

The Southern Presbytery

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Pray...

"Pray as you can, not as you can't" Thus wrote, Joyce Huggett, one of the more successful teachers of prayer 20 years ago. She was quoting one Abbot John Chapman but she could have used literally thousands of other writers on the topic of prayer. Prayer is a glorious mystery which lies at the heart of our faith. Wesley, for example, wrote, "I have so much to do that I spend several hours in prayer before I am able to do it." Abraham Lincoln wrote "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had absolutely no other place to go." Corrie Ten Boom in typical style asked, "Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tyre?" and the great preacher Spurgeon once noted that, "There is a general kind of praying which fails for lack of precision. It is as if a regiment of soldiers should all fire off their guns anywhere. Possibly somebody would be killed, but the majority of the enemy would be missed."

So many down through the centuries have advised, warned, cajoled and called the Church to prayer that we simply cannot ignore this vital practice. We must, if we are to call ourselves 'Church' be absolutely committed to prayer both as individuals and corporately – as a body. Why we are so often found wanting in this area is probably not a mystery. Prayer appeals to none of our proud capacities. It is hard to take the credit for anything to do with prayer apart from actually praying. Prayer hardly glorifies the pray-er. Indeed, most often no connection is made between an answer to prayer and the one who prayed so no glory goes to us. As William Temple was fond of saying, however, "When I pray, coincidences happen, and when I don't pray, they don't."

The most worrying thing is that the link between prayer and faith is well known and has been well taught down through the years and yet we still fail to heed it. As John Hardon the prolific Jesuit writer said, "Those who do not believe do not pray. This is a good functional definition of faith. Faith prays, unbelief does not." The simple fact is that the Church lives by prayer because it knows God and the power of God primarily through prayer. So many writers and preachers have tried to point this out. As the great Oswald Chambers wrote, "We hear it said that we will suffer in this life if we do not pray; I question it. What will suffer is the life of the Son of God within us, which is nourished not by food but by prayer...Prayer is the way the life of God is nourished."

In the Name of Christ I call this Southern Church to prayer. Let us gather on that week of the 29th May and pray that we might know again the moving of God's Holy Spirit in us and in our children and in all who would call upon the Name of God. Let us pray for our brothers and sisters in the faith and for this nation. Let us seek God's peace and God's leading for our work that we might not waste another hour in either religious or worldly ambition. God looks to a Church that will wait on the Spirit to move it and then do the thing which is at hand not in our own strength but in the power that moves men and women from the heart. To be sure Prayer moves God but it is we who need to be moved so much more. As William Law said "There is nothing that makes us love someone so much as praying for them."

Will you pray with me on that weekend?

Richard Dawson (Moderator)