

“Seek the things that are above.”

Col 3:1

In the last week or two we have begun to look at the nature of prayer. We have heard how it is prayer that raises up our good deeds to a supernatural level so that they participate in the eternal goodness of God and have an everlasting value. And we have heard that prayer is generally easier than many people think because it chiefly involves *doing* rather than thinking or feeling. We also learned that there are four ACTS of prayer, adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, and supplication; and that there are three main types of prayer, oral prayer involving words, meditation when we mull over a text, and contemplation when we simply gaze at God, for example in the Blessed Sacrament. We finished last week by suggesting that this week we would look at *why* we pray.

Today’s first reading gives us that famous line, ‘Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher. All is vanity!’ Solomon goes on to ask, ‘What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun?’ Pondering the purpose of life and wondering what it’s all about – and who hasn’t done that? – King Solomon finally concludes that its all pretty much a waste of time, or at least investing in the things of this world is a waste of time, because in the end everything is hollow and nothing has any substance. All is vanity.

In today’s Gospel passage, Our Lord makes exactly the same point. Here, we have a rich man enjoying a bumper harvest and building a bigger barn to accommodate his new-found wealth. He becomes complacent, taking things easy, eating, drinking, and having a good time. ‘But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul will be required of you.’ In other words, as with the man in the first reading, what good will his efforts have done him when he comes to the point of death and is judged by God?

No! Investing in the things of this world will get you nowhere. Even our good deeds will have little value unless we raise them up through prayer so that they participate in the goodness of God. And this is where we come back to the purpose of prayer, to the *why* of prayer.

We pray in order to lift our eyes upwards, to look at God and the things of God, so that we can participate in the truth, the goodness, and the beauty of God, so that we can become sharers in God's divine nature and after this life join the angels and saints in the state of everlasting life that we call heaven. That is why we pray. Whether we are adoring God, being contrite for our sins, giving Him thanks, or asking Him for what we need, our prayers serve the purposes of paying a proper tribute to the Creator of the universe and recognizing our utter dependence upon Him.

In today's second reading, St Paul puts it even more clearly: 'If you have been raised with Christ,' he says, 'seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.' That's the key to why we pray. Having been baptized – or perhaps for some who are preparing for baptism, looking forward to being baptized – we now participate in the divine life of Christ, and nothing that is rooted in the things of earth has any lasting meaning anymore. 'Set your mind on things that are above,' St Paul goes on, 'not the things that are on earth.'

Recently, at weekday Mass, we heard the account of the People of Israel, at the foot of the mountain, bowing down before the golden calf whilst the law of God was being revealed to Moses on the heights of the mountain. Not being able to see God face to face, the People of Israel had lost faith in the God who had freed them from slavery in Egypt. They had decided that they could trust more in the things that their own hands had made than in the God who had made them! Is this not what we do whenever we desire the things of this world more than the things of God? Is this not what we do whenever we place our trust for

happiness in the things we ourselves have made more than in the God who brought all things into being in the first place?

By spending our time seeking comforts and consolations in this world rather than looking above to the things of the next, by placing our trust in the things we can see, and touch, and worship here below, we are laying up treasure for ourselves here. And Christ says to us, ‘You fool! When your soul is demanded of you, whose will these things be then?’

All of which serves to emphasize what prayer is really all about. It is prayer – the lifting of the heart and the mind to God – that raises us up from the vanities of this world, saving us from the hollowness and the superficiality of this world, and elevating us to a higher realm, a kingdom where things have an everlasting value, a substance, and a depth of reality that we can never experience fully in this life. And this is the idea behind the tag at the top of your newsletter every week.

Through prayer, we may learn... *Deum diligere et quæ sunt Dei*: ‘To love God and the things of God’ over and above the things of this world.