



THINK ON THESE THINGS..... (our contributor this morning is Tony Wilson)

Reading: Philippians 4:4-6

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Reflection:

There's no doubt about it that times have been difficult for us all this year. However, I was brought up with the idea that there's always going to be someone for whom things are worse than my experience. In fact, there will be very many whose problems make mine fade into insignificance. This year two cases have illustrated the point for me very clearly. Two friends of mine are living in Beirut for work reasons. A few weeks ago they experienced that terrible explosion when a huge quantity of Ammonium Nitrate blew up, devastating part of the city. They were both slightly injured, and the flat they are renting was badly damaged. Another friend of mine had been coping for over a year with both his parents in bad and worsening health. They both died earlier this year, but not from the corona virus. My friend himself has health issues, and dealing with this, his parents' deaths and the corona crisis has caused him considerable stress and grief.

When I think of these two cases, I realise all I've had to deal with is the effect of the corona pandemic on my life. The deaths of my friend's parents and the tragedy in Beirut, all set against the backdrop of the corona crisis, set me thinking about the question of human suffering. My mind turned to the verses from SL Paul's letter to the Philippians which I've chosen for today's reading. SL Paul instructs us that the first thing we should do in bad times is surprisingly always to rejoice. That means not a superficial cheerfulness, but a deep joy in all that God has done for us. This must mean that we should also be thankful that we're not suffering as much as many other people in the world. Then we must try not to worry about anything. We know that although worrying is easy to do, it can't on its own put anything right.

Also, very often the things we worry about never happen. We should remember that when St. Paul was writing this letter he had a lot to worry about, but had chosen to trust God instead. He then tells us we should pray. At times of suffering our prayers may well resemble a shopping list of things we want from God. Whilst that's not the best type of prayer, it's understandable. However, we should always make time to listen to God as well. For God will almost certainly have something to tell us about what we could be doing in the situation in which we find ourselves. St. Paul also mentions thanksgiving. There must always be something for which we can thank God, something perhaps that hasn't gone wrong for us. A few Sundays ago we sang in our YouTube service 'Will your anchor hold in the storms of life?' That hymn can be a useful model for prayer or meditation at times of suffering and difficulty.

Breath-Prayer for Today:

Almighty God, we ask you to comfort all who are cast down and faint of heart by the sorrows and difficulties of the world. Grant that by the power of the Holy Spirit, they may be lifted up to you with hope and courage, and enabled to go on their way rejoicing. Amen.

