

The Great Prayer

This weekend Pope Francis is concluding his trip to Rio and will be in the company of over 1 million young Catholics celebrating the final liturgies of World Youth Day. It must give him great joy to witness such a gathering and no doubt those there will have a life changing experience which will remain with them all their lives. I am sure that they will be inspired by the Pope's words and gestures to them, and by his encouragement that they return to their parishes and communities animated by the Holy Spirit to live out their Christian vocation in their daily lives. But not all of us get the opportunity to go Rio! For the vast majority of us the experience of faith and faith in action derives from what we do as families and parishes to generate our motivation and that motivation must come from amongst other things our prayer life.

The "Our Father", the prayer that Jesus gave us, encapsulates all we need in terms of motivation. In succinct and precise language it focuses our thoughts on God, ourselves and our responsibilities in such a way so as to provide us with a clear sense of what our duty is. It is truly a prayer for all occasions. Luke's version is shorter than the one we normally recite which is from Matthew, and that fact may well indicate that Luke has a more ancient and perhaps a more original version than Matthew. Notwithstanding that, the fact remains that it is a prayer which Jesus himself prayed. Consequently we can assume that it was a motivation for him in his mission just as it should be for us in ours.

It begins with a familial phrase and in so doing it fashions us into the pattern of being part of God's family. This of itself helps us to understand our role as part of the body of Christ, as we find our own position in this family and see how our place within it is established and secured. We are to work for the coming of the kingdom wherein all the structures of the heavenly realm are to underpin those of the human one – justice and peace, integrity and mercy, truth and respect must be that fabric on which our communities and families are built, with love as the mortar which cements them in place. Our work is sustained and nourished by our daily bread, which is both the word and the very life of Christ. This bread and word is broken open for us at the table of sacrament and we gather to receive them as often as we do in memory of Jesus. In these moments we are reconciled with those whom we have hurt and upset, and we are called to make good what has been broken by virtue of our waywardness. We ask for the grace to be enabled to manage our lives along the pathway which Christ has established, guiding us in the light of his love and giving us his example of faith and hope.

The prayer that Jesus gave us is the prayer that he himself prayed and it is worth remembering that he prayed it at both the most intimate and most traumatic moments of his life. Gathered together with the disciples around the table of the Last Supper, John tells us he prayed: *Holy Father keep those you have given me true to your name...Protect them from the evil one...* In the Garden of Gethsemane Mark tells us he prayed: *Abba Father... let it be as you not I would have it* and as he was being nailed to the cross Luke tells us he prayed: *Father forgive them, they know not what they are doing.*