

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH
GRAFHAM

'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK'

30th September 2020

I'm sure that you all have prayers of which you are particularly fond and which have special meaning for you. Perhaps they bring back memories of when you first discovered them, of a particular moment in your life; of a particular person or place. Before reading on you might like to pause and call one to mind; see what associations arise and perhaps give thanks for those memories. Maybe from time to time, when you use those prayers which you find particularly special you might make doing this consciously part of your prayer.

One of the prayers which evokes all sorts of echoes for many people is:

*God be in my head, and my understanding;
God be in my eyes, and in my looking;
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking;
God be in my heart, and in my thinking;
God be at mine end, and at my departing.*

Perhaps because of its last line it is often said or sung at funerals but I first learned it at school where we always sang it at prayers on a Friday afternoon bringing the week to a close. So it brings back memories of three hundred girls kneeling and singing together - before the mad rush for the bus home!

The first known text of it is in French dating from around 1490. It appears in English in a Book of Hours printed in 1514 but is probably best associated with the Sarum Primer of 1558. Since then it has been set to music in innumerable ways but probably today the best known version is by Sir Henry Walford Davies.

It seems to me that part of the beauty of the prayer is that it works at so many different levels. Said or sung meditatively it reminds us that God is the ground of our being; that we are rooted in him and so gives reassurance, strength and comfort.

It can also remind us that for most of us, most of the time we are not conscious of God's presence with us, and it calls us back to that awareness.

We can see each line as a petition - perhaps the basis for more extended intercession for ourselves and our relationships with other people and all of creation - that our lives may conform more to God's ways.

When we ask God to be in:

our understanding, perhaps that is to understand ourselves more, and influenced by that knowledge to understand other better;

our looking, perhaps to be able to look carefully and attentively, to look with generosity, to see potential;

our speaking, perhaps to be positive not negative, to be aware of the potential for good and harm;

our thinking, perhaps given the order in which this comes, it is more about heart than head, about

our essence;

and at our departing, to be in God's eternal presence after this life.

I am sure we can develop each line in ways which feel most appropriate for us and where we are in our lives now.

And finally, perhaps this prayer could be the starting point for a wider journey round our bodies and the different ways we respond. You might like to pray this extended version of the prayer by Jim Cotter and as you do so think or perhaps touch each part of your body in turn.

*God be in my head and in my understanding
God be in my eyes and in my looking
God be in my mouth and in my speaking
God be in my tongue and in my tasting
God be in my lips and in my greeting*

*God be in my nose and in my smelling/inhaling
God be in my ears and in my hearing
God be in my neck and in my humbling
God be in my shoulders and in my bearing
God be in my back and in my standing*

*God be in my arms and in my reaching/receiving
God be in my hands and in my working
God be in my legs and in my walking
God be in my feet and in my grounding
God be in my joints and in my relating*

*God be in my gut and in my feeling
God be in my bowels and in my forgiving
God be in my loins and in my swiving
God be in my lungs and in my breathing
God be in my heart and in my loving*

*God be in my skin and in my touching
God be in my flesh and in my paining/pining
God be in my blood and in my living
God be in my bones and in my dying
God be at my end and at my reviving*

(from Prayer at Night by Jim Cotter)

With my love and prayers

Camilla

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