

HOMILY – 7TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

George Bernanos, a French writer said about prayer, “The desire to pray is already a prayer”. The thing is, we all desire something, but what is it that you desire? And is it good for you?

In the Gospel today, Communications Sunday, Jesus raises his eyes to Heaven and declares to the Father, “I pray for them”. Who are “them”? They are the faithful, those who put their trust in Christ. Jesus is teaching us by example, never to underestimate the call to pray.

I probably told you the story of Louis Pasteur, the famous scientist who was on a train, praying the Rosary. A young student was watching him and then declared that he didn’t believe in prayer, he was going to be a scientist at University. He then boldly asked Louis Pasteur what he did for a living. Louis answered “Trying to be a good scientist and a humble servant of God”. He does right enough take humility to pray. Recognising our dependence on a higher power than ourselves, that being God, and taking the time to be in communication with Him. That is in a sense what you are doing when you come to Mass, it is a celebration of prayer. Humbling ourselves in the presence of the Lord.

But we often, as the Catechism teaches us, forget God. We run away from religion and hide. Whether we avoid thinking about God or deny Him, he is always there for us. He seeks us before we seek him. He yearns for us like a lover. You speak with your conscience and suddenly notice that you are speaking with God. In a way, when everything else fails, we turn to God and cry out “God help me”! For example, you feel lonely, have no one to talk to and then sense that God is always available to talk. Or you are in danger and experience that a cry for help is answered by God.

Praying is as human as breathing, eating and loving. Praying purifies our lives, helps us to resist temptation and strengthens us in our weakness. Prayer makes us happier. Even psychologists acknowledge that people who pray regularly are more contented with life.

If you look at the second reading from Acts today, we witness the birth of the early Church and as promised by Jesus, the Holy Spirit has come upon the Disciples and they are joined in continuous prayer. Be still together in prayer before building the Church on earth.

We often sing a hymn at Mass, maybe it’s one of your favourites. “Be still and know I am with you...” And that is so helpful to prayer, stillness. It is only when we are still that we can really reflect and listen. Our lives now are so hectic that stillness is not easy to find. I heard some time ago that the motto of St Margaret’s Academy is ‘Lex Labore Lex Orare’ – ‘To work is to pray’, which I think is a bit of a cop out! Because the Benedictine Way is through prayer to work. We need to start every day with a prayer, then everything we do, with a spiritual mindset and to end the day in prayer, so reflecting on all that has been accomplished.

In the Catholic Church, we have such a rich resource for prayer, that we are truly spoiled. This includes the Holy Scriptures, the Psalms, the spiritual works of the Saints, the Church Fathers and the popular devotions and shrines of the world. But the great gift for prayer is the Holy Spirit, the fuel for the engine of the Church.

How much time should we give to prayer? There can be no mathematical answer to this. Because we are all so different, both in temperament and in circumstances. The general principle concerning time

spent in prayer, anything less than half an hour tends to be too short for deep prayer. We cannot get far in a friendship if we only spend 15 minutes with a friend. It is the same with God.

If I could finish with the words of St Ignatius, founder of the Jesuits, on prayer, “keep your soul in peace, let God work in you. Welcome thoughts that raise your heart to God. Open wide the window of your soul”.

God Bless you all, pray for me too please.