

## Easter 7 (Sunday after Ascension) 2016 Prayer

Ezekiel 36 vv 24-28 p868, Psalm 97, Acts 16 vv 16-40 p1112, Revelation 22 vv 12-21 p1250, John 17 vv 20-26 p1085

When I was a child and one of us complained that some electrical appliance wasn't working, my mother always used to say, *Is the plug in?* That's a good start! Nothing electrical is going to work without a source of power. In the same way, we human beings are powerless without God. Prayer is like putting the plug in. We connect with God. It's not a bad analogy. One word for a generator of electricity is *dynamo*. St Paul calls Jesus *the Christ the δυναμιν of God and the σοφίαν of God*, the power and wisdom of God. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, we are plugged into God.

We can take the analogy further. Electricity powers the lights which lighten our darkness. Electric fires provide warmth. Electric motors are the motive force behind our local trains. Stationary electric motors make all kinds of machinery work. Vacuum cleaners suck clean. Washing machines wash clean. Electronic guidance systems guide us. All kinds of electronic devices are involved in the healing processes of modern medicine. You probably know the urban myth about the doctors who wondered why so many patients in one particular bed died unexpectedly. It turned out that the hospital cleaner regularly unplugged the ventilator so that she could plug in her polishing machine. Electricity powers radio and television, telephones, computers and other forms of communication and computation. These devices provide music. They speak the word. They inform. They keep records of our heritage. They enable us to calculate, prognosticate and generally to plan for the future. So light, comfort, motivation, work, cleansing, guidance, healing, music, preaching, education and edification, tradition, prophecy. Am I talking about electricity or the Holy Spirit? Whichever, you need to be plugged in, plugged into the mains socket or plugged into God in prayer.

But is it possible, to be plugged in all the time? Surely, the cables are too short to stay plugged in whatever you're doing. You can't be in church or even on your knees at home all the time. What about batteries? Well, there's the battery in your torch. It should really be called a dry cell. The chemicals in a torch battery generate electricity until they are used up. Then the light fades and dies. So it is with people who try to live their lives in their own strength without God. They use up their God-given resources. They fade and they die. Better is the battery in your mobile 'phone, better, but not perfect. You can recharge your 'phone. In the same way, you can come to church each week, keep a prayer time every day and so recharge your spiritual batteries for when you have to out into the world without God. Now that doesn't sound right does it? Where in the world could you be without God? Nowhere; that's where. Your spiritual life can't be like your mobile 'phone, running down between charges, useless when there's no signal. You need a constant source of power, like your landline, plugged into the BT system. Doesn't St Paul say, *pray without ceasing*, but how is that possible? Just as you can't use an electric mower to cut the rectory grass because the cable would be too short or else it would get tangled up in the trees and bushes which get in the way of an uncomplicated run at it, surely you can't be expected to be plugged into God all the time, whatever you are doing, wherever you go, no matter how busy and full your life is.

Let me change the analogy. Let's say your power doesn't come from a wall socket connected to the mains or a battery. How about being an electric train, picking up juice from

a third rail, or a tram or a trolleybus, drawing current from overhead wires? The third rail and the overhead cables go everywhere the train, tram or trolleybus has to go. In the same way, God is with us wherever we go. It is possible for our lives to be a conversation with God. *He walks with me and He talks with me along life's narrow way.* If we are mindful of the fact that we are always in God's Presence, we may indeed *pray without ceasing*; we are always connected to the source which sustains us and guides us and empowers us to do God's work in the world, so that His Name may be hallowed, His Kingdom come, His Will be done on earth as it is in heaven, that we may receive our bread daily, that our sins may be forgiven as we forgive those who sin against us and that we may be protected from all temptation and evil.

One final thought from another childhood story. My grandfather told me that, as a young man, he used to wonder what would happen if the overhead wire which supplied the trams with electricity should break. One day he saw it happen in Dock Road, Chatham. and it was just what you would expect. There was a terrific blue flash and all the trams stopped. The Christian life is a corporate endeavour. We are all in this together. We depend on one another, the Church of God. If the infrastructure of the Church collapses because of lack of support, we shall all be cut off from the source of our power, but that's another sermon for another time.