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The Gospel writers make it quite plain that Jesus had very straight forward views on prayer.

They tell us he was critical of ostentatious displays of piety, and discouraged verbosity in prayer. More positively, what Evelyn Underhill describes as,

“a loving filial delight in God, in Himself and for Himself, which is unique in vividness and depth” (Evelyn Underhill, *Worship*).

It is his “vivid” and “deep” love that compels Jesus to break off from public ministry to spend time in prayer with his Father. At the end of one such time of retreat, the disciples ask, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” His response is a simple, easily remembered prayer. The Lord’s Prayer is as accessible to Galilean fishermen and peasants as to scribes and teachers of the Law. Yet its simplicity contains an infinite depth. The model prayer he gives them is full of phrases well known to any pious Jew.

In Aramaic, it begins with a simple, direct *Abba* — a term that indicates intimacy, although not one of sentimentality. It is the counterpart of “Father” rather than “Daddy” (Judith Lieu, *Epworth Bible Commentaries: The Gospel of Luke*).

The structure of the Lord’s Prayer gives the framework for all Christian devotion. It begins with the hallowing of God’s name. In so doing, it draws us into the eternal offering of praise from the Son to the Father. As Jesus observes in the second half of our Gospel, the Father is not like the lazy friend who needs to be roused by our pestering. His care far exceeds that of earthly parents. The primary purpose of prayer is to unite our wills with that of God, and to draw us into the threefold movement of praise, glory, and mutual delight. “Prayer”, as St Julian of Norwich writes, “oneth the soul to God.”

It is only after three petitions focused on God that we come to any focused on human beings. Here, again, is a striking simplicity. Jesus identifies three of the most fundamental human needs: bread, mercy, and deliverance from the tempter’s power.

The request for “daily bread” has a greater sense of immediacy than the liturgical prayers of Jesus’s day, which asked for “sustenance through the year”. Jesus’s petition “is not directed to securing a state of comfort but having needs met each day as they come” (David Lyle Jeffrey, *Brazos Theological*

*Commentary on the Bible: Luke).* This reflects the state of life of Jesus and his followers who realised their own shortcomings.

Tertullian, an early Christian writer from Carthage between 155-220 writes that,

“when we ask for our daily bread, we are asking to live for ever in Christ and to be inseparably united with his body.”

This has a particular meaning when we say the Lord’s Prayer together before Holy Communion. The practice emphasises the Triune nature of all Christian prayer. We join with the Son “in the power of the Spirit” as he offers praise and intercession to the Father.

Moreover, it reminds us that God is the ultimate answer to — as well as the answerer of — our prayers. In Christ, he feeds us with the bread of life, in whom we find forgiveness, reconciliation, and deliverance from the evil one. We ask, and what is given to us is the one thing needful: “To be inseparably united with his body”.

This point is reinforced in the verses that follow in today’s Gospel. Listing the good things an earthly father would give his children, Jesus continues by saying,

“How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” God gives us nothing less than himself.

Only one petition involves a promise of action by those who are praying. When asking for forgiveness, it continues with the declaration “for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us”, or as we more commonly would say,

“forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”

The two are inextricably linked. To refuse to extend forgiveness to others is to reject the summons into the divine love.

As Angela Tilby reminds us,

“God is not like the friend at midnight; yet we may sometimes feel abandoned and that our requests are not heard. Praying with persistence requires discipline and courage. Our spiritual muscles need developing and exercising before we can rely on them to carry us through barren times.”

Prayer is a two-way conversation and so it also is the place for meditation. We hear from God and want to talk to Him about what He says. During these times of reflection upon God and His Word, we learn to discern His thoughts as they enter our own minds.

It is not easy. Teresa of Avila was known to shake her hour glass so that her time she had allotted for prayer went more quickly. I am sure that we all have our own times and places for prayer and meditation and that we find it difficult to concentrate. I often wonder how books and articles have been written on prayer in order to cover up in spiritual inadequacies of the writer- the same could also be said about sermons as well!

How often do we experience “wilderness” situations when we are feel completely lost and alone- periods that can last for days, weeks and sometimes years that can even drive us away from or back to church.

I am sure that we all have our own opinions on what has taken place in our Government this past week. Billy Graham, the great evangelist and preacher once said,

“To get nations back on their feet, we must first get down on our knees.”

Perhaps the same is true of us as well.

Amen.