

Trinity 9 2020

9 th August Trinity 9	9. 30 & 11.00 Holy Communion	I Kings 19 vv 9-18 p361 Romans 10 vv 5-15 p1137 Matthew 14 vv 22-33 p981	Hymns you could sing at home. (numbers English Hymnal) 466 Thou Whose Almighty 469 To Mercy, Pity, Peace & 353 Dear Lord & Father 495 God is Working His 354 Eternal Father
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GRANT to us, Lord, we beseech thee, the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful; that we, who cannot do any thing that is good without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Things look different from different angles. If the clouds don't get in the way, the view of the landscape from an aeroplane is amazing. If you ascend in a space rocket far enough to escape the atmosphere, the stars don't twinkle. It's only our air that makes them appear to do so. Gorillas seen at the zoo through the security fencing are fascinating and quite funny. A company of gorillas seen free on a walk through an African forest might be somewhat more alarming. The desk I inherited from my predecessors at the Rectory is nicely polished, though somewhat worn, when looked at from above, but is just plain unvarnished wood when seen from below. What I thought was a bird in the trees opposite my kitchen turned out to be a fly on the windowpane when I looked at it properly. Well, I wasn't wearing my glasses. Optical illusions succeed in deceiving us because of the way we look at them, but sometimes we need to change the way we look at things if we are to see them as they really are.

COVID 19 has given me a different perspective on Morning and Evening Prayer. Normally, I used to say these daily offices at set times and in church and sometimes joined by other people.

The effect of set times was to give structure to my day. Everything else had to be fitted in around prayer – which is not a bad perspective on life actually. We should surely see everything we do in the light of our relationship with God.

Church is sacred space. Christians have worshipped in St Michael's and St John's for more than a thousand years. Almost certainly, pagans worshipped on these sites long before that. There is a sense of continuity with earlier generations (or there is for me anyway) when we pray here, when we think of the lives they led, the problems they faced, the opportunities they had, and the benefits God bestowed upon them in this very place. I don't think only of those long gone, but also of those who have much more recently been promoted to glory, as the Salvation Army puts it so well, in my own time as Rector, including members of my own family and close friends. Not only can we cast back our minds to the past and remember previous generations on their earthly pilgrimage, but we can also enjoy our fellowship with them as they dwell in eternity in Christ with all the company of heaven. *O blest communion, fellowship divine! We feebly struggle, they in glory shine; yet all are one in thee, for all are thine. Alleluia!*

Church buildings, moreover, are designed to turn our thoughts to heaven – the architecture and the artefacts speak of the facts of sacred history and the divine nature revealed in the story of the great things He has done.

Jesus says, *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* Christian fellowship is precious. That is one reason why it seems to me right that we should persevere in meeting despite masks and all the other paraphernalia of precautions against infection.

As I originally envisaged when I came to this parish, these daily offices of Morning and Evening Prayer were part of a programme which included daily Holy Communion, even more important than Mattins and Evensong, because it is the service which Jesus Himself gave us. I'm afraid that fact rather lessened my commitment to the offices which played second fiddle to the Eucharist and I sometimes failed to plumb them to the depths they have in themselves as services of the Word of God and prayer in all its aspects. *Yet*

ought we chiefly so to do (that is confess our sins), *when we assemble and meet together to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his most holy Word, and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul*, which is the essence of Mattins and Evensong. The words *when we assemble and meet together* are especially poignant at this time.

COVID has forced me to look at these daily offices from a different angle. Now I say them at home, generally in my garden, at times which suit me, and alone.

God is everywhere. We can pray to Him anywhere. We don't need to enter sacred space, to go into a consecrated church building to pray. In fact, personally, I find it not at all difficult to see something of the glory of God in nature, a tiny fraction of His infinity, but authentic for all that. I like praying out of doors. Perhaps harder, certainly for me, is to recognise the glory of God in the traffic roaring past on the A228 and the people passing by about their business in the world. I try to remember that every human being is made in the image of God and Jesus died for each one of us. God is as present with us on the motorway, in the office and on the hospital ward as He is with us in church.

It's actually doing me good, at least for now, not to have a rigid structure around which to order my day. I'm too inclined to enslave myself to time, to set unnecessary deadlines to try to get everything finished up as soon as possible. I need to accept that it very often doesn't matter if things take longer. Things take as long as they do. Time is a good servant, but a bad master. Time makes sense only in the light of eternity.

Missing out on praying with other people is a miss. Of course we can always pray alone and wherever we are, but it is nevertheless *not good for the man to be alone* – not all of the time anyway.

And what has particularly struck me, praying these offices alone everyday and in my garden, as entities in their own right receiving hopefully my full attention because they are all I have in the absence of the even more wonderful Eucharist?

It is this. Our relationship with God is a virtuous circle. Everything comes from Him. We depend on Him for everything that we have. We reach out to Him and He meets all our needs. But it is His gift to us that we have the grace to reach out to Him. God gives us the will to come to Him, the will to pray. Because we come to Him, because we pray, God meets our needs. Our need is to come to God in prayer. It is a virtuous circle that aligns us with God. In a way, I suppose you could say that it is a perpetual motion machine. The divine energy flows into us and enables us to live in accordance with His Will. As we live in His Will, so the divine energy flows into us and enables us to live in accordance with His Will and so on and on.

I've probably not made myself clear. I'm not entirely clear myself. But think of it in terms of the Lord's Prayer. We come to God as our Father and pray that His Name will be hallowed. We hallow God's Name when we honour and praise Him. His Name is hallowed when we obey Him. We pray that the Church and the world will honour and praise God's Name by obeying His commandments. God's Name is hallowed in pouring out His blessings on the world. So we pray that His Will will be done, for God to do His own work in making this world what He wants it to be, for the cooperation of humanity and the rest of creation in accomplishing God's purposes, for our own part as individuals in bringing in the Kingdom of God. We pray that He will look after us and provide us with everything we need. We pray that He will forgive us in the knowledge that we must forgive those who have trespassed against us. He forgives our failure to live up to what it means to be human beings made in the image of God to the end that we might be made like Him, generous in caring, ready to forgive, filled with love. We ask to be protected from what might turn us away from God, temptation, and from every kind of evil, from all the works of the devil, so that we are quite definitely and unconditionally on the Lord's side, we in Him and He in us. I've probably still not made myself clear. It's hard to grasp at an intellectual level and hard to explain, but it does make sense when we take time to align ourselves with God, reading the Bible & praying the prayers of the Church, alone or in company.