and challenging to all.

With prayerful regards,

Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos

Diocesan Bishop

PRAYER IS
THE MOST
IMPORTANT
CONVERSATION
OF YOUR DAY.
TAKE IT TO GOD
BEFORE YOU
TAKE IT TO
ANYONE ELSE!



Editorial

The Marks of Discipleship

“I pray each day, I talk to Jesus, I live with Jesus, I want to be like Jesus, I want to learn from Jesus, Jesus and me are always together” (Archbishop Desmond Tutu).



The above short, down to earth and most sincere bio-data of Archbishop Desmond Tutu is the true marks of discipleship and leadership in the church. St. Paul had to fight for his role as an apostle; he defended his qualification as an apostle of Christ in his pastoral letters. He sets out a job description for his apostleship in his first letter to the Corinthians; it is a model for those who would like to serve God in the church as servant leaders (1Cor. 4: 1-21). It says that they must be faithful (v 2), have a clear conscience before God (v 4), have a high view of Scripture (v 6), recognise that their gifts are given to them by the Lord (v 7), be willing to suffer (v 11), be hardworking to raise their own subsistence (v 12), be forgiving, enduring and kind (v 12), and even be willing to be treated as the scum of the earth (v 13)!

St. Paul indicated three important aspects of his leadership role, which is relevant us to us when we begin to build an independent Zone of the Mar Thoma Church in the United Kingdom and Europe. He had three

strategies in establishing churches during his missionary journeys: 1. Establishing local leadership and structures (Acts 14: 21-23); 2. Facing Challenges with courage (2 Cor. 12: 11-13); 3. Trouble-shooting (Col. 2: 1-5). It is good to study these texts to understand the tasks ahead of us for building leaderships for a strong and viable faith community in the UK and Europe through ‘The Council of the Mar Thoma Churches in Europe (COMPE). God has also prepared us over the last nine years through the COMPE and the last five years through its publication, ‘The Mar Thoma ECHO’. We congratulate and thank everyone who helped us and blessed us for reaching this stage in the life of our community.

St. Paul feels his own lack of status and respect quite keenly (vs 9–13). At several places in his letters Paul regards himself as an example to others, not only in what he teaches, but also in how he lives, and in the way that he suffers and accepts hardship and contempt for his Christian service. Paul treads a very tricky line. He doesn’t want to draw attention to his own accomplishments, but he does want the Corinthian Christians to take him seriously and learn from him (vs 15–17). In light of this, how important do we think the personal behaviour of Christian leaders is? To what extent have we had such bitter experiences in building a Christian community in the UK? Let us take time to reflect on them in the light of Paul’s words, experiences and his feelings. Let us reflect on our feelings and express them to God in prayer. With the formation of an independent Zone of the Church here, God has given us a fresh opportunity to think about all aspects of community building with love in Christ. The whole character of Christian existence is an existence in Christ.

In Pauline letters the phrase ‘in Christ or *En Christo*’ is one of his favourites. He used the same idea in his famous discourse to Greeks and their scholars in his Areopagus oration; **“For in him we live and move and have our being”** (Acts 17: 28).

St. Paul famously wrote to the Corinthians that **“if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation”** (2 Cor.5:17). This is both an individual and collective relationship with Christ (Gal. 1: 22; 1 Thess. 1: 1). It emphasises a relationship of Christians to one another in individual fellowship and altogether as a faith community to Christ; it is not just individual spirituality and salvation but social and communal in its implication. Our faith is nurtured in the community of believers. The very word religion has its origin in the Latin meaning ‘to bind together’. Therefore, this togetherness should be at the forefront of our attitude in developing the Zone. At present, it is solely centred on small groups, congregations and parishes, but God has given us another chance to think, work together and grow as a Mar Thoma community in Europe. It is for this and this reason alone that we have become a Zone. This togetherness is the most important factor for our development.

Paul does not want to be part of a celebrity cult, but he does feel that he deserves the support and prayers of the believers. He is asking here that the Corinthian Christians regard him and his team as servants of Christ, for that is what they are, despite being treated as if they were only ‘the rubbish scraped off the plate and thrown away’. It has come to his attention from earlier correspondence that there were certain pseudo-apostles at Corinth who

made great claims for themselves, taking advantage of immature believers. ‘Who did what in creating the COMPE or the Zone’ kind of questions would be constant temptations for few, but it is good to think we did it together in Christ and for Christ and His glory.



The church may have many guardians, but only a parent can feel for their children and care for them in the way that Paul did. He became their father by virtue of having founded the church, but also in his willingness to lay his life down for their sakes. How sad it is when we find church leaders who act as mere hired hands and who have no real care for God’s people (John 10:12,13). This is no plea for terms or titles to be used for leaders (Matthew 23:9, 10) but that the church should honour those who care for them as would a parent. There is plenty of biblical data to be lifted out of the New Testament concerning the work of an apostle. The word, apostle, means ‘sent one’. Do we feel this sent-ness? Our whole diasporic experiences and spirituality are based on this sent-ness. We should feel this in every fibre in our body. There is much debate concerning twenty-first century leaders of the church. How do they function today? Unfortunately, so many have presented themselves as builders of faith communities and leaders, but live a lifestyle that is far removed from that of the New Testament apostles. Membership of

committees, positions in parishes, oratorical or debating skills do not make genuine, sincere leaders. Thankfully, there are some wonderful examples of servants of God who built our church after our reformation in the 19th century. It is a time to pause and thank God for the amazing ministry of Billing Graham who passed at the age of ninety-nine. Let us thank God for all our Metropolitan, bishops, clergy and pioneering leaders of the Diaspora communities and laity for the work they have done in making the Mar Thoma Church a vibrant global communion of faith.

We have been publishing 'The Mar Thoma ECHO' for the last five years and it now has a new, but continuing, editorial board, and let us pray for them and give them total support for keeping the publication going and reaching greater heights for building our community. Communication is the heartbeat of a community and a community without communication is a life-less, living-dead or dead of living, community. It is the voice of our members; therefore, express them clearly, thoughtfully, and prayerfully for the faith formation of our members and others outside the fellowship of the church.

We and others are now reflecting on Lent and Easter. May God help us to deliver us from our over familiarity with Easter Liturgy and messages. May Easter always overwhelm us with awe, wonder, hope and joy. Let us respond to the call of the risen Lord and see hope beyond the tomb. May we never lose the Easter hope and joy. 'In Christ' everything is possible. St. Paul says: "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15: 57).

The Season of Lent



Let us thank God for the long life and the ministry of Chrysostom Valiya Metropolitan as he would be completing his 100th year on 27th April. We take this opportunity to congratulate Thirumeni in receiving the distinguished Padmabushan award from the Government of India. In October 2018, Philoxenos Thirumeni will be completing 25 years of his Episcopal ministry and it is good to thank God for all that he has done for our church and helping us to create the Zone, for ecumenism, for his holistic ministry in Christ, and for his contributions to theological education. We take this opportunity to congratulate Thirumeni on his Episcopal Silver Jubilee.

May God continue to bless you all.

The Editorial Board.

DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

Mar Thoma Church

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December 18, 2017

To the Members of the Mar Thoma Parishes and Congregations in UK and Europe,

The Episcopal synod of the Mar Thoma Church held on November 24, 2017 has decided to separate the parishes in UK and Europe from the Diocesan Assembly of the Diocese of North America and Europe with effect from January 1, 2018. The Synod has approved Council of Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe (COMPE) to function as the coordinating body of the parishes in UK and Europe

As such, the parishes in UK and Europe will be functioning as a separate zone of the Diocese of North America and Europe with independent nature through COMPE. Present diocesan assembly members will be the assembly members of COMPE for the present term. The zone will be functioning on the basis of the approved Articles of Incorporation and by-law of COMPE.

The present office bearers are authorized to convene the General Body/Zonal Assembly of COMPE as per the by-law and elect the executive council/ board of trustees for the present term.

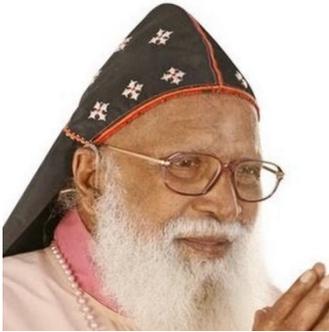
I am happy that the long-cherished dream of the Europe region has been materialized. It also calls for more commitment to take up responsibilities in planning and implementing programs for the spiritual upliftment of the faith community, for wider visible expression of the Mar Thoma Church in the region and for the expansion of God's Kingdom. May the Triune God be the guide and strength in promoting the gospel message through the witness of the Mar Thoma Community in the years to come.

Yours in Christ's Service,

Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos
Diocesan Episcopa



Government of India Decorates the Emeritus Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church



The Mar Thoma Community in Europe and the world-wide Church thank our Lord for the honour conferred on the Emeritus Metropolitan, Most Revd Dr. Mar Chrysostom Valiya Metropolitan, by the Government of India on the Republic Day Celebration. This award of 'Padmabushan' is very rarely given for religious leaders for being a 'Secular Democratic Republic'. Previously, such an award was given to Mother Teresa. Mar Chrysostom was given this award in recognition of His Grace's amazing work as a great spiritual leader in uniting the whole country of 1.3 billion people and upholding constitutional and universal human rights of every person.



Charles Kingsley, who was a 19th century Church of England priest, philosopher and poet, wrote about his interactions with nature in the following way, "I was aware that I was immersed in the infinite ocean of

God." The success and longevity of Mar Chrysostom is entirely due to his 'immersion in the infinite ocean of God' and through his everyday interaction with people of every age, culture, faith groups and political ideologies because he has a God-given ability to sense the presence of God in human situations and interactions as mentioned above. For him, the mission of the church is God's mission (*missio dei*); it is not building walls, but breaking them down so that Christians could welcome and embrace the strangers, 'the other'. He has been a beacon of light and a source of wisdom and is 'lighted to lighten'. May that light continue to shine on us and encourage us to do God's mission. He is the most blessed man on earth, and we celebrated his birth centenary in last April. He is indeed a blessing, through him we are blessed. He is indeed 'immersed in an ocean love' of people of all ages, of castes and creeds. Let us individually and collectively say to Mar Chrysostom, 'thank you for offering your whole life for our spiritual growth and mentorship'.

A Prayer-Centred Life

Dr. Zac Varghese, London

Prayer is the first step to a God-centred life. A Christian is a person who realises through the grace of God that he is called to live his life in close communion with God. This is the model that Jesus gave us in his earthly ministry – he prayed in private, with his disciples, in Synagogues, in the Temple, and in public places. Jesus also taught us how to pray, and how not to pray (Matt. 6. 5-13; Luke 11. 2- 5; Luke 18. 9-14). Prayer is the only way open to us for creating and sustaining a close, informal, intimately personal, and real relationship with God. It is the spiritual energy, resource, and the road map for our journey with God.

Unfortunately, prayer does not come easily or naturally to most of us. We need advice, assistance and assurance if we are going to lead a prayer-centred life. God is always there and we cannot escape from Him. It was not a simple throw away statement for the Psalmist, he fully realised it in his inner most being and stated in a most emphatic way: “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast”(Psalm 139:7-10). Jesus gives us the assurance, “. . . knock and the door will be opened to you. . .” (Matt. 7: 7-11). In Revelations St. John tells that if we do not knock then God will be standing outside our door and knocking until we open it (Rev. 3: 20). Therefore, there is no place to hide from God.



Prayer is life, and life is prayer. Anthony de Mellow in his book ‘Sadhana’ says: “The air you breathe is God. You are breathing God in and out. Beware of that, and stay with that awareness.” Those who lead a life of prayer – prayer can be as simple a matter as breathing in and out. A few weeks back, very early in the morning I woke up with the thought that God who loves you is by your side. Then after few minutes I began to think whether the God I love and the God who loves me is the one and the same. It is a prayer-centred life which has the power to make the God I love and the God who loves me the same and that is a real moment of transformation, a truly heavenly experience. God is not ‘out there or up there’; He is by our side in our happiness and in our sufferings. He suffers with us and comforts us at all times. This awareness is the power of prayer.

For the people of my generation, from the villages in Kerala, a prayer-centred life started with obligatory family prayers in the morning and evening. They woke up in the morning for prayer and ended the day with evening prayers. One could hear prayer from all around one’s house as well; the village air was filled with prayers and incense from all directions: Hindus, Muslims, and Christians said their prayers regularly and rhythmically. One could hear the worship songs and bells from temples and see people going to temples every day of the week. Thus prayer was an essential routine in one’s life. However, this routine

has changed for many people throughout the world. Family prayers have been replaced by set prayers on special occasions at special places at special times; now we have forms, formularies and books for prayer. In the nativity story, Luke tells us that when Joseph and Mary—faced with the very difficult situation of not finding ‘a room in the inn’—found shelter in a stable for glorifying God’s name and purpose. It is possible that in the busyness of our lives we often do not give a chance for God to interact with us, but anytime or anyplace is an opportune moment for God’s creative activity in us and through us. Therefore, it is important to recover our prayer routine and continue to live in constant communion with our creator, provider, and protector.

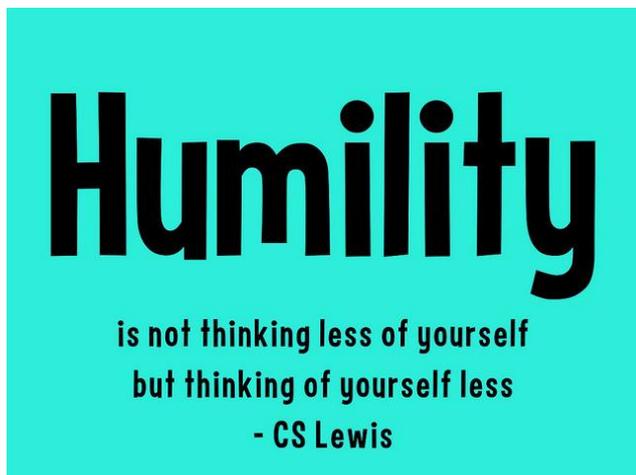


Prayer can be as simple as breathing as indicated before. The model of such a simple prayer can be seen in the prayer of the tax collector: “God have mercy on me, a sinner” (Luke 18: 13). People from Kerala maybe familiar with Mathen’s prayer; Mathen was a very hardworking farm worker; and at the end of the day, he used to get drunk to forget his worries and hardships, but he used to go home, climb to his bed and stretch out with a simple prayer, “Mathen etha malakunnu-meaning: I am falling down before thee.” Jesus’ prayer of the Orthodox tradition is also very simple and transparent: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me

a sinner.” This prayer is also used repeatedly with rosary beads. The simplest of all prayers is the practice of making the sign of the cross. We see this in most unexpected of places by most unexpected people, for example footballers on the football fields and so forth; people do this involuntarily because it is the part of their makeup. Indeed, it is when circumstances prevent us from praying, a simple phrase or biblical verse, such as ‘my soul find rests in God’, can be helpful for finding comfort after a hard, frustrating day. Jesus also instructs us how to prepare ourselves for prayer: “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen, Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matt.5: 6-7).

Father Olier, the founder of the Sulpician method of prayer , divides prayer into three parts: adoration, communion and cooperation. Adoration is the preparation for seeing Jesus before one’s eyes. In preparing for prayer, we are trying to avoid all obstacles to prayer from our surroundings and mind. In this process we are admitting in humility that “we do not know how to pray as we ought to” (Rom. 8: 26). We try to find things which will help us to pray and avoid things that make it difficult to pray. This preparation is by avoiding all selfish obsessions and all those things which make a conversation with God difficult. It is a process of purification and finding the right posture and right attitude and concentrating on our Lord. St. Teresa reminds us that for vocal prayer a penitential posture is best, and for silent prayer a comfortable posture is helpful. Father Olier calls the second part of the prayer as spiritual communion; this is the actual body of the prayer. After adoring Jesus, who has become the focus of the

prayer, we offer ourselves to the Lord so that we may go into communion with Him. This is a time for “holding ourselves in silence and repose to receive God’s gifts and communications without wanting to act on our own accord.” This is the time for keeping ‘Jesus in our heart’. The Third stage of the Sulpician method of prayer is about cooperating faithfully with the graces that we have received during the meditation. This is called ‘Jesus in my heart’. In following this method the meditator realises his ability to put into practice what he has learned in prayer is essentially the action of God who empowers him to do so.



Humility, confidence and perseverance are three important aspects of a general monastic life of prayer. There are strict disciplines centred on prayer in monasteries and they adopt their own specific ways such as the Ignatian, Carmelite, Franciscan or Benedictine method of praying. The Benedictine method has four stages. The first stage is the reading from the Bible or a spiritual book for meditation; the second is reflecting on the text; the third is a reflection on a key idea or phrase from the text, leading to a conversation with God; and finally, it is resting in contemplation, and in silence allowing God to speak to the meditator, like a child resting in the arms of the Father. But the monks are always

instructed not to do the following: 1) Reading of the scripture should not be a passive routine; 2) Reflection should not become just distracted thoughts; 3) Conversation does not become endless monologues or repetitions; 4) Silence should not be inactive, making one sleep. The strict structures of such prayers have the risk of making such prayers a routine robotic exercise. Therefore, total and absolute participation with body and mind – such as eye, heart and hand coordination – is needed in prayer.

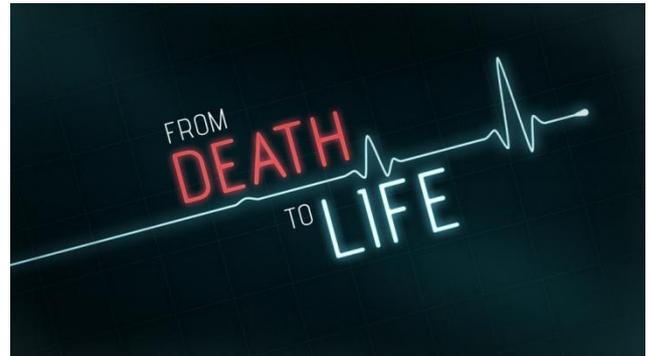
The body of the Lord’s Prayer has a beautiful structure; it is modelled like a letter addressed to God who is ‘our Father’. It can be divided into adoration, petition, penitence, intercession, contemplation, praise and salutation. It is indeed a privilege to address God as our Father and begins with such an intimacy; he is not the God of just one individual person, He is the God of our friends and enemies too; He is the God of the whole universe and this God is our Father. The body of the prayer is the submission of our mind and will to God and His interests and the particular subject on which we are going to pray for, ‘Let Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’ The conclusion of the prayer is the definite resolution of our will to attain a purer loyalty to God and His domain because we say: ‘Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.’ Tolstoy wrote: “. . . I found, to my astonishment that the Lord’s Prayer is nothing less than Christ’s whole teaching, stated in a most concise form. . . .”

God has His personal relationship with each one of us, as well as with humanity as a whole. He deals with each one of us individually and collectively. As we live in communities, fellowship and prayer with

others in the community is also important in our faith and prayer formation. We cannot have a vertical relationship with God, if our horizontal relationship with people in the community is not God-centred and prayer-centred. We really need to learn carefully and humbly how to pray in public and in corporate worship. Our worship is for giving glory to God and not to make a public performance, we are not actors on a stage, performing for acclamation and personal glory. Perhaps we are used to flowery or fervent language and rhythmic phrases in our community prayer to impress people and express our piety. Jesus warned us against such prayers, such prayers are colourful and rhetorical, but these prayers are for human consumption and often to remind God what to do. The prayer in the community and in the place of work and at home should be through the way we do our work and live. For Brother Lawrence, his work as a cook in the monastery was his total prayer life. The way he cut the vegetables, placing a twig on the fire or serving the food he so lovingly cooked was adoration to God and an action in silent meditation to glorify the name of God.

In this reflection on a prayer-centred life we see three movements of spiritual energy for our daily living: first of all, adoration, as we come to the presence of our God through our careful preparations; then communion with our Lord, as we bring before him our confessions, petitions, intercessions, thanksgiving, and praise; and thirdly, co-operation with our Lord as we make our resolution for God's mission for healing this wounded earth and its inhabitants through grace at the end of prayer for our prayer-centred life. Faith leads to prayer, prayer leads to faith, and faith is an amazing grace. Let me end this reflection with an

anonymous universal prayer for world peace:



*“Lead me from death to life, from falsehood
to truth,
Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to
trust,
Lead me from hatred to love, from war to
peace.
Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our
universe. Peace, peace, peace. Amen.”*

CHURCH – A PRAYING COMMUNITY

(Mt. 6:1-9)

Revd Dr. Abraham Athyal

God's universal presence enables us to pray with confidence knowing that God cares for each one of us individually and for all. That knowledge gives an additional fortification for our intercessions. A prayer of William Barclay: "O God of mercy, who so cares for me as if you have none else to care for, yet cares for all even as you care for me, I commend to you my own needs but also the needs of all this world of men to which I belong." (*A Diary of Private Prayer*).

How deep is this awareness in us when we pray?



*[It is part of a series of 'Reflections on Lectionary Themes' by Revd Dr. Abraham Athyal. The following sermon note is prepared for Sunday, January, 2018. It would be helpful to refer to the following verses: **Gen. 18:19-33; 1 Pet. 4:7-16; Jas. 5:13-18; Mt. 6:1-9.**]*

Church is defined here as a 'Praying Community'. The idea is that prayer is an essential characteristic of the Church. As a

faithful community we live in an atmosphere of prayer. We are sustained by prayer. We grow in prayer. We reach our destination through prayer.

'Community' means 'a group of people having a particular characteristic in common'. What is our commonality, as far as prayer is concerned? It is our faith in a God with whom we can communicate. So we can be 'in communion' with him – that is what prayer means.

Where Two or Three Are Gathered:

Basic to our communion with God is the awareness of his presence. Prayer becomes as meaningful as the depth of that awareness. Church is the very 'body of Christ'. It implies his real presence with us. We don't need to go in search of it. We only need to realize it. (Cf. 'Emmanuel', Mt. 1:23, 28:20).

In the context of a teaching on prayer Jesus says, "*Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them*" (Mt. 18:20). J.B. Phillips' translation is better: "Wherever two or three people come together..."

Worship: A Solemn Occasion of Prayer:

Communion with God may be either private or public. Worship is a public prayer – being in the presence of God as a community. Though there are several different elements in worship, the whole of it including the sermon, must be considered as a solemn occasion of prayer. We not only offer petitions, but also listen to his word which speaks to us. Prayer is a mutual communication between God and us. It is not a monologue.

The Lord's Supper is the central act of our corporate prayer. It is 'Holy Communion' – communion both with God; and with one another, bringing together both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of our life in Christ.

Paul's words are significant: *"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation (koinonia) in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation (koinonia) in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."* (1 Cor. 10:16f).

'Koinonia in the blood' points to the new covenant signified by the cup at the Last Supper (See Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25) – **a new relationship with God**. But what does 'koinonia in the body of Christ' mean? Importantly, Paul says, it points to the 'oneness' of the church – **a new relationship with one another**.

Mutual Confession of Sins:

Normally, it is our tendency to limit our confession to a 'General Confession' in the church. But there is more to it than that. Consider the following:

(1) How much does our General Confession reflect a penitent heart? Preparation for Holy Communion involves self-examination and repentance at home. That alone can authenticate our General Confession at worship in the church.

(2) A praying community should be a community willing to confess their sins to one another. As we read in Jas. 5:16, *"Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another..."* That is needed even for your healing, says James.

Which is more difficult? To forgive the offender (as I look at the other person), or to admit my own mistake? More often than not, it is the latter. It is easy to say, "I have nothing against him". But what if he has something against me? Am I ready to look into the matter with a sincere heart and see if it is my fault, and if so confess it to him? That is what Jesus said, *"If you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled"* (Mt. 5:23-24). Reconciliation involves the willingness both to forgive and to confess.

According to M.M. Thomas, the church is a *koinonia* based on divine forgiveness in Christ and manifested visibly in the spirituality of the Lord's Supper and extended in some kind of mutuality in congregational life. He says that divine forgiveness offered in Christ is deeply social in character. (*The Gospel of Forgiveness and Koinonia*, ISPK & CSS, 1994, p.2)

Peter's instruction to *"Keep sane and sober for your prayers"* is immediately followed by a command to *"hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins"* (1 Pet. 4:7f.)

How Not to Pray:

Our text gives some cautions regarding public prayer.

(1) Desire to impress others

Jesus says, *"Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them"* (Mt. 6:1). The Greek word translated here as 'piety' is *dikaio sunē* (*(justice, righteousness, correctness, one's own dharma. . .)*) Your devotion to God is required and is good. But it is not to be rehearsed for an advertisement. The

motivation is important. If it is to impress others, you are already getting your reward, says Jesus. Only that it has ceased to be a communion with God.

(2) Hypocritical prayer

Hypocrisy is feigning to be what one really is not. You are not what you appear to be before others. The remedy is to enter into a period of self-examination, *“Go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret”* (Mt. 6:6). Pray to God who sees you in secret for a transformation of your inner nature.

(3) Meaningless repetitions

“Do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words.” (Mt. 6:7). Avoid prayers that carry no meaning; avoid useless repetitions.

Paul says that as we pray with inspiration we should pray “with the mind also” (1 Cor. 14:14 NEB).

Liturgical worship is a blessing. But it can become a meaningless exercise. One of the benefits of Church Reformation in Kerala was that people were freed from unintelligible prayers in Syriac. Unfortunately some leaders today are interested in reverting the process!

There are also groups who repeat the same words or phrases over and over until everything degenerates to unintelligible confusion.

Prayer of the Kingdom Community

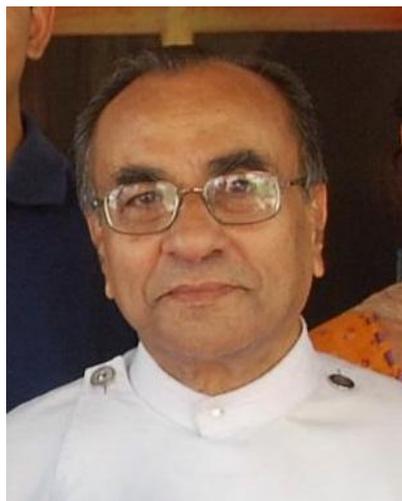
“Pray like this”, Jesus said as he taught the disciples how to pray (Mt. 6:9). The so-called Lord’s Prayer is a model Family Prayer. We are a kingdom-centred

community. Cf. Rev. 1:6. So we pray *“May your kingdom come...Thine is the kingdom”*. God is King, of course. But God is also ‘Our Father’. We pray for and on behalf of all his children – our brothers and sisters. Notice the plural pronouns, ‘we’, ‘us’, ‘our’. Selfish desires and petitions are excluded. Are we not guilty of selfish praying too often?

Conclusion:

Church is a praying community. But our prayers should encompass the entire family of God. Prayer life is based on the realization of our *solidarity* with all men and women before God, both in sin and in divine forgiveness.

Guard against prayers becoming nothing more than a ritual. While using a liturgy concentrate on the prayers. Say what you mean, and mean what you say. Praying in secret before the One who sees us in secret is a corrective to hypocrisy and mere ritualism. Praying in public should not become a substitute for spending time alone with God in private prayer and meditation.

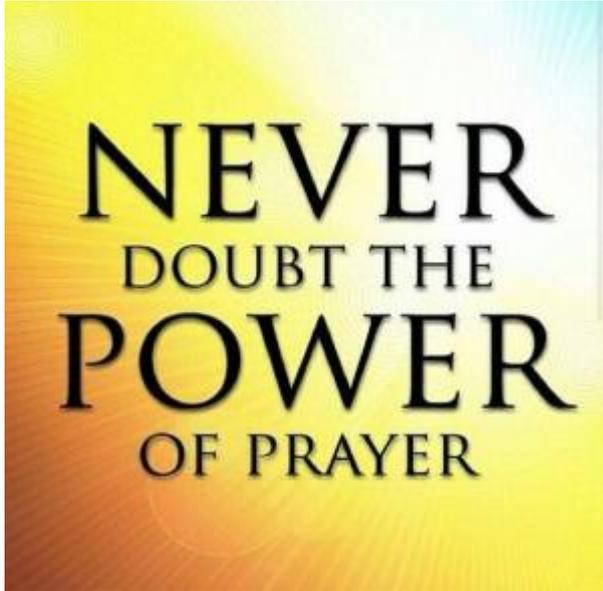


**Retired
Professor of
New
Testament
at:**

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Theological
College,
Bangalore;
Bishops College, Calcutta
Mar Thoma
Theological Seminary;
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Gurukul
Lutheran Theological College, Chennai

THE POWER OF PRAYER

David Brand*



There have been many articles written about prayer, so you may be interested in the following events that occurred to me after praying that will hopefully reinforce your confidence and belief in the power of prayer.

A new Vicar joined us in 2007 and had been asked by a lady member of the congregation for healing for a back condition she had been suffering from for some time and now was getting worse. I was asked to support her as she knelt in front of the altar while the Vicar prayed for healing. After a few minutes into the prayer she began to slowly collapse, I held her to prevent her falling forward and thankfully the Vicar finished his prayer and helped me to lower her gently to the floor. After approximately five minutes she recovered, we helped her on to her feet and she announced that there was no more pain. After approximately four months she moved south and strangely enough to the church that our previous

Vicar had gone to, so we had feedback on her condition until her Vicar retired. Needless to say her back remained healed; unfortunately we no longer have contact. One final twist in the tail came when our Vicar admitted to me years later it was his first attempt at healing. It is worth noting that she received an almost immediate healing response which begs the question where did it come from? It defied all our physical laws of space and time suggesting that whatever carried out that healing operates in some spiritual dimension we are not yet privy to. I hope the church is examining events like these in the hope we can gain knowledge of how and why the Good Lord works in his wondrous way.

The second event although not instantaneous was on a broader scale and the reason why I am writing this article is because it happened to me. In December 2012, I lost my wife to Cancer three weeks after diagnosis. We had 52 years of happy marriage; I had known her since she was eleven, and her father and my father were friends before they married. After her death I became withdrawn and spent most of my time playing computer games, as this was the only way I could forget my situation; consequently, I would put off doing what I considered to be non-essential jobs. I was also suffering from wet macular degeneration and was receiving injections in the eyes.

In November 2015, I woke up in the night not knowing where I was or who I was; eventually I went back to bed to wake up the next morning with every light on in the house. I had a vague recollection of my immediate location measured in yards but no further and a sense of this is where I

belong. After two days with no improvement I had the sense to dial 111 for advice and was promptly taken to hospital and placed in the stroke ward. The diagnosis was a stroke in the back of the head where the brain made sense of the visionary signals sent from the eyes.

After two days I was gifted MRSA and placed in a single room in a psychiatric ward opposite the Nurses Station. This has got to be the nearest thing to hell on earth if you are sane and trying to recover from a stroke. On the other side of the thin partition, the nurses kept opening and banging shut filing cabinet drawers night and day. There was a chap going up and down the corridor shouting "They are trying to kill me;" other patients made funny noises or cried out. Having been used to the peace and quiet of living on my own for three years I just could not sleep or relax.

A few days later, I decided to go for a walk down the corridor and on returning I could not recognise the door to my room as my vision and recognition had deteriorated. I badly needed undisturbed sleep, peace and quiet before I lost my vision. The second visit of the consultant only confirmed the deterioration but no medication. I had a heart ablation operation scheduled for mid-December at Harefield hospital which I did not want to miss so after two more days of this chaos I got on my knees, prayed for help and promised to change my ways, ditch the computer games and help others. In the modern idiom this was my Scrooge or 'Groundhog Day' moment of decision and immediately I seemed to hear a voice in my brain telling me to get out of this hospital now.

The following, out of the ordinary, events occurred to me and I must leave to the

imagination of the readers to draw their own conclusions. I discharged myself and arranged for my son to collect me and to my relief he totally agreed with my decision. I did not realise it at the time but my incredible journey was about to begin. Having completed the necessary documentation, my son and I were walking down the busy corridor leading to the main exit, I felt weak, tired and concerned about my decision. Everybody in the corridor appeared to be in a hurry, we were slow but we passed a man with a white stick walking even slower, after passing him I was suddenly reminded of my promise a few yards further on. I stopped turned back and asked him if I could help. My vision was bad but this man was virtually blind all I could see was the white of his eyes. He told me he was looking for the main reception, I could manage that so I guided him there and the receptionist took over after he thanked me. When my son and I exited for the car park I suddenly felt stronger and no longer doubted my decision, also helping the blind man gave me a sense of worth.

A few days later my son and I passed an Asian lady outside our Waitrose selling a charity broadsheet called 'The Big Issue'; we passed her by; however, when we reached the car park I received another reminder. I returned and gave her a pound, as I did not want the paper and a few days later I received some good financial news.

My next encounter was with a Muslim lady and her son, they were standing by a sweet vending machine, he was agitated and she was searching in her purse. I passed by; but, looked back and nothing had changed; so I went back and asked what the problem was and she mentioned twice, as I did not understand her the first time, that she needed a twenty pence coin for the vending

machine. So I gave her one and to my surprise she said in perfect Oxford English “Thank you very much.” This was followed by an Asian man dressed as Father Christmas, again selling ‘The Big Issue’, like the Asian lady above; I gave him a pound but did not take ‘The Big Issue’. Once more, there was a further improvement in my financial situation.

A couple of weeks later, I was standing in a bus queue when a large black man said with a superb deep perfect English accent “I am hungry will you give me money for a Hot Dog.” I was surprised as he was well dressed in a suit and overcoat. I asked him how much he wanted and he said, “I need £1.57”, so I gave him a £2 coin and said, “Keep the change.” The way he said thank you, left a deep impression on me due to his sincerity, warmth and tone. A couple of days later I found an old Life Policy which I had completely forgotten about; so as there was now only me, I decided to cash it in and received over £13000.

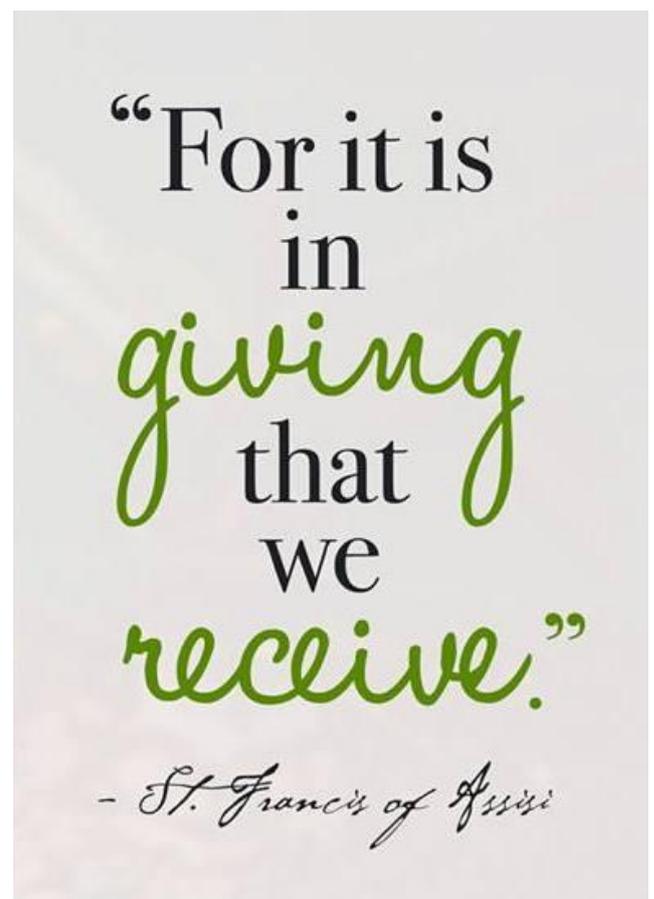
During this period I had two visits from a health visitor to check me out after the second visit she said no more visits were necessary. The consultant at Moorfield said I was a very rare case in that my Wet Macular Degeneration had turned to dry. My doctor said my recovery from the stroke was remarkable. I passed the DVLA eyesight test in 2016 and have just passed it again in 2018. I have had a full examination more intensive than the DVLA’s. The Macular Degeneration has gone leaving scar tissues where the bleeding had occurred and my eyesight has improved requiring weaker spectacles.

The heart ablation operation was successful eliminating any heart instability. I do not hesitate to give money or help happily to

those I am specifically directed to. I fully sympathize with anybody who doubts the authenticity of the financial side of this testimony as possibly unusual circumstances, coincidences or luck. However, the medical side is fully documented and supported by two medical specialists, two other doctors and one optometrist. In St Francis’ superb prayer there are two inspiring lines that certainly apply to me.

“IT IS IN GIVING THAT WE RECEIVE,

IT IS IN DYING (SELF), THAT WE ARE BORN TO ETERNAL LIFE.”



The first line was exactly right for in giving I most certainly received and not in just plain monetary terms, I also received things that money cannot buy. In the second line the

elimination of the old self and creating a different approach to life more in keeping with Jesus' teaching of closing old doors and opening new ones, leading to a more purposeful and satisfying life closer to the role model we crucified. Is it eternal? That is not my decision but my remaining years, having reached 81, will be more fulfilling as I hope to justify the faith that has been placed in me.

I have written this because I care about your relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Do not repeat Mantras when communicating, he has heard them many times before, have a conversation instead; he would prefer that, as it is something he can listen to and act upon. Above all BELIEVE, BELIEVE, BELIEVE and remember that what you receive may not be what you asked for, but it will be in your best long term interest and please demonstrate your gratitude for that.



[Editors' Note: Mr. David Brand is an elder and a Lay Reader of the All Saints', Harrow Weald, where the Sinai MTC conducts worship services. He is a retired electronic engineer. He is a friend of one of the editors, and he too is a witness to the amazing recovery of the author from the stroke and macular degeneration through the grace of God.]

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY!

Revd Dr. Valson Thampu

St. Luke 11: 1-13

Prayer is a quintessential spiritual discipline. But that does not mean that all prayers are necessarily spiritual. Like most religious practices and provisions, prayer too is vulnerable to abuse. In times of spiritual decline, prayer gets overridden by superstition.

This is nothing new. Else, the disciples of Jesus would not have had to request him to teach them to pray. Obviously, they were worried. They were aware of conflicting views and styles on the subject. It is interesting that, despite Jesus' clear and simple teaching on prayer, its abuse continues unabated!

"Your Father in heaven knows what you want," Jesus said. Yet, the driving assumption in our prayers most of the time is that God does not have a clue. The more 'specialized' the expert in prayer is, the more he takes it upon himself to instruct God minutely and meticulously on obvious details. There is no merit in using too many words in praying, says Jesus. Yet, the virtue of prayers, by our reckoning, depends mostly on how flowery, vehement and long-winded they are. Pray 'in this manner', says Jesus. We happily call it "Lord's prayer" and seem relieved that we don't have to be restricted by that model. We brand it as a special case; whereas it was given to us, clearly, as a model. ('Pray in this manner....') Instances can be multiplied.

I have incurred myself in a mountain of insincerity on account of prayer. Many people have, in the past asked me, after mentioning their needs and worries -known

by the omnibus expression “prayer requests”- “*Achen*, please pray for me”. By sheer force of habit, I had said on each occasion, “I shall”. I have not stayed true to even 10% of such promises. It is not that I have been indifferent to the needs and miseries brought to my notice. It was that I wasn’t sure I could be praying for them ‘in spirit and in truth’ by staying at a safe and comfortable distance from their *via dolorosa*. This raises the question: what is it to pray?



My discomfort all along has been that in such instances prayer is assumed to be a magical thing that the experts in this field may practise with unmatched efficacy. I have always been uncomfortable in being seen as an ‘expert’ in prayer: or as one who existed in privileged proximity to God so that he was bound to hear my prayers preferentially and compulsorily. I experience an instinctive unease about any magical association with spiritual practices.

Yet I have had powerful experiences in praying. Most of them relate to the terminal illness of my mother, spread over a period of several years. I used to ‘wrestle’ with God -if you don’t mind the expression- for her life. Fasting for three days was not a problem. Praying through the night was not tiresome. But all that was rooted in being agonizingly “involved” with her predicament. My praying and fasting was a seamless part of my agonized identification with her plight. It was sustained by a willingness to do

anything for securing a wee-bit of relief for her.

I saw, as vividly as I have seen the brightest of noon-days, two things about prayer. First, it had awesome power. My mother had immense faith in prayer. She had nearly as much faith in my sincerity. She believed earnestly that God will hear the cries of my heart. The reason? She knew how much I loved her.

Second, I felt praying to be a natural thing and a source of immense strength for myself. What sort of power? The power to serve, to hope, and to endure. Looking back, it amazes me how much I could! And how much I could take. I could not only nurse my mother full-time but also excel in studies. I did not experience such explosive power and optimism until much later, when in the evening of my life, I assumed responsibility for St. Stephen’s College, Delhi. I couldn’t have done half as much, but for the strength -strength is too weak a word- I derived from prayer.

The power of prayer that I experienced then was simply due to a feeling of being near to Jesus. From Sunday school classes I had gathered that Jesus was particularly fond of children. That helped a great deal! I used to feel, as the Psalmist says, that God’s ears were inclined to my prayers and that my tears were not wasted in his presence. He was closest to me when my heart was breaking into pieces. (I don’t use this expression merely as a figure of speech.)

In comparison, when I pray now, I feel that my experiences lack that ‘density’ (Somehow, I prefer this word to ‘intensity’. Can’t say, why.). I don’t know how else to put it. I am no longer a warrior in prayer. (By the way, a prayer-warrior is different from worldly warriors. The former fights his

own littleness of faith; the latter, the weaknesses of their adversaries.) The best example of the 'density' that I mention here is the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane.

I wasn't acquainted well enough with the Bible in those days. (Not that I am a great deal better now!) Now I know that my experiences then weren't far dissimilar to the discipline that Jesus practised. He persevered in prayer; but not prayer as an alternative to struggle, suffering and sacrifice; but as a preparation for it. The same connection between prayer and action can be seen in the case of Nehemiah, in his daunting mission to rebuild the broken walls of Jerusalem.

A question that often bothers me, when I think of prayer, is this: have I lost the spiritual gift of prayer because I lost my simplicity? Was this simplicity my strength when I was a little boy?

I don't think so. My strength then was my passionate identification with a cause, which was -to put it rather mildly- of the very essence of my life. This is a bit too difficult to verbalize, but let me try.

What I prayed for -or, wrestled in prayer for- was not something external to me. (I was not asking God for a 'favour'). It existed in the core of my being. There was a total and earnest identity between the longing of my whole being and the words that became my prayer. How do I know? Well, it is quite simple. I never experienced the slightest artificiality, shallowness, formality, or matter-of-factness in praying. I was utterly unaware of the words I used. Of who was around, or who wasn't. Of the posture or the hour in which I prayed. Forgive me for putting it this way, I was so sincere in praying that I was not aware of praying at all. My praying was of a piece with all else

that I did for her. It was like giving her a sponge bath, for example. Like feeding her, when she was too ill to sit and eat. Like massaging her feet, which were gradually turning blue due to decreasing blood supply. Like sitting for hours with her head in my lap. Like sharing jokes with her, when she was well enough to listen and laugh.

I prayed for her, not because she asked me to, but I could not help it.

Why, then, did I fail to pray as meaningfully and efficaciously as this for those who sought my 'prayer support'? Conversely, why did Jesus enfold, effortlessly and naturally, the whole world (Jn. 3: 16) within his ambit of concern, compassion and prayer? And prayer, even from the Cross?

At the heart of the parable of the Good Samaritan is the very same insight that prayer and social responsibilities need to go hand in hand. The ambit of the religiosity of the priest and the Levite in the parable became so very narrow because it had nothing to do with the secular space. It is interesting to note that, as per old terminologies, whatever was outside the temple premises was 'profane'; as though the world beyond the hedge of temples was extraneous to God's concern and responsibility!

Like the priest and the Levite in this parable, I too failed, as I now recognize in retrospect, because I did not grow in my sympathies. For far too long, I stayed confined to the religious haven. Today, I have no doubt at all that the mark of a spiritually evolved person is his capacity to feel as intensely for 'the other' (or, neighbour) as he feels for himself. As Soren Kierkegaard pointed out long ago, the word 'neighbour' is universal in scope. It does not exclude anyone -not even criminals and sinners- from its scope.

When one does not grow in this way, only two options are available. (a) to stay confined to oneself and to a self-created small world where one is at home and in charge; and (b) to resort to gimmicks in order to play on the susceptibilities and vulnerabilities of others, deceiving as many as possible and, in the end, to end up self-deceived. Jesus calls such people 'false prophets' -the wolves that come in sheep's clothing.

This raises yet another issue. To what extent can we turn prayer into a public exercise?

One thing is by now absolutely clear to me: to pray is to have fellowship with God in the fullness of our being. It is the discipline prescribed in the first of the two cardinal commandments. The logic implied here can be formulated in simple terms. We are to love God with the fullness of our being - whole heart, whole soul, whole mind, whole body. Admittedly, there is no activity in the human sphere which requires participation in a state of fullness to this extent. In comparison, all other activities involve only a part, or a portion, of who we are.

It is impossible that we love God in such fullness, if we live a compartmentalized life. As we live, so we worship. If we agree that we are social creatures -as is affirmed in the commandment that we love our neighbours as we love ourselves- it is impossible that we love God with the fullness of our being if we hide from our social responsibilities. Prayer is an expression of loving God as he deserves to be loved, which is with the fullness of our being. Seen in this sense, it is doubtful that most of us pray at all. I am sure only about myself. I am far from this norm. There are times when I feel like Shakespeare's

Macbeth, "My words fly up, my heart remains below".

Over the years I have grown in my conviction that spirituality is about this fullness of life (Jn. 10:10). And prayer is necessary and powerful as a means for gaining strength and inspiration in attaining this spiritual goal. Jesus has taught us to pray, "Thy will be done..." And that will too is revealed clearly. It is that we should have life, and life in all its fullness. How can prayer be delinked from, or fall short of, this goal?

The proof, therefore, that we pray in spirit and truth is that we grow in our awareness, sensitivities and responsibilities. It is impossible that those who pray stay stunted like Zacchaeus. The curse of shrinking in our spiritual stature is that we fall into the morass of superstition. And it is indeed shocking how thickly overlaid our religiosity is with superstition. If we are not shocked it is only because we lack discernment. Is it not superstitious, let me ask you, to turn praying into an exercise in cosmic begging, assuming God to be a superhuman Christmas father, whose duty it is to go around distributing favours to the chosen few who do not care to help themselves?

J



Jesus insisted on the likely incompatibility between the public space and sincerity in

respect of prayer. The public domain -the sphere of 'being seen by men'- is a sphere where hypocrisy lies in wait for us. There, the desire to be seen by men, rather than by God, is too real and insidious to be glossed over. It is not that we should not pray in public; or, even standing in street corners. It is that the location, or the setting, should not get the better of us and reduce praying into an exercise in self-advertisement. Only those who have the spiritual maturity to be 'in the secret place with God' -irrespective of where they are- can venture to pray 'in spirit and in truth' in the public sphere too. The readers would realize how evidently mechanical the familiar experts in public prayer are. Their eloquent prayers are like re-plays of the same old tape that you have heard many times over.

When, then, about seeking God's help in prayer? Are we not, after all, given the right to approach the Good Shepherd with our needs? Didn't Jesus himself encourage us to do so? Didn't he say, where two or three are gathered together and agreed in his name, he will surely heed their prayers?

In considering this aspect of our theme, it is necessary that we also conjugate this assurance with the discipline Jesus himself laid down for praying -to pray in his name. Praying in the name of Jesus is not a magical formula! In eastern thought, 'name' stands for the total significance of a person. To pray in the name of Jesus is, therefore, to pray strictly according to the role-model that he is to us. His prayer had the power to drive our demons, cleanse lepers, raise the dead and change lives because he embraced the whole of creation in his love. Our prayers are as sincere and as powerful as who we are.

I do believe that prayers have the power to activate external help. But that 'external' help must not be, as Spinoza warns us, misunderstood. All means and forces with which the external world is filled are God-created. God is not arbitrary or chaotic. The forces in the external world -forces extraneous to us- can avail us through prayer, provided we pray aright. Such prayers become effective only when they serve as catalysts for our growth in a manner that attunes us to the larger possibilities, energies and forces that surround us.

Jesus' feeding the five thousand, with a boy's lunch pack, is a case in point. The multiplication of loaves happens through a prayer of thanks-giving. It evokes a response from something beyond the immediate. That response is 'supernatural' only in the sense that it seems to be so from our limited understanding. Leaves absorb sunlight and turn it into food with the help of chlorophyll. Dry leaves can't do that. What if we stay as dry leaves on the withered tree of superstitious religiosity? How can it avail us if we pray, or don't pray, in such a state?

I have experienced help from the 'world out there' materializing in astonishing ways. But I cannot think of a single instance of that kind happening without my putting myself in situations where my individual strength and resources were inadequate for serving the godly cause espoused. God is not a performer. He is our helper. Helper for what? Is it not to help us do his will? When it comes to doing his will, God is faithful enough to activate external help, if need be; but not to impress anyone or to secure publicity, but to reveal his mercy and faithfulness.

Yet another way in which I have experienced the power of prayer is through the intensification of my internal powers. I must insist and emphasize that this, again, was not magical, but logical. God gave me the grace to stay focused as well as open to his promptings. Insofar as I ventured out in his name, I grew continually. God led me through a variety of situations and challenges. In retrospect I cannot help feeling convinced that there was a method underlying what seemed, then, to be a haphazard process. Given the inclinations of human nature, we are happy to be led in linear progress, where things happen neatly and predictably. My life was full of ups and downs. Nothing really happened as I wished, planned or preferred. It was best that it did not. God had a plan for me. And he caused me to grow continually. So, when the final push came, in the crowning phase of my public life as the principal of St. Stephen's, and I got into near-death situations, I found myself -and this is not an exaggeration- exploding with inner energy and happiness.

How can I not include this in my understanding of what it means to pray?

What I am going to share or reveal in the following paragraphs presupposes some familiarity with the events that comprise my tumultuous tenure as the 12th principal of St. Stephen's College, Delhi. Since I have narrated them in my recently published memoir titled *On A Stormy Course* (Hachette India, New Delhi, 2017), it is not being repeated here.

St. Stephen's had become, over the decades, the exclusive preserve of the rich and the mighty. In fact, the gloss of the institution was derived almost entirely from this. The flip-side of this situation was that the college

shut the door hard against social justice. The foremost question in my mind, as I took office on the 22nd of May 2007, was: "How can I preach the Good News to the poor through St. Stephen's?"

My attempt to integrate social justice with higher education made me the most hated person in Delhi, among the upper caste and upper class, in the annals of higher education in India. It plunged me into a nine-years-long relentless turmoil, the like of which was wholly without a precedent in India. I have had hundreds of people - Christians and Non-Christians alike- ask me, "How could you survive?"

Through prayer, I tell them. I was all the time on my knees. I was working all the time. But my work was awash in prayer. That is the time I realized that prayer and work are one! The hallmark of doing the will of God is that work and prayer become seamlessly integrated; one indistinguishable from the other. Then great things begin to happen. Here is an instance.

One of the many strategies used against me was litigation. A slew of court cases was piled on me, on the assumption that I would not be able to defend myself, given how prohibitively expensive litigation is. I had to face, in all, 21 court cases!

When this was in progress, and I was truly at my wit's end, I got a call, on night, from a total stranger. He introduced himself as Rajiv Nayyar, a lawyer.

"Sir, would you allow me to represent you in the High Court?"

Rajiv was a senior advocate, whose charge per appearance was Rs. 5 lakhs.

"I can't afford you, Rajiv".

“Sir, who is asking for money. All I want is the honour of representing you; for I believe in what you are doing. I know that justice is on your side.”

Rajiv Nayyar stayed a tower of strength till the last day of my tenure and he was largely responsible for my winning all cases. It didn't cost me a rupee.

Do you believe such things can happen? You have to. It happened in my case. Rajiv is not a Christian. But I believe he was the answer to my prayers. I prayed because I was utterly helpless. I was on the brink of total collapse. I couldn't have survived without this help.

Suppose I had taken the easy path and compromised with my adversaries, apologizing for my spiritual convictions and assuring them that I'd do their bidding for the rest of my tenure in exchange for an easy passage out? Then too I would have prayed. But my prayer would have been like Macbeth's prayers, “My words go up, my heart remains below.”

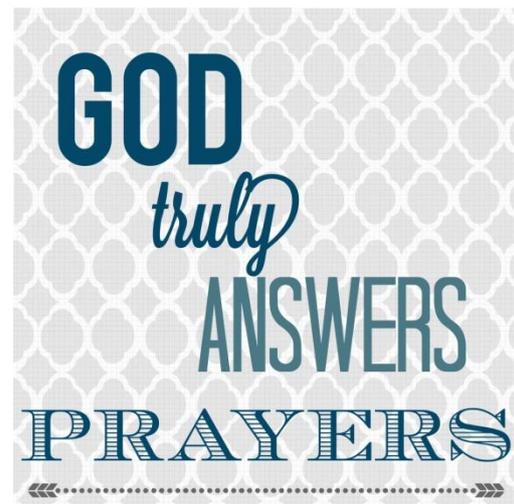
I am inherently suspicious of prayer experts; those who claim to enjoy special equations with the Almighty. I believe all our ailments and calamities come laden with crucial messages for us. We can stay stubbornly deaf to the ‘still, small, voice’ talking to us through pain and trauma. We can also open our hearts and our lives to divine authority and emerge from these situations refined and rejuvenated in the spirit. If we allow middle-men to intervene and make a mess of this sacred process, we belittle God's purposes concerning us.

In 1992, I went through a serious health crisis. Three of my cervical discs prolapsed and I was paralysed in the neck and the left hand. I lay in intermittent traction for 3 months. My neurologist grew cynical of my

recovery. I went to the UK for surgery, but it was ruled out, given the high risk involved.

When I was in the dark night of the soul - battling demons of hopelessness- light dawned on my life. A tremendous inner assurance that ‘the business of my life’ was not over yet, descended deep into me. A few days later it occurred to me to try and lift my head. I could! For the first time in months.

That was the most significant turning point in my life. No prayer or healing expert was involved in this process. It was strictly between my Maker and me. God does not need recommendations. You and I are valuable enough in his sight! The sanctuary of God's mercy is open equally to all.



Through that near-death experience God taught me the value of life and of each moment in time. I was seized by a keen desire to fill each day with the best. It was this traumatic experience that motivated me to become an author. I had written and published very little till then. After 1992, it has been truly an avalanche of creativity!

Does God answer prayers?

Well, you decide, if he should. It is all up to you!

IF I READ CHRYSOSTOM THIRUMENI ARIGHT....

Revd Dr. Valson Thampu



Keralites are a paradox. They are iconoclasts and idol-worshippers at the same time. In the land of Marx, the tradition of Mar Thoma thrives. That means, lest we forget, that Keralites know neither Marx nor Mar Thoma.

Here is a classic illustration. Chrysostom Thirumeni, the Senior Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church, with a strong Diaspora presence globally, is being celebrated, extensively and inventively. Of course, he deserves to be. But even more, he deserves to be understood. I doubt, if he is.

People get carried away by his matchless gift of humour. I haven't come across another, anywhere in the world, who can match

Thirumeni vis-à-vis this talent. (By the way, I believe talents are, if you don't mind, God-given.) He is an instant poet of humor. Humour emanates from him as naturally and inevitably as fragrance from a freshly opened flower or steam from the barrel of your puttu kutti. I introduce the metaphor of 'freshness' deliberately. The amazing thing about Thirumeni is that staleness does not approach him even from a distance. I don't know if he is frozen in perennial youth. But I do know that he is rooted in perennial freshness.

The Chrysostom Thirumeni I know is a subterranean iconoclast. (That's to say, you need to read him below the surface) But he is being turned into an idol. This is a terrible disservice to him. The problem with idols is that they stand -rigor mortised- on pedestals of distance. They are a continual illustration of the difference between adulation and adoration. The distinction between the two - it is superfluous to say- is one of understanding. You can hero-worship without understanding. But you cannot worship, or adore, without it. We are required to worship, as Jesus said to the woman of Samaria at the well of Jacob, "in spirit and in truth". Whatever is undertaken in any other state may appear to be worship, but is not. (So, are we sure that we honour the Sabbath, rather than merely keep it? I am not very sure about myself. The rest I leave to you.)

I have not met Chrysostom Thirumeni for a few years. But I sense him at a distance; and do so with much joy. In my limited understanding, the main thrust of his continuing ministry is ministering to the old and the ageing. And I hear no one talking about this; the reason I have to take on the task myself.

I need to be personal here. I am getting older. But I don't want to be old; or, as the poet says, 'decline into the sad vale of years'. No one can help growing older; but all of us can help getting old, or senile, especially in mind and spirit. This is where Chrysostom Thirumeni is a great blessing in my life. One look at him, even when he is beyond the range of my physical vision, I get challenged, rejuvenated and reassured. Thirumeni is three and a half decades older than me. (He really is.) But he is younger in spirit. (He really is.)

Not convinced? Well, consider this.

"My greatest worry," Thirumeni says, "is how I will manage after Pappachen's time (an assumed name)". (Pappachen is Thirumeni's driver and he is about forty years old; that is six decades younger. Thirumeni would say this in such a matter-of-fact tone that you begin to believe that Pappachen is a hoary character, decades older than the Senior Metropolitan.)

I tune in to a radio station on Christmas Day, and it is Chrysostom Thirumeni all the way. I watch comedy shows on TV and run into the same person, spreading ripples of laughter in the studio and the rest of the world. I check my WhatsApp messages. I catch Thirumeni in the midst of a controversy, as though he is a robust young man, taking a stroll to the Everest for his evening walk.

Well, let me come to the point. (Otherwise, I'll go on, and on, and lose my way in a forest of anecdotes about this unique and tantalizing man (especially so, for Pentecostal pastors stuck in their perennial spiritual nonage.)

To me, Chrysostom Thirumeni is an inspiring illustration of how to age with dignity, the sort of dignity that defies age. It occurs to me to think that he is improving

with each passing year. (He is the water that Jesus turned into wine in Cana or Galilee.) I wish him the best, yet, in 2018. If the Gospel According to Chrysostom Thirumeni were to be written, it would be centred on the message, "There is room for improvement as long as we live." I call that a life of triumphant faith. Our spirituality, Jesus says, must bear fruit. (Otherwise it will stay stuck with "hallelujahs and praise the Lords" and the noise pollution that people create under pretext of speaking in tongues to hypnotize the credulous). Chrysostom Thirumeni is bearing fruit -an abundant harvest- at 103 years of age. (Go, tell it on the mountains. . . .)

So, what does it mean to age? Most people take it to be synonymous with growing older. You don't have to be old, because you are older. Growing older is what time does to you. Becoming old is what you do to yourself.

That also means that we can also choose to not grow old. How do we do that, let's ask Chrysostom Thirumeni.

He could say something like-

"Well, you see, the problem with people is that they stop cultivating new ideas. They refuse to be renewed. [Here he would give an illustration, which will make you laugh because it is so very apt and insightful. Being not Chrysostom Thirumeni, I cannot craft it without belittling his genius; and the same is, hence, not attempted here.]

And you ask, "But, Thirumeni, how can a person go on learning well past his retirement? Don't mental faculties begin to decline, as we are told, once you turn forty?" "Athei," Chrysostom Thirumeni would say with a tinge of mischief hidden behind his rough exterior, "It is only for those who are spiritually dead. You have to die in the spirit before you can die in your mind. Why do

you think Jesus said that he will bear us beyond our old age?"

"So, we grow old, right?"

"Yes, in years. When that happens, you must remind yourself of Psalm 103 and a host of similar texts."

"Thirumeni," you protest, "It is easier said than done. It may be possible for you. But we are ordinary folks. It is beyond our reach."

"So, you don't know, Sosamma, right?" Chrysostom Thirumeni would ask, and pause for your response. Not getting any, he would continue. "She is eighty-seven, living alone near Chammanthi mukku. Her children are all in the Gulf (That means, between her and her children there is a great gulf). She attends church every Sunday. She is active in Women's Fellowship activities. She visits the sick in the neighborhood. She reads the Bible and Malayala Manorma daily. Her son, Ponnachen, recently gave her an iPad and she is on WhatsApp with her friends. She sends emails, most of them with "attachments" (because 'attachment' is otherwise missing from life today)". How old, do you think, Sosamma is?"

And before you can respond, Thirumeni moves on. "If you go to Ranni, try to visit Avarachan, who is only ninety-five years old. He was junior to me in school. He reads even now more than your professors do. His grandchildren, whenever they visit him, are so keen to discuss all their problems with Avarachan. They sit around him and listen to him in rapt attention. I have a suspicion that Avarachan's sons and daughters are a bit jealous of him. They are rich in worldly things. But they know that Avarachan has chosen the 'the right portion' like Mary of Bethany. Sosamma in Chammanthi mukku and Avarachan of Ranni are more spiritual than me. (I don't know about my brother

bishops. Who can know? Not even God. But don't tell them that I said this!)

"But, Thirumeni," you expostulate, "this is not evident from the life of Jesus."

"One of the reasons for this, Chrysostom Thirumeni would say with a smile (as though there could be many other reasons!), "is that he was not allowed to live long. They got him when he was thirty-three. But that is also spiritual. What it means is that Mar Thomites should not be older than thirty-three. I am trying my best to be a Mar Thomite. I wish we could pass a resolution in the next Sabha Mandalam that those who feel that they are older than thirty-three years of age should be encouraged to join other denominations."

As you try to figure out what has hit you, Chrysostom Thirumeni continues,

"Once I read about a doctor. Now don't think I am going to talk about Matha Aritanandamayi's hospital and doctors. (People take me too seriously, that's the problem. Tell them, please, it's not a crime to laugh now and then. Christianity is not a funeral religion, you know?) This great physician lived decades ago in the west. He studied his own approaching death with his finger on his pulse, noting down its last beats as his heart was gradually giving way. Why did he do that? Well, because he wanted to contribute, even on his death bed one more insight, if possible, to medical sciences from which you and I would benefit. How can such a spirit grow old or senile? I think he was only as old as Jesus was. I would to God that I stay young like him for the next fifty years, or till my death, whichever is later." (Being one to forego an opportunity to unfurl the unfamiliar. Thirumeni could also mean that 'lifelong

learning' should apply, in the case of women and men of faith, to life beyond death.)

You and I could benefit a great deal more by heeding Chrysostom Thirumeni on the challenge of coping with old age than by listening to a thousand sermons preached by those who think that preaching is a performance with which to impress others. I hope to face the creeping influence of time on me as Chrysostom Thirumeni is doing. That's why I cannot be grateful enough to him for ministering to me. And to thousands of others, who have the eyes to see. And the beauty of it is that Senior Metropolitan Philipose Mar Chrysostom is not even aware of it!

A synopsis of the Bible classes of the Maramon Convention 2018



Scripture classes have always been a quintessential part of the Maramon Convention. This columnist thanks God Almighty for the great opportunity he has had in attending the Bible classes of the 123rd Maramon Convention. Two eminent Evangelists and theologians of our times took these classes.

Monday 12th February

Speaker: Bishop Peter David Eaton (Florida)

Translator: Rev. Mathew Scaria

Bishop Eaton based his discourse on the Gospel of St John with reference to St Thomas, the apostle. He concentrated on the faith of St Thomas in four scenarios:

- 1) Faith in difficult times
- 2) Faith leading to a deeper understanding of Christ
- 3) Faith strengthening Thomas and preparing him for his future mission
- 4) How to cement faith and strengthen it in the aftermath of a crisis

Bishop Eaton referred to St Thomas as the apostle of India. In John's Gospel chapter 11 verse 7, Jesus tells the disciples, "Let us go

back to Judea". The disciples were worried about Jesus' safety, as the Jews had tried to stone him there.

In verse 15, it says that Jesus decides to go to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead. In the following verse Thomas tells his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him". Thomas was willing to put his life on the line. This is faith-willingness to face consequences.

Bishop Eaton remarked that for us, believing in Jesus might not carry the same risk of death. However, we may not know now the future consequences of our faith in Jesus—a new life with Jesus.

In John Chapter 14: verse 1-8, Jesus comforts his disciples. The exchange between Jesus and his disciples in general and with Thomas in particular about the journey to the Father's house is an eye-opener to any Christian. When Jesus says, "You know the way to the place where I am going", Thomas replies, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way." The reply of Jesus sums up the Christian faith—"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Bishop Eaton concluded his talk by stating that faith is always about seeking the truth, a willingness to keep on exploring the way forward.

A brother from the audience asked this question—In the modern information superhighway, how do we keep our faith and focus on Jesus Christ? Bishop Eaton replied briefly by saying that we have to strengthen our fellowship with other Christians.

Tuesday 13th February

Speaker-Bishop Eaton

Translator-Rev. Mathew Scaria

Bishop Eaton started by referring to John chapter 20, verses 24 to 29 where Thomas (also called Didymus) has been portrayed as Thomas the doubter. Bishop Eaton remarked that this is not an insult in western culture. Most believers sometimes have doubts. But what is important is how our doubts and fears strengthen our faith.

In Matthew chapter 19, verse 27, we see that Peter had some doubts. He asks Jesus "we have left everything to follow you. What will there be for us? Our doubts are a gift to our faith. We have to come to a firm commitment with Christ. We tend to believe things we have seen ourselves. There are things that are true which we cannot scientifically prove to be true. We can believe things that we cannot see. Bishop Eaton admits that sometimes he feels the burden of doubt.

The Church has never been a hotel for saints. It is a place for sinners and doubters and there is always room for more. Bishop Eaton raised the question—why wasn't Thomas with the other disciples on the day of resurrection? He thinks that perhaps Thomas was organising the future activities of the emerging Church. It has to be made abundantly clear that Thomas was not expressing any doubts about resurrection whatsoever. He was only asking for the vision of the resurrected Christ.

Bishop Eaton proclaimed that we, the disciples of Christ of the 21st century should be guided by the experience of the vision of

the risen Lord. “ My Lord and my God” has been the greatest affirmation of all in the

Bible. The faith of St. Thomas does not travel in a straight line. Thomas has been singled out at the end of the gospel. There was no doubt in the mind of Thomas who Jesus was. We are here today owing to the steadfast faith and Christian discipleship of Thomas.

Bishop Eaton concluded by saying that to know Jesus and to make Jesus known had been the mission St. Thomas the Apostle had been entrusted with. The distinguished speaker then responded to a question from the floor---How could we pass on the legacy of our faith to the new generation?

Wednesday 14th February

Speaker: Bishop Peter Eaton

Translator: Rev. Mathew Scaria

Bishop Eaton started by saying that Lent had begun this day in the Anglican tradition. He referred to Genesis ch. 32, verses 22 to 32 as the basis of his talk. He said that this passage helps to understand the faith deeply. We encounter a different struggle here, the encounter between Jacob and God at night. Spiritual writers have studied the importance of night and darkness in our faith.

It is a feature of modern times that advertisements of all sorts promise us satisfaction comfort and peace. We have known people who have had difficult and dark times in their lives. Some of them as a result have come into deeper relationship with God.

Jacob was alone when he encountered God. A multitude of complex emotions can make us feel alone. Jacob was alone when God appears to him, starting the relationship between God and Israel. God does not make it easy for Jacob. In a wrestling encounter, God goes for Jacob’s weak spot. When we feel that everything is okay, we fail to listen to God.

Bishop Eaton highlighted “ The Wound of the Knowledge of God”. Some of our struggles can go on for a long time. God is immortal; we are mortal. There is bound to be tension in this encounter. At the end of the encounter, darkness had given way to light.

God refuses to give up on us. Resurrection from death should be a daily pattern for us. Jacob is not giving up-an example of deep faith in God. The change that had happened to Jacob was extraordinary. “ You are no longer Jacob but Israel.

To change one’s name is changing one’s identity from one individual to an entire section of people.

We are always a different people after an encounter with God. If we avoid God, we may be forced to encounter with other things. It is more difficult for us to keep God away. The immediate aftermath of our transformation by God is bound to be painful. It is our limping that makes us deepen our compassion for others. The night, the solitude and the pain of limping---by the end of the night, the sun arises and it is a new dawn with a new set of people and a new future. But Jacob continues to limp.

God never gives upon us and we should never give up on Him.

Questions from the floor:

1. As narrow-minded human beings, we are unable to accommodate our neighbours. How can we overcome this?
2. How can we help someone struggling with faith and God?

With regard to the above question, a senior priest of the Church in the audience said that in Eastern spirituality, we do not wrestle with God but we are there to receive the Word.

Thursday 15th February

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Rajkumar Ramachandran

Translator: Rev. Abraham Pulinthitta

Dr. Rajkumar started his discourse by referring to John chapter 17-verse 11 where we find Jesus praying for his disciples. ‘Father, protect them by the power of your name-the name you gave me.’

In Philippians chapter 3, verse 10 Paul says “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.” Dr. Rajkumar is of the view that as Christians, we do not value the closeness to God. We have to pray-‘Reveal yourself to me, Lord.’ He added that it is easier to know God than to know people. God never changes. God hates sins but loves sinners.

Dr. Rajkumar dwelt on three aspects of our relationship to God:

1. It is the will of God.

Draw close to God and he will come closer to us. The word of God reveals the will of God.

2. We are the inheritance of God.

We like to be with people whom we love. The speaker mentioned death as the homecoming to heaven. Stephanos said, “Lord, receive my spirit.”

Dr. Rajkumar mentioned on a personal note that in his prayer time, he enjoys God’s presence. He reminded us the words of Christ ‘Ask and it would be given to you.’ In 1 Samuel chapter 3, we read how God revealed himself to Samuel through His word. In the same way in our prayer we should be saying “

Lord, speak to us; we are listening.”

3. We are called to be the friends of Jesus

Dr. Rajkumar referred to the hymn “what a friend we have in Jesus” and said that Jesus called his disciples friends. In John chapter 15 verse 15, Jesus tells his disciples “I have called you friends; for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

Dr. Rajkumar mentioned that Christians could be enemies of God. He referred to James chapter 4 verse 4-“Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” Christians do sometimes get carried away by the world. We read in Matthew chapter 6, verses 19 and 20---Jesus telling us not to store up for ourselves

treasures on earth but store up treasures in heaven. In verse 24, we read, “ you cannot serve both God and Money. The take- home message was unequivocal-Lord is our treasure. On a personal note, Dr. Rajkumar revealed that he received God in his life on 21st May 1980. He has been to 48 countries and 21 states in India preaching the Gospel. He referred to some personal and family difficulties that he had had to endure. Through prayer, he survived all those difficulties. The truth of the matter is that God has never promised us a life devoid of difficulties.

In John chapter 16, verse 33, Jesus says, “In this world you have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” Dr. Rajkumar concluded his talk by referring to 1 John chapter 3, verse 24—“Those who obey his commands live in Him and He in them.”

Friday 16th February

Speaker: Dr. Rajkumar

Translator: Rev. Abraham Pulinthitta

Rev. Rajkumar started his talk by referring to Psalm 94 verse 14. ‘ For the Lord will not reject his people; He will never forsake his inheritance.’ Then he expanded on John chapter 15 verse 16 “ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-fruit that will last.” To bear fruit, we have to be friends of Jesus. He referred to two sets of people-those who are saved up and those who are not yet saved. Touching on Ephesians chapter 4 verse 15, Dr. Rajkumar stressed the importance of speaking the truth in love. He said that we cannot compromise on truth. Isaiah 50 verse 4 says, “The sovereign Lord has given

me an instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary”.

Referring to 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 11, Dr. Rajkumar stated that all Christians have been called to speak the word of God. As it is written in John chapter 14-verse 26, God the Father will send the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus Christ to teach us all things today and will remind us tomorrow. He will give us the word to speak as illustrated in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 13. ”This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

Dr. Rajkumar went on to say that God’s love for us and in us are different. God’s love for us is for us to enjoy. God’s love in us is for others to enjoy. Anybody can enter the most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus. God lives in us through the Holy Spirit. In John chapter 14-verses 15,16, and 17, we see the fellowship with Holy Spirit. The speaker referred to Romans chapter 8-verse 26 and said that the spirit helps us in our weakness and helps us to pray according to God’s will. Spirit of God is a counsellor.

The speaker now dwelt up on the Prayer of Ezra in Psalm 119 verse 19. “ I am a stranger on earth, do not hide your commands from me.” In Jeremiah chapter 33 –verse 3, The Lord says, “ Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”

The word of God is life. In John chapter 6 verse 63, we read “ The spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing.” God’s words live forever. Dr. Rajkumar concluded his sermon

by referring to 2 Corinthians chapter 13-verse 14- “ May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

There was a question from the floor. We are spending more time in social and community work than actually spreading the Gospel? Dr. Rajkumar replied in brief saying that we have to live by the word, spirit and faith and that there is no compromise here.

Saturday 18th February

Speaker: Dr. Rajkumar

Translator: Rev. Abraham Pulinhitta

On this last day of the Bible classes, Rev. Rajkumar concentrated on:

1. The blood of Christ
2. The Holy Spirit
3. The Word of God

He describes these as the resources in our Christian life. The speaker said that we should ask God what He wants us to ask Him. Let us pray to Him. “ Help me God to walk with you.” He referred to Hebrews chapter 11-verses 5 and 6 and said that Enoch travelled with God and was able to please Him consistently. Dr. Rajkumar exhorted everyone to ask for faith and earnestly seek Him. Faith is a gift of God. The blood of Christ was shed for all of us. Hebrews chapter 12 verse2 refers to Jesus Christ as the author and perfection of our faith.

In Colossians chapter 3-verse 16 we read, “ Let the word of God grow in us”. Dr.

Rajkumar said that we should have hunger for the Word and thirst for the Faith (Spirit) and that we should all be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith. Intimacy with God will enable us to help the least of our brethren said the speaker in answer to a question from the floor-what are we doing for the underprivileged and the marginalised in our society. Dr. Rajkumar concluded his class by exhorting everyone to hold on steadfast to the faith.

There was a large attendance in all the Bible classes. His Grace Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Koorilos Episcopa, President of the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association, Rt. Rev. Thomas Mar Timotheos Episcopa -past President, Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa, Rt. Rev. Dr. Mathews Mar Makarios Episcopa graced the Bible classes on various days.

This columnist can say quite categorically that it was a great blessed experience for all the participants of the Bible classes, who have taken home the Word of The Lord. Let us thank God Almighty for His countless blessings on The Maramon Convention and pray for the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association and its global missionary and charitable activities.

Amen.

Prepared by Dr Ninan Daniel Kurunthotikkal

Member of Tabore Mar Thoma Church, Manchester, UK

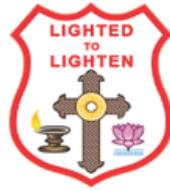
Good News for the Mar Thoma Community in Europe:

2017 has been a year of miracles, let us thank God

In the Bible we see so many beautiful and soul searching verses on giving thanks to God. For the Mar Thoma community in Europe, 2017 has been year of thanksgiving for God's manifold blessings to us. In Psalm 118 we read: "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures for ever." How do we know God is good? Psalmist says: "Taste and see that God is good." As a Mar Thoma community in Europe, that is what we have been doing over the last sixty years. God also has given us an opportunity to express our thanks collectively during our Diamond jubilee celebrations.

Two amazing things have happened to us by the grace of God. Firstly, the Sbaha Council and the Episcopal Synod have decided to give us an independent zonal status from January 2018. Secondly, the Charity Commission has allowed 'The Council of the Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe (COMPE)' to be a registered charity. Therefore, we have much to be thankful for, and God is worthy of our ultimate gratitude in all things. The Christian ought to be a thankful person. Let us follow St. Paul's advice, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:4-6). "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).



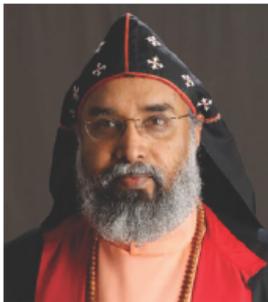


36th Mar Thoma Family Conference, UK & Europe



Spiritual Journey in a Digital World

*"Let My People Go,
That They Might Worship Me!"*
Exodus 9:1



Leaders

Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar
Philoxenos Episcopa

Rev. Dr. Mothy Varkey
Rev. Larry Varghese



Hosted By : **Hermon Mar Thoma Church, The Midlands**

Dates : 24–26 Aug, 2018
Venue : Yarnfield Park, Stone
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