

Fifth Sunday of Lent: The Power of Prayer

29th March 2020

Many people have told me over the phone of all the various jobs and activities they have been doing while in isolation. Clearing out drawers and cupboards, decorating back rooms and bathrooms, pottering around the garden and getting round to those jobs they have never had the time to complete before. At the end of each chat I find myself saying 'God love you and keep praying.' Keep Praying. This isn't an insincere platitude, a hollow phrase but something I truly believe and know to be powerful. It is by praying we can make a difference and help others.

The news this week has shown us the huge numbers of people who are volunteering and working to combat the Coronovirus in our country. We are seeing such powerful public shows of support like 'the applause' for our NHS workers on Thursday and community groups looking out for those who are the most vulnerable in their streets, flats and local areas. Pictures of rainbows are being placed in windows to encourage and give hope. All these things are showing the outside world that love and charity among humankind is not dead.

We as brothers and sisters in Christ have a unique role to play – prayer. It is through prayer that we are able to support, encourage, aid and love those on the front line of this pandemic, those who are anxious and worried, those who are suffering and mourning as well as those who sadly have gone before us marked with the sign of faith.

The picture below (For those who cannot see it please do visit the parish website) depicts an important episode in the book of Exodus.



'As long as Moses kept his arms raised, Israel had the advantage...' (Ex 17:11a). The people of Israel following Moses, after liberation from slavery in Egypt, engage in battle with the Amalekites. Moses stands at a distance and raises his hands in prayer and as soon as he does it has an impact, the Israelites gain the upper hand. Though he is not in the heat of battle his prayer aids the people of Israel and all goes well for them. However, ***'...when he [Moses] let his arms fall, the advantage went to Amalek.'*** (Ex 17:11b)

All looks like doom and yet in this potential tragedy Moses is blessed! He is not on his own, he is part of a community, a family and because of this his prayer and their support leads the people of Israel to victory.

'But Moses' arms grew heavy, so they took a stone and put it under him and on this he sat, Aaron and Hur supporting his arms, one on one side, one on the other; and his arms remained firm till sunset. With the edge of the sword Joshua cut down Amalek and his people.' (Ex 17:12-13)

This piece of scripture from the Old Testament reminds us about the power of prayer. No matter where we are standing at this time in our daily lives – the hospital, the supermarket, home or the garden – our prayer will help our brothers and sisters in the battle to contain this virus. No matter when we are tired, exhausted and our mind is distracted with worry there is always another believer praying for us and the world. We may be all in physical isolation but our prayers connect us with each other as we are all part of the Body of Christ.

Today (Sunday 29th March 2020) at 12noon our country will be re-dedicated as the Dowry of Mary. When it comes to prayer Our Blessed Mother is the model of prayer and intercession. It was St. John Vianney who once wrote that when we ask Our Lady to pray with us our prayers become scented with a beautiful perfume that is always pleasing to Jesus Christ our Lord. Do watch the Holy Mass live at 12noon being streamed from Walsingham if you can. The link is on our website.

I will be celebrating Mass at 11am today and though it will not be public do know that I always bring your intentions to the Altar. In the afternoon I will also be praying the Rosary and the Litany of Our Lady in our own parish Chapel of Our Lady of Oswaldtwistle. Again know that each day I ask her to pray for all parishioners of St. Mary's and their families. For the rest of the week Mass will be said at noon Monday – Saturday.

God Bless and do keep praying
Fr. O'Brien