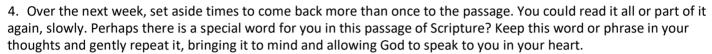
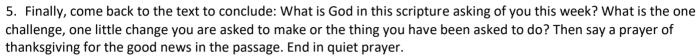


Praying the Scripture - a few simple steps at home Sunday 6th Sept 2020

- 1. Start with stillness and quietening down; then gently read the passage, noticing any feelings and connections to your own experience.
- 2. Read the passage again and spend understand. The notes in your Bible may be of help at this point.
- 3. Read the passage a third time wondering how you yourself might pray the text over the next few days.





THIS SUNDAY'S GOSPEL - Matthew 18:15-20

'...where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them'

'If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, between your two selves. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you: whatever the misdemeanour, the evidence of two or three witnesses is required to sustain the charge. But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community; and if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a gentile or a tax collector. 'In truth I tell you, whatever you bind on earth



will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 'In truth I tell you once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them.' (New Jerusalem Bible)

A Short Thought

Our Gospel reading today has some harsh dimensions and most likely it reflects not the teaching of Jesus directly but the practices in the church for which Matthew was writing. People who refuse to acknowledge their failures are to be treated as pagans and tax collectors! But just how are pagans and tax collectors treated by Jesus and in the Gospel of Matthew? They are welcomed and forgiven! Any permanent exclusion is to be resisted on the example and teaching of Jesus himself.

So Jesus challenges his disciples: "If your brother or sister sins against you, you should go and talk with them about the situation." Now ask yourself: What is your typical reaction when someone 'sins against you'? Do you ignore them? Do you take some time to decide how you want to respond? Or do you nurse your anger or hurt or hold a grudge? Do you retaliate in like manner?

Most of us developed and honed our personal response to being wronged at a very young age. Most times we didn't even know we were developing a personal response. We may have modelled our response on how our parents responded in these types of situations. We may have learned how to manipulate others. Or we simply may have decided to keep our distance from the individuals who we have judged to have wronged us (if that was an option). Or perhaps you were taught to talk with the person and work it out? Today how do I respond when another person sins against me? Is my response different from when I was a child? Or is my reaction basically the same as when I was an 8-year old or a 14-year old? The reality is that our instinctive (and automatic) responses are developed at a very young age, perhaps even beginning while we are still in the womb. These responses become so automatic in our childhood that we may not consciously be aware of them.

Today may be a good day to ask ourselves: how do I respond when I hurt or wronged by another? Forgiveness is meant to be at the core of who we are, and to be honest with you, if we can't do it between ourselves in the church, how can we ever be agents of reconciliation in the world?

SOME POINTERS FOR PRAYER

- 1. At the time Matthew was writing his gospel local church communities would have numbered no more than fifty people. They would be known to one another. Matthew presents the instructions of Jesus for dealing with people whose behaviour disrupted and harmed the community. Note the steps suggested. Simple directions but many of us do otherwise. We avoid difficult confrontations. We talk about the faults of others to everyone but themselves. We go over the head of someone who displeases us and make complaints. In your experience, which approach is life-giving for you and for others?
- 2. What do I do when I notice others losing their way: do I just shrug my shoulders, do I denounce on social media, do I feel morally superior? Or do I follow the gentle way traced by Jesus, trying to win back my sister or brother? Pray for someone today that you may have a grievance with.
- 3. How do we take the first step to heal a broken relationship, if the hurt done to us is very painful? Where can we find the courage to speak face to face with the one who has caused such hurt? How do we become reconciled?
- 4. As individuals and communities, we have the power to bind and to loose, to exclude people from relationship, or to open up and include others in relationship. When have you found it important to acknowledge this power in your own life?
- 5. Jesus promises his continuing presence. Even if I pray alone, I am united with others who pray at this time, with all of those who read this gospel today, with those who use this resource just now. Take a moment to be aware that Jesus wants to be present to us, is present to us, loves us and calls us to life.

Prayer -

Confirm, O God, in unity and truth the Church you gather in Christ. Encourage the fervent, enlighten the doubtful, and bring back the wayward. Bind us together in mutual love, that our prayer in Christ's name may be pleasing to you. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen *Amen*

Prayer in these uncertain times

We pray for all those in our country and throughout the world suffering from the Corona Virus. May its victims and their families be strengthened by the support of our community of faith and restored soon to full health. We also pray for our leaders and medical personnel who deal with the virus. May we keep calm and may we join together in solidarity with care and compassion to tackle this emergency. This we ask in confidence through Christ Our Lord. Amen

