

Hosea 1:2-10

Psalm 85

Colossians 2: 6-19

Luke 11:1-13

These sermon notes were prepared before the sermon was delivered and so do not transcribe the actual sermon word for word

Today's first reading comes from the prophet Hosea, a change from Amos who we have heard from for the last two weeks; and the Hosea reading gives us a good example of Prophetic communication.. We find through the words of Hosea a 'Divine' appreciation of the world, a perspective, in Hosea's understanding, of how things are in the sight of God.

And that is followed by a vision of what is being called into being, the very hope and promise of God for creation; *"it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."*

This Old Testament example of communicating with God reflects a world view and an understanding of God that is fully understandable in its time and place. It is however open to discussion and debate whether or not we can find that same understanding still available to us in our time and place today.

When we look at today's gospel reading, we come across another form of 'Divine' communication; and in today's reading we also find one of the cornerstones of our liturgy and perhaps the best known and most recited pieces of Scripture, 'The Lord's Prayer'. We generally use the form found in Matthew's gospel (6:9–13) rather than the shorter form that we have in Luke's gospel today.

As we reflect on our 'communicating with God', there is something else in the gospel that is as important, if not more important than the Lord's Prayer; something that also is foundational in our becoming 'The Body of Christ'.

When we follow the interaction between Jesus and the disciples throughout the gospel narratives, we have an opportunity to compare and contrast their interactions with our own life experience. The objective is not for us to mimic the disciples, for theirs is different life in a different time and place; rather we have an opportunity to discover ourselves in relation to the same life processes of growth and development and to use their stories as a reference point for the orientation of our own story.

Today's gospel identifies an important, if not critical step, or movement, in their journey and it comes in the form of a request; *"Lord, teach us to pray"*.

Like us, the disciples had previously been taught how to pray; they had well tried and tested religious practices. However in their following Christ something more was revealed, something they saw as life giving and life changing. And what was revealed, required of them another, a different, engagement and encounter with the Divine; they sought to communicate and so relate in a way they had not experienced before.

“*Lord, teach us to pray*” indicates the initiation of a process for us in the present; it invites us to go beyond the practices we learnt as children and discover again the engagement and encounter that we have with God.

If, like the disciples, we seek to know for ourselves what Christ revealed then we also must be open to leaving behind past teachings and discovering the reality of prayer, in the light of Christ’s self-revelation.

The early church closed off the options for discovery for it read this, and all of scripture as literal and absolute. The early church read the gospels as if an ABC reporter was at the scene capturing the actual dialogue; they had also elevated Jesus into an absolute representation of God rather than a revelation of God in all of humanity.

Today, we have an opportunity to do what the disciples did, to look at all that is revealed ‘in Christ’ and then to seek for ourselves a new understanding and a new encounter with the Divine in and through our prayer life.

First we have to ask ourselves, is our understanding of prayer still very much as it was formed when we were children? And then consider, has the inclusion of a literal understanding of the gospels, and perhaps the bible in general, shaped our theology and restricted it to a simple child-like understanding?

As we engage these questions we begin to open ourselves to an appreciation that the Lord’s Prayer is perhaps not to be understood as a literal and absolute script for how we should pray. This becomes obviously clear when we look at the opening line that we recite in our daily prayer; “*Our Father in heaven*”, for if taken as literally it is as descriptive of God as it is of Santa Claus.

To begin our encounter with prayer we have to first clarify our understanding of God; and that is the process identified in today’s gospel. The disciples found a new understanding of God revealed ‘in Christ’, and with a new theology they sought to learn a new way, and a new process of prayer.

If God is in a place different from you, then it is ok to give it a name, and heaven is Ok even though it reflects a past understanding of heaven as the place above the dome of the sky. If God is seen as a father figure then again perhaps “our Father” is ok, although how do we different catholic priests?

If God is a person other than yourself then it is feasible to have a conversation with ‘him’, even if we have, or have not, got beyond the gender issues.

And finally, if god has something you want, need or desire then perhaps it is ok to ask for it; however you then have a God who is a withholding God, one who has not given everything!

The disciples were drawn into a new understanding of God, and Christ revealed that new understanding, and so a new appreciation of prayer needed to be understood as well.

Last week we received a new perspective on our place in the universe, photos taken by NASA's Saturn-orbiting space probe, Cassini, from a distance of 1.44 billion kilometres. A reminder of the different appreciation we have of where we are, very different to our common understanding back in the times of the gospel narrative.

We have also grown into a deeper understanding of God, and a deeper appreciation of Christ's teaching, his life and being.

But have we developed, or even sought to develop our understanding of prayer?

If we see revealed 'in Christ' the fullness of Divinity in humanity, and if we appreciate Christ as the fullness of God's 'giving', nothing withheld; then we might agree with Meister Eckhart, who said: "If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough."

If, we leave behind the rigid script of a literal theologians prayer, we might embrace Mahatma Ghandi's reverence for prayer; "Prayer is not an old woman's idle amusement. Properly understood and applied, it is the most potent instrument of action."

If we listen to that which Christ revealed:

"I and the Father are one." [John 10:30]

"He abides in us" [1 John 3:24]

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." [John 1:14]

"God is love Whoever lives in **love** lives in **God**, and **God** in them" [1 John 4:16]

Then surely, like the disciples, we will seek to pray with a new voice and new orientation to that which we learnt by rote when we were children.

Prayer is a dialogue, much more one of listening than speaking, and in prayer the Word of God is both given and received, the very dynamic of love is given form within us.

The voice of prayer is a Divine voice, and it is our voice.

"Lord, teach us to pray"

Let's find the same request for ourselves this week ,and join the disciples on our quest. And be encouraged by the insight of Soren Kierkegaard:

"Prayer does not change God, but it changes the one[him] who prays."

Peace be with You