

Remarkable Prayers



There are some prayers that we return to time and again at Church on the Corner. They are written or inspired by some amazing Christians from the past, and give insights into their relationship with God and their understanding of what it means to be followers of Jesus.

Prayers like this raise our eyes to catch a new vision of God, to refresh our perspective and teach us to pray in bigger ways. They inspire us and unite us with those who have gone before. And we are reflecting on them so that we can understand and appreciate and understand them and perhaps incorporate them in our own prayers.

- 1) A Prayer of St Augustine
- 2) A prayer of Theresa of Avila
- 3) The Magnificat
- 4) The Prayer of Humble access
- 5) The Collect for Purity



Remarkable Prayers

1. A Prayer of St Augustine

Almighty God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you: pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself, and so bring us at last to your heavenly city where we shall see you face to face.

What do you know about St Augustine?

Lived in the 4th Century, from Hippo Regius in Algeria. Famous for his wild youth and brilliant intellect. Trained in Rome, and explored various Pagan religions before converting to Christianity

What insight does this prayer give to his life?

What do you think it means 'to find our rest in God'?

Is that something that seems true in our society too? Can you relate to that?

The prayer contains some great insight into Augustines sense of how God is at work in us and in the world. Can you draw them out?

- *We are made not for ourselves but for God.*
- *God pours love into our hearts and makes us seek him*
- *He draws us to himself through love and restlessness*
- *The goal is to know God fully in his heavenly city.*

The idea of the heavenly city is an important one for Augustine. His work 'The city of God' was a response to the devastating fall of Rome - the 'eternal city'. How do you think Augustine wanted people to respond to that loss?

What are you anxious about in our world, and what do you think Augustine encourages you to do about that?

Our city is to be cared for and prayed for, but it is only a pale imitation of what is to come. Set your hearts on the eternal city and your inheritance there.

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2. A prayer of Theresa of Avila

Let nothing disturb thee,
Nothing affright thee
All things are passing
God never changes.
Patient endurance
Attains to all things;
They who God possesses
In nothing is wanting;
Alone God suffices.

Who was Theresa of Avila?

She was a remarkable 16th Century woman of God, a nun, a reformer and latterly a 'Doctor of the Church'. Perhaps get the group to do a bit of internet research on her.

She lived in anxious times. How does she challenge to her fears?

It is one thing to be afraid, another to be disturbed by that fear.

So much of this prayer is in stark contrast to 21st Century attitudes What do you think she means by "Patient endurance attains to all things"

We long to be able to fix things, and to solve problems. But that is part of our desire to be in control, and that is not the same as trusting God.

'They who God possesses' is an interesting reversal of our usual idea of what it means to be Christian. To what extent is that your experience?

We are not christians because we chose God, but because he pursued us and wouldn't let us go. And he promises that he will never let us go no matter what.

Her prayer ends "Alone God suffices". What does that mean? Is it true?

God is the only thing in the world that will really satisfy us, but we often spend a lot of our life discovering that is the case.

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3. *The Magnificat (the Song of Mary)*

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;
he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed;
the Almighty has done great things for me
and holy is his name.
He has mercy on those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm
and has scattered the proud in their conceit,
Casting down the mighty from their thrones
and lifting up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,
to remember his promise of mercy,
The promise made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his children for ever.

This might just be one of the greatest prayers of all time.

What do you know about Mary and what is the context of this prayer?

Does this prayer surprise you about her?

Her perspective on God's kingdom is really quite radical. How does she understand what God's salvation looks like.

There is a story told by a missionary to India in 1805 that the British Empire had banned this from Evensong in churches - can you understand why they might have done that?

How do you think this prayer should change the way that we pray?

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4. The Prayer of humble access

*We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body,
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us.
Amen.*

Introduction

This might be a very familiar prayer - in fact some of you might know this prayer from memory. See if anyone can remember it all.

Does that say something about the value of liturgy?

It is amazing how this ancient words sink in a go deep. They are a bit like underground springs that bubble up and sustain us.

This is a much loved prayer, part of the Anglican communion service. It's origins are a bit of a mystery but it first appeared in prayer books in the middle of the reformation. And it has some strong reformed themes. Can you see them?

Justification not by works but by faith alone, through grace alone, through Christ alone.

Sometimes people feel a bit uncomfortable with the quite humble approach to God that this prayer suggests. What would you say to that?

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5. The Collect for Purity

Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Opening Discussion

One of the strange things about living in a busy city is the superficial way that we relate to each other. What do we mean when we ask *'how are you'*?

What might be the consequences of that struggle to be honest with each other?

This prayer is one of our favourite ways to start a service. It is very old, probably from 11th Century and was original a prayer for priests preparing to celebrate communion. Can you see why they might have thought this was an important prayer to pray before they did that?

How do you feel about God being able to see our deepest thoughts and desires?

It feels like a really important thing to say to ourselves that you don't have to be good enough. What do you need to do instead?

In Christ we are loved without condition, except that he asks us to be who we really are without pretence. How might that effect the way we pray?