

“Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river.”

Is 66:12

With so many economic difficulties, political upsets, wars, death and destruction, seemingly all around us, we might almost be forgiven for wondering what is the point of prayer? After all, nothing ever seems to get any better. Well, whilst it is certainly true that God does not will suffering and distress – and it is right and proper that we pray for those who are suffering, including ourselves: indeed, Our Lord Himself has commanded us to – it is also true that our religion isn’t all, or even chiefly, about improving our lot here on earth. Rather, our holy religion is about the sanctification and salvation of souls. But how, exactly, does this help when we’re in the middle of distressing or painful circumstances?

Each of today’s readings is about peace, amongst other things. And whilst we may not be able to bring an end to all of the world’s troubles, we *may* be able to establish peace in our own hearts even in the midst of the turmoil around us. And we may be able to do this by changing how we respond to the circumstances around us even if we cannot change the circumstances themselves.

Holy Communion is often called the Sacrament of Peace because we receive into our souls the One who is Himself the Prince of Peace. It is not just that Christ is the *bearer* of peace: He is Peace itself. In the Person of Christ we find a perfect harmony between God and Mankind; in the Person of Christ we find everything as it should be, with no disordered passions or desires or distracting anxieties, and no diseases of mind or body or soul. Christ Himself is at peace: Christ Himself *is* Peace. So, when we receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion, we receive into our souls a form of living Peace as it were.

Some of us like to kid ourselves that so long as we eat an apple a day, it doesn’t matter what else we eat or drink, we shall be healthy and fit. Well, of course, it doesn’t work

like that, does it? For our bodies to be healthy and fit we need a properly balanced diet as well as plenty of exercise and a healthy lifestyle. The same is true for our souls. However astonishing is the gift of Christ's presence in the soul in the form of sanctifying grace, our spiritual lives will not benefit very much unless other things are in place too. If we are to benefit from the presence in our souls of the Prince of Peace, then we must make sure our spiritual diet is healthy, that we get plenty of spiritual exercise, and that we live a spiritual and virtuous lifestyle. Just coming to church once a week and going to Holy Communion – essential though that indeed is – nevertheless, *just* doing that won't provide us with the spiritual ballast to keep us steady when the waters around us are troubled and choppy.

In the first instance, prayer should be as natural a feature of our lives as physical exercise is for many people. Whether you go for a daily spiritual jog, or take vigorous spiritual exercise, or simply go for a spiritual walk every day, prayer is as necessary to the soul as exercise is to the body.

Eating your five pieces of fruit and veg. a day won't do you much good if you spend the rest of the day stuffing yourself with pizzas, take-aways, and chocolate. So it is with our spiritual intake. Going to Mass once a week will do us little good if we then gorge ourselves on television programmes, computer games, social-media distractions, and the affairs of the world. We need to feed our minds, our hearts, and our souls with spiritual reading, from the Bible, as well as from all those wonderful authors whose names begin with the letter 'S' – St Augustine, St Bernard, St Catherine, St Benedict, St Thérèse of Lisieux, St John of the Cross, and so on and so on. As St Paul says elsewhere, 'whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things' (Phil 4:8).

And what is a healthy spiritual lifestyle? Prioritizing spiritual matters, and surrounding yourself with spiritual concerns. Do you have a crucifix prominently displayed in your home for veneration? Do you have images of Our Lady and the saints around you? Do you turn your thoughts to God and the things of God throughout the day? Or only once a week, on a Sunday? Do you take delight in God and the things of God? Is living in the presence of God your natural habitat?

If you take spiritual exercise in prayer, if you feed your mind with spiritual reading, if you live a healthy and spiritually virtuous lifestyle, then the peace that comes to us in the Sacrament of Holy Communion can become for us a calming and steadying influence in our daily lives *whatever* the trials and tribulations that are going on in the rest of our lives.

“Now towards her I send flowing peace like a river.”