**Homily for Trinity 3**

Pray without ceasing from 1 Thessalonians is our sentence from the roof beams for us to consider today. Interestingly, its part a longer sequence at the end of Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians, of encouragement , joy and exhortation to live joyfully in the faith, “**16**Rejoice always, **17**pray without ceasing, **18**give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

I chose it completely out of context, when feeling very low in spirit at the continuing news of the deaths of children, in wars, in the boats crossing the channel, in trafficking and modern slavery, in abuse and ill treatment of every kind. Born only to die in some kind of terror or misery, before their lives have even begun. It is and it was for them that I pray most often, children that I do not know and never would have known, but I often lament for those innocent and disregarded children - seen of no account or no value and killed by adults. I pray for their peace and their rest in God’s loving care almost daily and for comfort for their bereaved parents.
Only then did I check the context, and it was a salutary reminder not only to pray without ceasing, but also to give thanks in all circumstances. So all circumstances has to include giving thanks for children who are safe, loved, wanted, cherished and nurtured. To pray and thank God for the love and care of family life
As I was looking at the ceiling texts, I realised they are all short but have lifelong implications.
So why is prayer so important that it gets mention on the roof beams of our Church?
Our personal prayers are the building blocks of our relationship with God who loves us, it is our offering of love in return. Our community prayers are those build up the community, a manifestation of love for each other, our relationships are strengthened when we pray together and are changed with those for whom we pray. Remember the well-known phrase ‘the family that prays together stays together’ works for the church family and the literal family.

Applying these understandings about prayer to today’s readings. I realised that Naaman the Syrian diagnosed with leprosy, would have prayed in fear for his life and health to his own local gods, long before he went to Isreal and met Elisha. The King of Israel would also have prayed in terror that his neighbouring kingdom was trying to pick a fight with him. Elisha himself must surely have been guided by God through his own prayer about what to expect and what to do, because his responses to Naaman were just right.
Likewise, Naaman will have moved from prayers of fear to his national gods, to a new relationship with a new God built on prayers of gratitude and thanks to the God of Israel for healing – the rest of his story contains a note of his conversion.

So far then we have in my own life, prayers of lament and sorrow, prayers of thanks and gratitude, and then from Naaman and the king of Israel prayers of fearfulness and worry, followed by more prayers of thanksgiving and rejoicing. And Elisha demonstrating in his life the fruits of a whole life of continual prayer.

When we move to the letter to the Galatians, it is again at the end of the letter when Paul is trying to focus his readers attention on some of the important aspects of living together in community. Bearing one another’s burdens, especially when we ourselves struggle against temptations or catch ourselves noting the weaknesses of others and not our own, these are invitations to both penitence or repentance, and to intercessions, which may include thanksgivings as well as requests for God’s grace and mercy, as well as the other kinds of prayer already mentioned.
All these forms of prayer build us up in a community, of faith and mutual trust, as we share with God our concerns for each other, and try to help each other learn and improve creatively in the best ways possible.

Again, when we look at the sending out of the 72 disciples on their mission, what might they be praying for? In their vulnerability at the very least they might be asking God for strength for journey and the ability to do a good job. They would be sharing with the Lord their hopes and fears at the beginning of a great adventure, and their thanksgivings on their return. They would hope that they could teach and heal as Jesus did, and that their mission would bring many new people healing and wholeness and into the kingdom

So in this short time we have encountered many different forms of prayer, from my prayers of lament and sorrow, then of prayers of thanks and gratitude, and then prayers of fearfulness and worry, followed by more prayers of thanksgiving and rejoicing. Then we have prayers of repentance and penitence, followed by Intercessions standing in God’s presence with or for our sisters and brothers in hope and thanksgiving. And still there are many more .
We have learned, I think, that God wants us to pray about everything , to share our all joys and sorrows ,all our hopes and fears, to share our sorrow for sin , our thankfulness, all our gratitude, all our hopes for healing and for growth and development. But we will not have got to the end of the possibilities.
There are so many different ways to pray, there are the formal payers of worship in church, the informal prayers of prayer group or family, the family prayer or the Lord’s prayer which we pray for each other almost every day, there is the prayer of contemplation or paying attention to God, relaxed and calm and often based on sentences from scripture and controlling the breath.
There is the prayer of song and dance and the daily offices, the lectio Divina, using scripture and psalms, there are prayers expressed in music and singing, prayers in the spirit in other tongues, there are short arrow prayers , prayed under pressure or under stress - like the soldier in the Civil war who prayed Lord you know I will be very busy this day, if I forget thee do not thou forget me.
Many different Christians use the Jesus prayer ‘Lord Jesus Christ , son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner’ to help slow the breathing and still the mind , in and then out, repeated often to free us to pay attention in contemplation and meditation.
There are lots more forms of prayer, so many too many to count, you will know already we have not covered every option. Even so, the key is that if we are really seeking to live a God centred life, and are paying attention then prayer, consciously or unconsciously, is our constant response to our awareness of God. ‘Pray without ceasing, give thanks, ‘this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you’ – building up our relationships and prayer is the primary building block of our relationship with God, it’s an essential continual turning to God and recollecting that our lives are lived in God’s presence, prayer becomes with practice, as constant and natural as breathing, and just as necessary for our wellbeing. We always live in difficult times, so we pray to keep our relationships in good heart, and we pray now

God our saviour, look on this wounded world
in pity and in power; hold us fast to your promises of peace
won for us by your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen**