

3 Lent A Is the Lord Among Us or Not?

How do we prove God or even that God is with us? Great proofs have been recorded throughout history. There is one that involved an argument for a cosmic watchmaker and that by examining the very design of a watch - its purpose and parts point to an intelligent designer. Nearly a thousand years ago a monk named Anselm sought to prove the existence of God when he wrote that "God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived." Putting that in plain English, God is the highest thought that any of us can have. So if we had the ability to conceive of such an omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent being in our minds he must also exist in reality.

Unfortunately, these arguments in themselves were unable to prove anything let alone the "existence" of a being. I think they have merit but mystery is something that cannot be proven.

In today's reading of St Paul's letter the apostle writes this verse: *God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.* Rather than arguing for the existence of God Paul argues for the existence of love in the world. And he uses the argument: "For what are you willing to die?" He again writes to the Romans, "*Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.*" If it's conceivable that one of us would die for a good person, than would it not be conceivable that God would send His Son to die for sinners who can do no good at all? Paul speaks to this previously in the third chapter of Romans, "There is no one who is righteous...there is no one who shows kindness." For St. Paul, this proves there is love – the sacrificial love that is willing to put others first though they are not worthy of such a sacrifice.

What convinces you of God's reality in your life? Is it a sense of His love that you received through people who love Him? How? Might it be that your response to God in prayer brings the reality of His presence closer to you?

Priest and author, Christopher Webber has written, "The only way you can really get to know God is through prayer, and the Prayer Book sets out a pattern that has been used by saints sinners for centuries. No other book will give you as much help in building your faith."

The prayer book states (pg. 856) that prayer is “responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words.” There are three strands of prayer for church members that reflect this statement on prayer. The Eucharist and the Daily Office reflect on twenty centuries of Christian life and experience. Private prayer, the third strand, will naturally be influenced by the Prayer Book. Yet the freedom of expression in private prayer made ‘without words’ may allow us to go deeper into the presence of God. In silence we may learn to be comfortable in “lifting up the heart and mind to God, asking nothing but to enjoy God’s presence” (BCP pg. 857).

All three forms of prayer invite us to unite as a people of God. It shapes our thought about God and enables us to experience the mystery of our Maker.

The Book of Common Prayer is a good place to begin our journey into the presence of God. This book will not provide all the answers to the hard questions. Yet, its use can help us ask the hard questions and unite us in seeking the God’s wisdom and knowledge.

There was the hard question asked by the quarrelling Israelites, “Is the Lord among us or not?” They had ceased to be united by their prayer. They began focusing on asking things of God for themselves forgetting about the good of the community and just enjoying the company of God. They did not have the Prayer Book or the Bible as a guide for faith and living. But they had a prophet, named Moses, given by God to guide them. They could have trusted God and Moses to get them through the hard times. Saying the right prayers would not have helped them. They had not yet developed a sense of God’s presence in the whole of life.

This book of prayers seeks to develop in us that practice of God’s presence everyday. Just think what might happen if we studied scripture and prayed more. Jesus said that our worship was about the spirit. If we took time to pray and worried less about what mountain to stand on or what city to pray in we might hear what God desires and begin to understand him a little more:

“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...”

The prayer book is but one tool that forms and guides our spiritual life as God’s people. I urge you to explore Bible Studies, prayer groups, spiritual meditation, spiritual guidance, retreats and devotions that are limited only to your imagination. As the apple falls

not far from the tree, neither will the fruit of a disciplined life escape us if we are diligent. Amen.