

## **Lent 1: Our Father**

Lent is about getting back to basics so as to grow in holiness. On Sunday mornings this Lent we are going to explore aspects of the Lord's prayer - basic model prayer that Our Lord gives us, the basic prayer that across the centuries the Church has taught us to pray morning, noon and night.

On Shrove Tuesday this week the House of Bishops wrote a pastoral letter to all of us encouraging us to play a full part in the forthcoming General Election. We as a parish have already got plans in place to do just this. Fr. Tom is organising a reverse hustings at which all the candidates will be present not to tell us - but, exactly as our bishops are asking - to listen to the real needs and concerns of the community and parish which we serve in the name of Christ.

What has this got to do with prayer? Bp. Desmond Tutu at the height of the struggle for freedom in South Africa wrote: if governments knew how subversive contemplative prayer is, they would ban it. Contemplative prayer is not some graduate level form of prayer to be attempted only by the extremely clever and holy. Contemplative prayer simply means: spending time looking at god, looking with god, looking through Christ's eyes. When, as many of you do, you light a prayer candle before the icon of Christ Pantocrator and spend time simply looking at Christ you are doing contemplative prayer. A story I have told many times sums contemplative prayer up: the old man hobbles over to church every morning in lent and sits for an hour or more simply gazing at the crucifix, no words being said, by his own admission hardly conscious thought, yet asked what he is doing: "I looks at him and he looks at me". As we look we see and are seen; as we are seen we are changed - for our good and for the good of the world.

Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer to be prayed in much the same way as looking at an icon or crucifix: simply to spend time with, time spent that we come closer to Christ, time offered in prayer for the needs of the world- a world which so needs daily bread, forgives and deliverance from evil.

The Gospel for this Sunday tells of Jesus praying in the wilderness. He is driven there, we are told, by the Holy Spirit. Always the whole work of God is Trinity shaped\_ Creation, redemption, salvation - in all father, Son and spirit are together as one. Straight from baptism in the Jordan Jesus is compelled by the Spirit to enter the desert of Lent. Why? Whole books could and have been written on that. Today let's take our cue from the other two readings given us this morning: both telling the story of Noah.

The Great Flood of Genesis on whose waters Noah bobs safely in the ark is a different form of desert but a desert, a wilderness, none the less. No I don't think there was ever a Noah event to be

filmed had we been there. Yes I do believe very much that the Noah story is true - for it is about us- and about Christ.

Why the flood? Actually probably most of us go there most nights when watching yet another horror story of evil and cruelty unfold on the nightly news. Because we really do try to be Christian - to be Christ-like - we recoil inwardly from wishing that evil men butchering harmless innocents would get their come-uppance. But perhaps we feel it? The Genesis story simply assumes that God thinks the same. Hence the flood.

“Let him who is without sin cast the first stone” cries Jesus - and we know that destruction, even for those who have done most terrible things, is not Christ’s Way. Contemplating the Noah Story through Christ’s eyes we come closer to the Mystery contained in the first two words Christ gives us to teach us to pray: Our Father. Our Father. Christ teaches us to recoil from a half-idea of god who punishes creation. Christ leads us to God who loves. Our Father.

Noah builds an Ark - and at the end of the story gives worship to god. Christ goes into the desert to pray- and teaches us to worship: hallowed be thy Name. Christ teaches us to pray that god may make God’s very being holy to us -and so holy to the world. That is the role of Christ’s community, the Church. Christ in the desert offers himself wholly to god in praise - and continues to do so even when Christ’s praise leads him to the Cross. Our worship and praise makes plain to the world that the only hope, the only truth, the only future for our world rests in the God who is Love, the god revealed on the Cross.

Our father, hallowed be thy name. Simone Weil, a French political activist and mystic made it her calling to work for the good of the poor and down trodden. Although very much an academic, Simone chose to work in a factory at the bench - for she believed she saw Christ doing that in the desert, saw God doing that as he brought Noah through the flood to new creation. Every day Simone prayed the Lord’s Prayer - truly praying it; daily she would rise very early and would not allow herself croissant and coffee until she had prayed every word of the Lord’s Prayer in its fullness, reflecting on Christ’s call through it. She prayed the Our father as an icon of prayer- and so did much to bear witness to the political necessities and concerns of her world at that time. We must do the same - for as Bp. Tut puts it: if governments knew how subversive contemplative prayer is, they would ban it.