

Wendy's October Prayer Thoughts

In 1885 the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy wrote a short story about Three Hermits, drawn from an old legend from the Volga region. A Bishop and several pilgrims were travelling on a fishing boat from the port of Archangel to a monastery on one of the Solovetsky Islands, situated on the White Sea. During the voyage the Bishop overheard a fisherman talking about a group of old hermits who were living on a very small remote island. He decided to make a pastoral visit, and asked the captain to take the boat in that direction. The captain replied saying, "The old men are not worth your pains. I have heard said that they are foolish fellows, who understand nothing, and never speak a word." However, he acquiesced to the request, and the Bishop was duly rowed to shore in a small boat to meet the three men. He gave them his benediction and began to talk with them. "Tell me what you are doing to save your souls, and how you serve God on this island?" The only thing they knew to do was to pray a simple prayer: "God, there are three of us, and three of you, have mercy upon us." The Bishop quickly realised that they had no understanding of the doctrine, nor of prayer. They didn't even know the Lord's Prayer. So he began to teach them, repeating over and over again the phrases for them to memorise. Late in the evening he was finally satisfied with his effort. He left them with the instruction to keep on praying the Our Father.

The Bishop was taken back to the ship. Suddenly he noticed the three hermits walking on the water, rather running after the ship. They caught up with it, and as the captain stopped the ship they called out: "We have forgotten your teaching, servant of God. When we stopped saying it for a time, a word dropped out, and now it has all gone to pieces. We can remember nothing of it. Teach us again". The Bishop humbled by their simplicity said "Your own prayer will reach the Lord, men of God." It is not for me to teach you. Pray for us sinners."

God is sure to hear every prayer from the heart, for it engages us immediately with God and He is with us. Furthermore, because it is from the heart He accepts it, whether it is repetitive or in any other form; whether words are from scripture; spontaneous; or inspired by other Christians. God hears because He loves us, and responds to us in His love.

When David was established as King, he had the Ark of the Covenant brought to his new capital in Jerusalem. The Levites placed it in a tent, in a specially prepared area. "They then sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings before God..... David blessed the people in the name of the Lord." 1 Chronicles 16. After food was shared David sang a Psalm of Thanksgiving. One of David's verses came to my mind while pondering the situation of the Three Hermits. It is "Search for the Lord and His strength, and keep on searching." Psalm 105:4. The Message translation emphasises their practice more accurately. An impact on the Bishop. "Study God and His strength; seek His presence day and night." God's special place was in their hearts. There they communed with Him. That is why their simple prayer had such relevance and comfort.

When we pray from the heart Christ will remain at the centre of our lives. Being constantly aware of His presence, we will reflect Him through loving and serving others.