

Prayer is not a solitary act ...
when we pray we are, consciously
or unconsciously, expressing a
connection with our brothers and
sisters, even if they're not
physically with us.

James Martin SJ

WILDERNESS CHOICES

In the Scriptures the wilderness is traditionally the place where conflict between good and evil is out in the open and clear. This is part of the Gospel for this first Sunday of Lent. It is also the place where Jesus prayed. During Lent, an actual place of wilderness may not be possible in busy lives, but a metaphorical place apart for prayer and reflection is possible.

Geoff Robinson was a Sydney Auxiliary Bishop who died at the end of 2020. Following major heart surgery he took extended leave for a field study in Israel and Turkey. This included a week in the Sinai Desert. In *Travels in Sacred Places* he wrote about the experience:

Before I left Australia to begin my travels, I packed what I needed into one suitcase and left everything else I possessed at home. When I left Jerusalem to go to the Sinai Desert, I left the suitcase behind and took with me only what I could hold in one haversack to carry on

ascent of Mt Moses in the Sinai, I left most of the contents of this in the jeep and took on my back only the essentials of water and a few dried figs.

I believe it is the same for the spiritual life. To find God, I have to leave behind a lot of baggage and go out into the desert. There I must leave behind even more baggage and climb a mountain. It is only when I have reduced my spiritual life to its few most basic essentials that I may begin to come near God. If I don't do this, I will inevitably load many of my own fears, longings and distortions onto God and end up with a god of my own making.

A DESIRE FOR GOD

Throughout Pope Francis' writings he constantly invites everyone to seek an encounter with God through prayer and encounters with other people. He sees that mission and evangelisation flow from that encounter. He describes a Christian as someone who remembers the encounter with God and can share that with others

by being a humble witness to God's presence in them, by relating to others the way Jesus did. Pedro Arrupe, a past Jesuit Superior General describes encountering God:

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.

A PRAYER FOR THIS TIME

How do we pray for peace
from half a world away?

How can words salve
and soothe real wounds?

How do we pray for safety in floods
from safe places?

Assuage real fears,
wipe tears from real eyes?

God of endless compassion,
transform our prayers
from words into bridges,
that span the distances between us,
uniting our hearts in yours.
Every time we turn our keys in our doors
may we remember

all who are losing their homes.

Every time we step into our cars,
may we remember
all who are having to flee.

Every time we embrace our families,
may we remember
all who are trying to shield theirs
from the trauma of war
and raging flood waters.

May our besieged sisters and brothers
be drawn into the arms of Christ,
and may our cry be heard as one voice,
ringing out from every corner of the earth:

God of endless mercy,
grant us peace and safety.

Amen.

Adapted from a prayer by Cameron Bellm

A SPIRITUAL WORK OF MERCY - PRAYING THE NEWS

Praying for the living and the dead is one of the Spiritual Works of Mercy. Praying the news is a way of putting this spiritual work of mercy into practice, whether in silent individual prayer or with a group.

- Read or view a news item. Pay attention to what engages your heart; perhaps a quote, an image, someone's name. Ask God to keep these in your heart.

God of mercy, as I take in the news today, inspire me to hold up to you all who are involved in the stories, everyone who is affected by the events, and all who announce and receive the news.

Grant me the gift of awareness and a sense of responsibility, especially toward the most vulnerable in our society and in our world.

Lord, expand my heart with your love as I embrace all that is in the news today.

- If names are mentioned, pray for people by name. Pray for whatever initially engaged your attention.
- Return to these prayers throughout the day.

*God is with us;
God is our stronghold.*

*God is for us a refuge and a strength
an ever-present help in times of distress.*

*We shall not fear though the earth should rock,
though the waters rage and foam,
though the mountains quake at its surging.*

*Streams refresh the city of God,
the holy dwelling place.*

*God is within;
it cannot be shaken.*

*God puts an end to wars;
the bow is broken;
the spear is snapped;
the shields are consumed with fire.*

*"Be still and know that I am God,
Exalted among the nations,
Exalted on the earth"*

*God is with us;
God is our stronghold.*