



St Marylebone  
Parish Church

## Wednesday Eucharist with Prayer for Healing

Readings: Galatians 2:1-2, 7-14

Psalm 117

Luke 11:1-4

7<sup>th</sup> October 2020

A few years ago, we adopted a little rescue dog called Rosy. She had been abandoned, and when she came to us she was anxious, having spent a lot of time first on the street, then in a dog pound, and then alone in a cage. But as the years have progressed she has learned to trust and is very happy. Her most favourite thing in all the world apart from chicken is to roll herself into a little ball and sit as close to me as possible on the sofa. Whenever I sit down, she jumps up into the smallest space squeezing up against me. Once she is comfortable, she lets out a long happy sigh. I think it feels safe for her to be close to a human she loves and trusts. It's a simple and straightforward solution to all the sadness of her former life.

We were in this position recently when I had a thought about prayer. Anxiety, stress, uncertainty are rife. Our automatic response could be, like Rosy, to rush to the love of the one we utterly trust. Yet somehow, though it is the easiest thing in the world for her, for us, coming consciously into God's presence can be the hardest thing in the world. Everything militates against us doing that. Distractions, temptations, sloth, forgetfulness, the wiles of the evil one who would much rather us find an alternative solution. Even though God is always there waiting lovingly, we more often steam ahead trying to do things in our strength, not God's, which is always the less successful method. Prayer is really just coming close to Father Son and Holy Spirit. It can take many forms; silence, contemplation, saying formal prayers like the Lord's Prayer, breathing in and out slowly repeating a word like Jesus or Lord or Spirit, praying out loud informally as if you were talking to a friend, sometimes shouting and crying to God in desperation, sometimes saying prayers from ancient spiritual traditions such as the Jesus Prayer, the rosary or the examen. Work can be prayer if it is done consciously for God. A famous monk Brother Lawrence said he felt closest to God when he was in the kitchen amongst the pans. Some people find praying easiest when they are walking, or even driving,

although not of course with their eyes shut. I use a wonderful app on my phone when I am commuting called Pray as you Go. Sometimes prayer is done through singing, sadly something we cannot do together at the moment, but we can do alone. But however you do it, prayer is just about simply coming close to the one who loves you. We can do that alone, and we can do that with others. I have spent a lot of the pandemic praying with people over the phone. Prayer is always answered somehow. The answer can be Yes, no, not now, or I have something better in store. It can be disappointing and discouraging when the answer is no. But God loves to answer prayer and give what our hearts most desire when we are in tune with his will for the world and realistic about its struggles. I've seen many occasions when God has healed, has transformed, has given hope, has opened doors, has made a new thing happen. And I've also seen the miracle of people finding peace when God's will seems to be different to what they might automatically want. If someone tells you that they are going through a difficult time, why not be bold and offer to pray for them over the next couple of weeks? If you are really bold you could say a prayer for them there and then. A survey recently showed that 20 million adults in the UK believe in the power of prayer - and 9 million pray daily. Far more than the number that come to church. Most people will appreciate your kindness in offering to pray for them and respect your faith. Who knows what good things might happen?

Prayer changes things. Prayer changes US. So don't keep it for crises, or Sunday best. Pray without ceasing. Not because it's a tiresome duty, that we OUGHT to do. But because it is about coming up close to the one who loves us, and who wants to give us abundant life.