

## NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2016

Dear Friends,

### 'Tuning In'

This year's parish Lent Course will focus on prayer. Our lives as Christians are shaped by our relationship with God and prayer lies at the heart of it. Jesus was a teacher and a healer, but he would have been neither of these things if he had not also been a pray-er. Often he would up into the mountains or seek out somewhere quiet away from the crowd (Mk.1:35; Lk.6:12), though he also worshipped regularly with his fellow Jews in the synagogue (Lk.4:16).

It is striking how often Luke records Jesus praying. He was praying when the Spirit descended on him at his baptism ((Lk.3:21-22), when Peter made his famous confession of faith (Lk.9:18-20), when the disciples asked for help in learning how to pray (Lk.11:1), and at the time of his arrest on the Mount of Olives (Lk.22:39-46). Before choosing his twelve disciples, he apparently spent a whole night in prayer (Lk.6:12). He could not have done what he did without that intimate, enlivening relationship with God which his prayer-life encapsulated.

Jesus is our guide and inspiration, and it is *through him* that we as Christians feel able to draw near to God and relate to him as like a loving parent, 'our Father in heaven' (Heb.10:19-22). This is why our prayers in church so often conclude with the words: 'in Jesus' name', 'for Jesus' sake', or 'through Jesus Christ our Lord'.

Prayer at its most profound is communing with God. Some people liken it to a conversation between two people on the telephone with God at one end and us at the other, and to the extent that it may involve speaking and listening, there is some truth in the analogy. But ultimately it takes us way beyond this. God is not a finite creature in one particular place at one particular time. He is the Creator, the infinite Source of all Being, who has not only been present amongst us in Jesus but is active still in our lives today through the Holy Spirit. When we pray, it is never simply a matter of us here and God 'up there'. God is present everywhere – at both ends of the telephone! We may talk about praying *to* him 'over' and 'above' us, but it is only *through* Jesus (God in human form) that we feel able to do so in such an intimate way, and only *in* the Spirit that we know how to pray. His Spirit awakens wonder, kindles love and inspires us to worship; he alerts us to what is wrong and prompts us to confess and seek forgiveness; and he guides us as to what our priorities should be and what we should be praying and working for. As St Paul explains in one of his letters:

“...The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.”

(Romans 8:26-27)

We are tuning in to God, opening ourselves to his purposive Presence in the world and aligning ourselves with his Will for our lives. As Jesus taught us:

“Our Father in heaven, ... your kingdom come, your will be done.”

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