

Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament

Last week we talked about the need for prayer, and in particular the need for an established routine of prayer. If our prayer lives are built on a routine, especially a routine that makes use of set prayers given to us by the Church, then we know that we are putting in place a stable foundation for a healthy spiritual relationship with God. With an established routine we are less likely to miss out our prayers in the morning because we are in a rush, or in the evening because we are tired or not in the mood. One of the main reasons for establishing a regular pattern of prayer is to make sure that our relationship with God does not depend on our moods, on how we feel, because our prayer life is not about us: it is about God. It may be *for* us, but it is *about* God. Our primary purpose in prayer is – or should be! – to give praise and homage to the living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Once we have offered God adoration and worship then we can consider our relationship with Him, and offer thanks for what He has given us, penitence for our sins, and supplication as we ask Him for the things that we need.

For this reason, I repeat the message of last week's sermon and encourage you to establish a routine of morning and evening prayer, making use of set prayers given to us by the Church and her saints.

But a routine of prayer helps in other ways too. First, whilst some of our morning and evening prayers may change according to the season or feast day, some parts of our set prayers will not change, just as certain parts of the Mass do not change even with the feasts and seasons of the Church. With these unvarying parts, we can enter into the rhythmic breathing of the Holy Spirit deep within our souls, the mutual breathing back and forth of the

Holy Spirit between the Father and the Son which is, in essence, what prayer is: the breathing back and forth of the Giver of Life within the bosom of the Blessed Trinity.

Second, the unvarying parts help to root us in what matters so that our prayers do not play to our moods or to the all-too-changeable vagaries of the world in which we live. What is going on out there should leave untouched the core of our being where we are encountering the living God directly in prayer.

And third, a set pattern of prayer can help us to ride the rough storms of life when busyness, or work pressures, or financial worries, or relationship turmoil could otherwise threaten to overturn and sink our little boat. By turning to prayer at the start and at the end of each day we can put God first and last, just as Christ Himself is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. And if we can get our relationship with God right first, then there is a much better chance of getting our relationships with other people right.

As we approach our Eucharistic Congress in September we do well to remember one of Our Lady's titles, Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. We may not often think of Our Lady as going to Mass, but the people of the early Christian community went to Mass every Sunday just as we do, as we can read in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 20:7), and the Blessed Virgin was a member of that early Christian community and would have done as they did. Her Son had been taken from sight, for her as for all the other disciples, at the moment of His ascension back into heaven forty days after His resurrection. Like them, the central focus of her prayer was His continued sacramental presence in the Holy Eucharist. Whilst the practice of reserving the Blessed Sacrament in tabernacles on the altar was not yet established, nonetheless the weekly gathering for Mass, Sunday by Sunday, was not chiefly about the fellowship of meeting up with one's brethren, but about encountering the living God in a collective act of worship which culminated in the sacramental presence of the living Lord in the Holy Eucharist. *That* – or rather, *He* – was what was at the centre of Our Lady's routine

of prayer, and at the centre of the prayer life of all the disciples. To gather in order to pay homage to the living Saviour truly present before us in the Blessed Sacrament should be the beginning and the end, the source and the summit, of our prayer life – with a regular pattern of prayer on the days in-between each Mass that we attend – just as it was for the members of the early Christian community; just as it was for Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.

If the heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary ached to be in the presence of her Eucharistic Lord, how much more should we yearn to come into His presence, even on the weekdays between our Sunday obligation? Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament is for us a model of prayer and contemplation, with her whole mind and body, heart and soul and strength concentrated on the presence of her Divine Son. In these weeks before our Congress begins, perhaps we might make her our daily model and follow in her footsteps of routine and regular prayer.