

## Matthew's weekly musing

### 19<sup>th</sup> February 2021

A book review this week told me there are nine reasons for prayer. I was intrigued. Before I read on, I decided to list the reasons I pray. I struggled to reach five.

Happily when I read the list of nine I recognised them!

Unhappily, I've been left reflecting on my neglect of some of them.

I wonder how you will muse on the nine?

But first why do I pray at all? The simple answer is because Jesus did. We often read of Jesus retreating up a hill to spend the night in prayer.

#### **Matthew 14. 23**

And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone

So here are the nine.

1. God wants to be in a relationship with you, so pray with him.  
Jesus of course invites us to begin, "Father in heaven." Before coming to faith, my only occasional prayers were to God. I had no concept of a relational engagement. It took me a long time to pray to God as Father. I was much quicker off the mark with praying to Jesus as friend. I wonder how you begin your prayers.
2. We pray because we want to be in a relationship with God  
Now I'm beginning to feel emotionally stretched. Do I really want to be in relationship with God, or in fact do I see God as a kind of spiritual butler who is there to respond to my needs?
3. We pray because we have to.  
This doesn't mean *ought* to, but rather there is an instinctive desire for us to be in touch with the spiritual. There is something beyond what my senses tell me. My coming to faith and start in the life of prayer started from this compulsion. I had known about prayer and had felt left-out. It took me a while to realise it was up to me to get going.
4. We pray because we are in need.  
This may be physical, emotional, relational. This may be something to do with me, or something in the news or the world which upsets me. I've never really prayed to God as a kind of fifth emergency service. Even I knew this was a bit of a cheek. I do now talk to Him about my needs in a relational way eg "Well Lord, where are you in this?" or, "Well Lord, what's your advice on the next step?" And so on.

5. We pray because we've come to know that prayer helps us.  
Long ago I used to enjoy running and I learned to keep my body fit. As I grow older the fitness is slowly fading. The experience of prayer is the opposite. Prayer is the place I keep my faith in good order. Daily spiritual engagement is the route to being spiritually fit, and I link this to a good diet of scripture and avoidance of temptations!  
Wonderfully my spiritual fitness is improving as I grow older.
  
6. Prayer is the place we unburden ourselves.  
My goodness this is true. I have spent many an interlude in my prayer chair, reviewing my emotions and experiences and chatting them over with God. It isn't that the burdens go away, but it is that they become lighter and find a place in the rhythms of my life.  
There can be huge challenges in these prayer exchanges. God as counsellor and therapist is really rather good (!) at pointing out my sub-agendas and the way my past experiences influence my present choices.
  
7. Prayer helps us praise God.  
Oh dear, some guilt is creeping in. My praise has essentially depended on hymnody in services surrounded by the faithful. Covid has knocked me off course because I haven't given myself to praise day by day. My daily psalm usually has an element of praise, but I rarely use this as a springboard for my own praise.
  
8. Prayer expresses my solidarity with brothers and sisters near and far.  
My heart bubbles with delight as I contemplate this one. I often prayerfully imagine myself with my many friends in east Africa and from previous parishes. This imagining leads me to pray for them.
  
9. We pray to be transformed.  
It probably took me about two decades to realise that my prayer life was changing me. My pomposity had me assuming that I had been doing the improvements in holiness. Fortunately friends noticed the changes in me and commented, and I realised I was changing in ways I hadn't recognised.

The book mentioned in the review?

James Martin SJ, "Learning to Pray: A guide for everyone"