

Donnybrook

8 March 2022

Welcome

This morning we have come together to pray. We all do it regularly – sometimes with others, perhaps mostly on our own. Even though we pray and pray frequently, it is natural to wonder sometimes what is the point of it all.

Topic

Matthew implicitly raises the same question when he tells us not to be like the pagans, who think the more they say there more likely they are to be heard.

Steps

St Augustine of Hippo can help us here. Once, he was reflecting on the Lord's Prayer and on this introduction in particular. With his usual clarity, he recognised that we do not pray in order to inform God – God who cannot be unaware of our needs. He also recognised that we do not pray to persuade God – God already loves and desires to give us all we truly need. So, why do we pray? According to St Augustine, we pray not to change the God but to be changed so that we may be able to receive to good things God wants for us all along.

For Augustine, prayer is fundamentally a longing, a desire. His most quoted sentence is: You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. In Latin, Augustine says you have made us not "tibi" for yourself but "ad te", meaning oriented towards God, on the journey towards God. When we pray we exercise, so to speak, our longing and we enlarge our capacity for God in our lives. Augustine speaks of the "extensio animae", the stretching of the soul. It is sometimes translated as an enlarged heart – a tricky medical metaphor – but we know what he means.

Conclusion

So, in a word, we are not informing God; we are not even persuading God; we are living our desire for God and letting ourselves be changed. 6