

Pro-Cathedral

27 October 2021

Welcome

Welcome again to everyone as we pray together this morning. Over the last few days, we've been listening to the marvellous chapter 8 to the Romans – deep, poetic, mysterious, alluring. One phrase in today's reading has often helped people who pray. There we read:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)

Topic

This helps us in three ways.

Steps

First of all, prayer is a challenge for us. Once we move beyond saying prayers to prayer of presence or to meditation of some kind, we can easily feel helpless or even that nothing is really going on for ages. The teaching of Paul is a direct help: we are not at all alone, the Spirit is praying within us.

Secondly, this means that prayer as such is not our own construction, our own effort or achievement. On the contrary, prayer is a gift at different levels. The desire to pray is a gift, even when we are not always faithful or responsive. The practice of prayer is a gift, when we respond to the small still voice within calling us to greater intimacy with God. Being faithful to prayer is also a gift. We do contribute time and commitment – but we can be faithful only because of the Spirit within.

And finally, when we pray our task is suddenly very simple. God the Spirit is praying within all of us all of the time. Our role is to attune ourselves to that inner "liturgy", simply to say yes again and again. The foundation for this gift and grace is to be found earlier in the letter to the Romans. In chapter 5, St Paul writes simply and directly as follows:

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Romans 5:5)

And at the end of chapter 8, Paul takes us the same thought as he says

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

Suddenly, it is all there: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

This means that even when we fail to pray, still we are praying because the Spirit is working within us all. When we feel the absence of prayer, our longing for it is itself prayer. Best of all, when we do pray, the love of God comes alive within us.