“**Everlasting Father”**

Isaiah 9:6  “He will be called “Everlasting Father”.

In those rare glimpses of Christ’s own life and prayer which the Gospels show us, we notice too, the perpetual reference to the unseen Father so much more visibly present to Him than anything that is seen. Behind that daily life into which he entered, filled as it was with constant appeals to His practical pity and help, there is always the sense of that strong and tranquil Presence, ordering all things and bringing them to their appointed end, along with that freedom of a living, creative, cherishing love. Christ always snatches opportunities for it, and at every crisis He returns to it as the unique source of confidence and strength.

The fundamental principle is that God is perfect love and wisdom, and eternal. He knows what is for our good, better than we do ourselves. Matthew 6:8 “Your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask Him”. What things are good for us may depend on our spiritual state, and worst of all is detachment from God, whether by ignorance or by neglect. A blessing to us may often depend on whether or not I truly recognise God as the source of all good things.  So the first requirement in prayer is that we trust in God for all blessings. He goes to the greatest possible length in the demand that as we pray, we shall believe that God will hear and answer, and in the promise that God will grant our petitions. Mark 11:24 “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

The next requirement is inconsistent with this; for this next requirement is that we should persevere in prayer in spite of disappointment. We are to be sure that God will grant our prayers, and when He does not, we are to go on praying. God knows our needs and what is good and right for us. Does God wish to trust our confidence? Of course not, He knows perfectly well what it is worth, but He may very likely want to deepen it. The faith that takes the form of confidence that God will do what we ask is, after all, in our own judgement as much as faith in God. The purpose of God’s delay may well be to detach our faith in Him from all trust in our own judgement.  God know our needs.

This means that the essential act of prayer is not the bending of God’s will to ours, but the bending of our wills to His. And the prayer should be “Please do in me, with me and through me what You want.” The Everlasting Father is faithful and for ever beside us, waiting for us to believe in Him and to do His will on earth.  All prayer is intercession and joining in prayer is something much greater than the individual, it is joining in the great stream of prayer and praise which never for a moment ceases; it is eternal, everlasting.

When we feel glad, grateful, pleased, relieved, joyful; when we feel the need for help, when we are frightened, anxious, distressed, in pain, perplexed; when we are tired, flat out, beaten…all those moments which seem by their very nature to prompt us to pray to the Everlasting Father, Abba, Our Loving God, and to say “Thank You.” The important thing is to let the gratitude take hold of me and of us, and surround our experience with gratitude.

**Psalm 23**

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.  He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.

He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.  You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.  Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

**Advent Prayer**

Open our eyes, Lord, especially if they are half shut because we are tired of looking, or half open because we fear to see too much, or bleared with tears because yesterday and today and tomorrow are filled with the same pain, or contracted because we only look at what we want to see. Give us a bigger vision of what you can do, even with hopeless cases and lost causes. Show us the world as in your sight, riddled by doubt and disbelief, yet also shot through with possibility for recovery, renewal, redemption.

**Prayers**

Open our eyes, Lord especially if they are half shut because we are tired of looking or half-open because we fear to see too much, or bleared with tears because yesterday and today and tomorrow are filled with the same anxiety or because we only look at what we want to see.

Open our eyes, Lord, to gently scan the life we lead, the home we have, the world we inhabit, and so to find signs of hope we can fasten on and encourage. Give us, whose eyes are dimmed by familiarity, a bigger vision of what you can do, open our eyes in yearning for Jesus.

Our heavenly Father, as once again we prepare for Christmas, help us to find time in our lives for quiet and thought and prayer; that we may reflect upon the wonder of your love and allow the story of the Saviour’ birth to penetrate our hearts and minds. So may our joy be deeper, our worship more real, and our lives worthier of all that you have done for us through the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen

**Pray for the Church**

That we may be ready for the coming of Christ

For St John’s and Sunnyside churches as we cope with the effects of the virus, plan Christmas and the future.

For our Vicar Rebecca, the Staff team and all in positions of leadership and responsibility.

For the churches in places where there are difficulties of conflict, and poverty.

**Pray for World**

The Government as they plan the future arrangements to combat the virus, administration of the vaccine, and the future relationship with Europe.

All in medical and caring professions with the extra load and problems because of the virus.

All involved in the life of schools, colleges, and universities

Countries in turmoil through internal strife, poverty and corruption and the attendant issues of poor health and social care, insufficient food production & inadequate education

Glimmers of hope that the major industrial nations will finally tackle the urgent issues arising from climate change.

**Pray for Ourselves**

Pray for our parish and this week for the roads of The Horseshoes and The Paddocks.

Those who have been affected by the virus.

Pray for all those who are struggling with their health at the moment, for God’s strength and peace.

Those in need of God’s healing and who need our support, and those for whom the onset of winter brings particular difficulties.

**Collect**

God for whom we watch and wait,

you sent John the Baptist to

prepare the way of your Son:

give us courage to speak the truth,

to hunger for justice,

and to suffer for the cause of right,

with Jesus Christ our Lord.