

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Diocese of Cape Town Clergy and Layworkers' Conference
Eucharist – Second Homily
Wednesday 7 October 2009

Luke 11:1-4

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.' ²He said to them, 'When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial.'

May I speak in the name of the One God: the Father to whom we pray, the Son who sits at his right hand and intercedes for us, and the Spirit, who groans within us.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, those of us who are ordained, are asked 'Will you be faithful in prayer ...?' (Deacons); 'Will you be diligent in prayer' (Priests); and 'Will you devote yourself to prayer?' (Bishops).

And all of us give the same answer 'With God's help, I will.'

When we baptise children, we also remind the wider church that as they grow, they will need encouragement to be faithful in public worship and private prayer.

Prayer is hard work – it requires commitment from our side and it requires encouragement and help from others, most of all from God.

But let us start with the commitment on our side.

The American Franciscan priest Brennan Manning has described prayer like this:

"Prayer is not primarily about gaining insight from the Word or having an intense emotional experience. It's primarily an act of love. Spending time with God might be dynamic one day, and I might fall asleep the next day. But showing up is an act of love."

So we must be faithful, diligent, and devoted, in our showing up.

And we must remember that it is not just an act of love on our part. For we are always received by open loving arms, too.

This is true both of our saying of the Offices, and of the personal prayer that is more about waiting on God, that is related to the sitting and listening that we reflected on yesterday.

The quality of our prayer cannot be measured by our experience during or after the prayer – how uplifted or focussed we felt; how inspired or affirmed. Prayer is not failure if we sit with distractions or worries or depression.

Prayer is only failure if we fail to make the time to stop and sit.

So, if nothing else, we turn up, and go through the motions.

And we come with the attitude outlined in our gospel reading, Jesus' outline of prayer, which is embodied within our daily offices. We show up to express:

- honour to God,
- our desire for his kingdom,
- our need for his daily resourcing of all we are and do,
- our need of continuing transformation through learning to forgive and be forgiven,
- and our susceptibility to weakness and temptations of every sort.

We come, expressing our dependence upon him – and what happens as a result is entirely gift!

All I know is this: that, by and large, the gifts come – gifts in my own life, but, perhaps more importantly, gifts to others through my ministry – not through how well I judge my prayer times to have gone, but through my faithfulness, my diligence, my devotedness, in showing up.

Whatever else we do in ministry, let us battle and fight to ensure that we always show up, and place ourselves in the embrace of God's love.

Amen