Pastoral Letter (Third Sunday in Lent Reflectin)

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love and God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you today. Yesterday I found myself standing at the foot of a casket. Nothing like a cold, March morning in a cemetery to remind one of the shortness and uncertainty of human life. As many of you are aware, Joyce’s mother died this week. It’s an interesting experience being a “outsider” (son-in-law) at a funeral. Yes, everyone was very respectful and affectionate as many of us embraced and passed on our condolences to one another. But the presence of a casket is a bold reminder that “we are dust and to dust we shall return”. I have to admit my favourite part of the funeral was the reception. No, not because of the food. But for the opportunity for a “connection” with a large and expansive family. Many travelled from 3 or 4 hours away to be at the 15 minute committal service. Lent is a clear and bold reminder that there is birth and death. But what we need to remind ourselves is that between the birth and the death there is “intentional living”. What is this intentional Christian life? For some people it means attending Church on a regular basis. For some it means reading their bible daily. For still others it can mean an extraordinary prayer life. Everyone approaches their spiritual vitality differently. What’s important is that our spiritual life is as important as all other aspects of our life. On Thursday morning we gathered together to say goodbye to a Christian woman. The real challenge is that we need to remind ourselves that Christian does not mean perfect. Sometimes it can mean far from perfect. But at least we can gather at a celebration of life service with the assurance that the departed will be in the presence of Christ forever.

So now that I have begun this letter in a very personal way, let me offer a few heartfelt reflections about the season of Lent. First, I have no idea what I would do without my prayer life. I still spend far too much time trying to figure out my problems and challenges on my own. My brain twists and turns in all formations in an effort to come to reasonable conclusions. I don’t want anyone to get hurt. I don’t want anyone to get mad. I don’t want anybody to get upset. But I’m called to be a priest and sometimes that means that I’m called to challenge the status quo. If I’ve come to one conclusion it’s that I need to surrender much earlier in the process. I need to prayerfully hand most issues to God while asking direction, way before I get to the point that it keeps me up at night. How about you? Do you ever find yourself spinning because you can’t figure out a challenging relationship or a difficult issue or even a problem personality? Please believe me when I say that surrendering the issues to God in prayer can bring an extraordinary peace that only the Holy Spirit can give.

Now before you think that I’m somehow trying to be critical, I’d like to tell you a story. Almost twenty years ago I sat in a room with 110 clergy from all over North America. At least ten denominations were represented. It was an inter-culture and inter-racial room filled with dedicated, loyal and compassionate pastors. But the room was paralyzed when the leader asked the question, “How many of you pray several times a day?” I need to confess that not every hand went up. As a matter of fact, far from most hands went up. Even pastors struggle to pray. Sometimes it’s because of frustration, irritability, fear, or anxiety. But sometimes it’s about thinking we have the answers.

If there is one thing I’ve learned in ministry, in marriage, and in family, I do not have all the answers. How about you? Is there a chance that you need to lean into your prayer life with passion, commitment and loyalty today? Please join me in a very intentional effort to pray my way through each situation, each challenge and each relationship.

Praying for you today.

Blessings

Stephen

The Rev Canon Dr Stephen Hendry