

Seek God not where God is..”

Prayer “the raising of the mind & heart to God” [penny catechism] remembered by rote..not
”..off by heart”..poses more questions than provides answers. If you were to describe prayer
in one word, what would it be?.. relationship

“they have spent their whole lives serving God but are not in love with God..& not
surprisingly they do not have a prayer life that amounts to much” [said of priests/religious]..a
little too close to home for some of us

..too many of us have lost God..real authentic God..or we have never been introduced to him
“seek God not where God is” a saying of the Desert Fathers, first monks ..seek the person [
God] rather than the place [Heaven] too often first thought is on the “where” what will
heaven be like? ..not the “who” “who do you say I am?”..seek him not necessarily in most
expected place/person but in surprise moment & in disguise..a migrant & the coxswain on
RNLI lifeboat off Dover an hour ago.

Story in Matthew Ch 15v 21-28 cure of Canaanite woman’s daughter

..a tired exhausted Jesus making for some space to rest eat pray, confronted by person with
three “diseases” she was a woman; from Cana; & “from that district” [Seacroft not
Headingley] she confronts Jesus politely “Sir”; religiously “Son of David”; & relationally

“take pity on me” no rights/qualifications & then the real tug at his heart “my daughter is
tormented by a devil” what a heartfelt plea/prayer in her desperation

& a spent Jesus didn’t want to know “but he answered her not a word” a downright refusal to
dialogue..His disciples try to coax him, to melt his refusal..only tragically because they want
rid of her, the wasp..no relationship on offer from them either..

at last he speaks to her, to rebuff her like waves on a breakwater “I was sent only to the lost
sheep of the House of Israel” working under instructions to insider Jews..the lost sheep the
lapsed of Judaism..a lost relationship term in Catholicism “lapsed” written off

..& bless her she wasn’t for giving up in her need; her prayer her desperate need for
relationship with him..she kneels at his feet with to me one of most powerful prayers in
Christendom “Lord help me..” on her knees literally & relationally..

& the breakwater breaks her heart once more “it is not fair to take the childrens food & throw
it to the house-dogs” imagine her feelings of rejection..like Afghans on Monday clinging on
to the wheelhousing of US military planes at Kabul airport as the plane taxied to take
off..”Lord help me”..

& bless her, unlike Afghan military, who cowardly dissolved, she fires back “ah yes sir”

his cold refusal to cooperate thus far loses him any sense of warmth respect “sir, but even the
house-dogs can eat the scraps that fall from the rich mans table” if it is against your strict
dietary Jewish kosher to relate to me directly, leave the scraps on the edge of table &
withdraw; I will wait until gentle breeze [of Holy Spirit hokmah feminine dimension of God]
blows them onto floor & I will then pick them, the lowest by the lowest..

& then at last he warms to her “woman you have great faith, let your wish be granted”

A three fold relationship mother daughter Jesus..who is healed in this delayed special relationship through prayer/faith of a resolute desperate outsider? her daughter & Jesus..

..a real Jesus who struggled in prayer in relationship with his flock & with his Father..

“Father, take this cup of suffering from me” I have had enough I want out; & I want out now”..Muslims Christians believers of no prescribed faith in Kabul this week..

I wonder if at that liminal moment his thoughts his brokenheart went back to Tyre & Sidon & he echoed prayer of his now beloved outsider who bolstered his faith in her own Gethsemane moment?.. “Lord help me”..”Father help me”..

..a passion lost..a relationship restored..& passion rekindled..

..a young practising Catholic who some years ago wrote in relationship to her Parish Priest..she copied it to an Irish weekly Catholic periodical..“tell us what you know & also tell us what you don’t know; young people value honesty most of all..when it comes to the Eucharist, the Last Supper, Jesus giving his life for us! this is amazing, this is as big & good as it is ever going to get..but you know what is missing” not all of the time of course..the passion is missing, the heart of what you gave your lives for & the joy.. ”where is your passion?”

“..they have spent their whole lives serving God but are not in love with God..not surprisingly they do not have a prayer life that amounts to much” no prayer no passion

Mary retired teacher at St Marys Browndedge & her candle..”who is candle lit for today?”

Teachers in despair at their Yr 11 RE set three times a week..prayer on crossing threshold

into classroom 5 three times week for a term “Lord help me” & a resurrection

Wedding service on Saturday..95 guests from across spectrum of faith..in my words of welcome & introduction I said;

“..it is a gift to be here to see, & far more importantly, to take part..a wedding in a Catholic Church is no place for spectators..it is a place for unity & togetherness, where the greatest gift we can give to this exceptional couple is our prayer..

“Fr Bede I don’t know how to pray, no one taught me, or I have forgotten, or its years since I prayed, or I have given up on prayer, or its never answered, or I am worse a person because of it..I’ve lost my faith”..

..& all I would say to each & every one of you here & now is “welcome home”

I took risk & asked them to sit down & in silence, offer a prayer for the bride & bridegroom..& the silence for two three minutes was total intimate sacred..a profound lasting experience of prayer..”..& I was there” they will say with passion for years to come..

I leave you now with an invitation for later today at home on sacred ground your own home space..Cure d'Ars John Vianney took courage to go up to elderly man who used to sit in Church day after day in prayer..Cure asked him "what do you say to God as you sit here day after day in prayer" old man looked up into eyes of Cure & smiled.."it is simple..I look at him & he looks at me, & we are happy in each others company"..

..& always remember in your Gethsemane moments, the spriritual vaccine we call grace which brings recovery healing passion & redemption..one jab three words once daily..

"Lord help me.."

For reflection later in the Retreat Day]

..with just 3 more weeks to go as your Parish Priest, it is perhaps a moment for adventure

the feast today of adventure personified in Mary, the mother of Jesus & mother of the Church, as we celebrate her removal from her pastoral ministry here on earth, at her Assumption into Heaven..

first reading in your leaflet from book of Apocalypse is somewhat far fetched, & leaves Mary "our Mary" at a distance; cocooned isolated from danger & encounter she surely experienced..

whereas 1st rdg of Vigil of the feast is much more earthy, as it describes the forerunner of Our Lady in the OT, called the Ark of the Covenant..wooden casket containing 10 stone tablets on which were engraved 10 commandments..

& Our Lady was to become the Ark of the Covenant, her womb space wherein was born God made man..Jesus..the Word himself whose name & presence was to be etched onto each & every heart of the chosen people..you & I..

"this is what God asks of you, only this.." as he did of Our Lady..

"..to act justly.." ; Lord have mercy

"..to love tenderly.." ; Christ have mercy

"..to walk humbly with your God.." ; Lord have mercy

May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins & bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

20yrs ago, if we were to have hoisted a parish flag onto the steeple of our Church at St Mary's in Bamber Bridge, it would have said on it in bold letters "we've always done it this way" beloved people, salt of the earth, staunch traditional loyal Catholics albeit Lancastrians, who sadly didn't want to embrace change..like our Jewish forebears in OT they'd want to keep sacred & holy the Ark of the Covenant the tabernacle, the presence of God reserved prayed in front of..held/confined in a religion of entitlement..we keep the sabbath holy, we

work with gritted teeth & determination to keep 10 commandments & fast on Fridays, we pay our levy, our temple tax, gift aided, so we expect God to keep his side of the covenant..good loyal faithful Catholics “they offered holocausts before God & communion sacrifices” “we’ve always done it this way”..our forebears 2700yrs ago, the chosen people like us, carried their inheritance in journey of exodus in a wooden casket into the promised land of milk & honey, & they settled down in every sense of word, settled comfortably, their faith established into religion & custom, the Ark now kept safe & contained in a temple, becoming the meeting place with God..& once you define it as the place, anywhere else is invalid disqualified, the holiness of the sacred space, holy ground, of tent of meeting of field/bridleway was diminished..the real presence of God in the tabernacle of a Catholic Church in Dover but surely not in presence of 42 migrants rescued by the RNLI 3miles off the coast during 10am Mass?..”we’ve always done it this way”..our Catholicism still carries weight of that compliance; keeping sabbath holy by being obliged to come here weekly, & the invitation into adventure, for the licence to change, too much for some, except in covid when you could transfer your Sun obligation to a weekday, & now Bishops of England & Wales to reinstate the Sun obligation from 1st Sun of Advent in Nov, to get us back into the pew in front of the tabernacle, real presence of Christ under the appearance of bread & wine “do this in memory of me”

2700yrs ago prophet Ezekiel “I will give you a new heart & put a new spirit within you.

I will remove your heart of stone, & give you a new heart of flesh” & pray have we yet had open heart surgery?..a new heart which is alive, beating grace & love at 60beats a minute into your life & through you into hearts of all those who look to you for a lead, a word on active servant discipleship, like bucking the trend, & instead of cancelling your subscription to the RNLI, as thousands are doing in protest at their rescuing migrants, to increase your standing order in support of their humanitarian & spiritual apostolate & adventure..& to suggest to the RNLI a possible name for their next new lifeboat “Ark of the Covenant” & how that would unite both Jew & Christian like nothing before..as Joan Mulcahy would have said with her Irish lilt “if not, why not?”..”but we’ve never done it this way”..& 700yrs after Ezekiel, when hearts were still as hard & cold, God instigated the master plan..”they will listen to my Son” so adventurously & at risk he sent his Son a man like us, the incarnation, the Word became flesh & lived among us..& how was this radical moment of salvation history enabled? Through Mary of Nazareth & her spiritual titles, Ark of the Covenant, Our Lady of the Assumption..she carried the divine presence in her womb for 9months “how can this come about?” for a compliant Jew “we’ve always done it this way” the answer then & now is faith..

“this is what God asks of you, only this..” as he did of Our Lady...to act justly, to love tenderly, & to walk humbly with your God”..she did & will you?..will you?..”let it be done to me according to your word” a huge ask of me in three weeks time “this is what God asks of you, only this”..”let it be done to me according to your word”..story of old man who sat day after day in prayer in parish Church where Cure d’Ars was the shepherd

..Cure noticed him sitting there, hour after hour, week after week..one day took courage to approach him “tell me, what do you say to God in prayer day after day?” old man smiled looked up into face of Cure & said “I look at him & he looks at me, & we are happy in each others company” can you really say the same about your relationship with your God?..or is it a rosary twice a day, a prayer group on line weekly, Mass most Sundays, confession once a year, morning & night prayers, & a shekel onto collection plate “we’ve always done it this way” 2000yrs ago even God changed & brought in plan B..John Henry Newman, convert to

Catholicism said, “to live is to change, & to live fully is to change often”..& as you prepare to welcome my successor, & with a flag with a Yorkshire rose in one corner, what would you want to tell him in a sentence of truth & honesty on it, to sit alongside the outstanding inspirational vision statement you [you] brought to birth two years ago?..when your future was seeded, & now awaits the rich fertile soil, the womb space & the divine heartbeat it, & you, deserve..

“Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months & then went back home” Bede stayed with his parishioners about three weeks & then went back home.. [Assumption; 15 Aug Lk 1;39-56]