

## Thought for the day 25<sup>th</sup> July 2020 from Robin Fishwick (All Hallows)

### A fresh look at prayer

While writing my last Thought for the Day, I was tempted to go off on a tangent. I didn't, but it's a good tangent to go off on, so here it is for you now:

My last Thought for the Day was about Jesus and the rich man who couldn't follow him. When reading the passage I was reminded of an experience I had in the Chaplaincy a couple of years ago. Every year we have a group of "prayer guides" who come over to lead a week of guided prayer. When we can, we chaplains also sign up for it, and so it was that one day I was meditating on that same passage. I was using the Ignation method as guided by Steve Hoyland, one of the visiting prayer guides. He had been encouraging me to picture the scene and imagine myself there. At the end of the exercise, as I was discussing it with Steve, the thought suddenly occurred that I could pray for that rich man there and then. Having placed myself in his presence using my imagination, I had gained a sense of the reality of the rich man's existence and felt pity for him as he walked away from Jesus. I wanted to pray for him and realised I could

So pray for him I did - and I gained an overwhelming sense of closeness to him. It is one of the amazing things about prayer, that God, who has already received every prayer that ever will be uttered, before the beginning of time, had already received my prayer when the rich man walked away from Jesus in sorrow nearly 2000 years ago. Let that sink in, if it hasn't struck you before! We often shy away from thinking such things because they are too mind boggling, but I think it's well worth the effort to be reminded how powerful prayer is - to be reminded that for God, there is no prayer that can ever be too late. It doesn't matter to God that you have only just remembered to pray for someone whose operation was 4 hours ago, or you want to pray for someone whose funeral you missed last week because you didn't even know that they had died . God's timeless existence means that every prayer comes with its own tardis - it can travel in any direction in time - for God receives it where God is; where God is and time is not. Some Christian traditions don't like the idea of praying for the souls of the departed, because they don't believe in the idea of Purgatory. If there is no Purgatory, they argue, then there is no point in praying for the departed, because by now they are either in Heaven or not -end of. Whether or not you believe in Purgatory, however, should be no excuse for not praying, because whenever you pray, God will have received the prayer in time. As friends depart, let your love embrace them and let that embrace join the embrace of eternal Love.

But the tardis doesn't just travel in time, it also travels in space - and so it is also with prayer. Another recent experience I had was while praying with someone via Zoom. Zoom is weird, and praying via Zoom is no less weird. You are looking at someone on a screen but not into each other's eyes. And yet the experience of millions in recent months has been of joining other people in worship whether they are a mile or thousands of miles away. Oh, it is amazing, of course, that we have this technology to draw us close together, but what the technology does is what prayer has been doing for

thousands of years. In prayer, we join in the prayers of others, regardless of whether they are a few seats away or on the other side of an ocean - and the distance has no relevance whatsoever. Thus it was that when praying with this man via Zoom I suddenly let go of the image of the man on my screen, closed my eyes and felt him just next to me -where he truly was.

People often talk about the power of prayer, by which they usually mean the power of prayer to change things, but we overlook the power that prayer has to transcend time and space and to bring us close to our fellow creatures. Prayer changes everything, but sometimes we need to change the way we see prayer.