**November 2022 *Remembering, Letting Go, Memories***

Welcome to the November Prayer, and the third in a series of 12. Each month we will explore different themes and different ways of praying which we hope you will find helpful as ways in which to encounter God. *The Provincial Spirituality Group in the Church in Wales.*

**Introduction - We Remember**

This month we will be reflecting on the way in which we are prompted to ‘remember’ as we move through November. And we will be introducing a prayer of remembering - the Examen.

November is a month of remembering. Our memories evoke so many emotions in us. They can be a source of thankfulness, of smiles and laughter, and of tears. We can remember a job well done with justifiable pride and our unkind words to someone with shame.

Our memories are woven into the fabric of our identity as we are formed and shaped by our experiences. They are also woven into our relationships as we build shared memories with those we love and with the communities of which we are a part. We can also ‘remember’ events which we have not experienced directly - such as events from history.

**Prayer**

God of all times and places,

embracing past, present and all that is yet to be;

in the memories and stories of my life,

hold me close in sorrow and when tears flow,

rejoice with me in happiness and when laughter fills the air.

Be with me in all of my remembering.

Amen.

**Reflection**

We enter the month of November with ‘All Saints Day’. We remember all those Saints of God who have been recognised by the church as especially holy. People who have lived close to God or, perhaps, who have paid a particularly high price for their discipleship, staying faithful even though it cost them their lives. They are an encouragement and inspiration to us. Our churches ring out with the hymn, ‘For all the saints’.

 *Is there anyone you know who you feel is a holy and saintly person?*

This is followed by ‘All Soul’s Day’. The mood quietens as we remember those saints, those souls, whom we have known personally. We may light a candle. Their names are spoken aloud in our churches. We remember them with love, perhaps with longing, or even grief. We give God thanks for their love, their life. They too may have been an encouragement or inspiration to us in our Christian journey.

In the remembering of All Saints and All Souls, we recognise that the church is made up of people across the ages. It is as if the veil between us and them grows a little more transparent. We gain a different perspective on ourselves as Christians as we recognise that we too are part of this enormous group of people from across the globe and across the centuries. All following after Jesus as best as we can.

The days continue and it isn’t long before the childhood ditty echoes around, ‘Remember, remember the fifth of November’ - bonfire night has arrived. We hear that ditty less these days and perhaps we prefer to forget the violent conflict between Protestants and Catholics to which it refers. Remembering can be uncomfortable. It can challenge us.

As the month rolls on, we come to Remembrance Day. We remember our armed forces, especially those who have given their lives in so many conflicts across the ages. We remember the cost of war and we pray for peace. For some of us the remembrances will be deeply personal if we have served in the forces or lost family members in conflict. Often there is a tension in us as we honour those who have died in war but we long for an end to war. Sometimes we wonder why God doesn’t intervene in some clear-cut way to end such suffering.

We look for the day when people,

‘shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
   and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
   neither shall they learn war any more’. (Isaiah 2; 4)

We can also acknowledge the conflict of our own hearts - the seeds of our personal wars in anger and bitterness, enmity and a desire to show ourselves to be right and others wrong. We long for peace in our hearts. In this season of Autumn, we might decide to let go of some of our hurtful memories as the trees around us allow their leaves to fall to the ground, preparing themselves for the Winter and the new growth of Spring.

**Prayer: The Examen – A prayer of Remembering or Re-Visiting**

The prayer suggestion for this month is a prayer of remembering - the Examen. It has its roots in the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola (b1491-d1556) but it has been adapted for modern use, so there are a number of variations. Many people use this prayer each evening to look back over the day. Try it for yourself!

1. Sit quietly, in stillness. If it helps you to focus, light a candle. Remember that God is with you and loves you with a very great love. You sit in God’s warmth and light, thankful for the day.
2. Ask God to show you what you need to see and then allow your mind to remember your day - where you were, what you did, who you saw. Don’t worry about the order - whatever comes to mind is fine.
3. Consider where in your day you drew close to God? Sometimes it’s easier to ask where you found love or light? Or where you gave love or light? Or, perhaps it might be something for which you are grateful, something which made you feel good.

We can find God in everyday places:
- in a child’s smile
- in a kind word
- in the music playing in the car on the way to work
- in the sunlight falling on dew
- in an unexpected sense of peace
4. Consider as well whether there was any time when God seemed distant - when the day seemed dark, or love-less. Perhaps there was an encounter where you were unloving or simply failed to notice God. If you need forgiveness then ask, knowing that it is already given.

We can draw away from God in little things:
- in an unkind word
- in a negative assumption about someone

Or perhaps God is trying to nudge you towards change
- some activities which used to give pleasure seem like a burden - what is that saying to you?
- realising your concern for a friend might suggest that you contact them
5. We are people of faith and hope. Today is coming to an end so look forward to tomorrow, asking for whatever you might need from God as you consider the day ahead.

The Examen doesn’t have to be prayed in the evening. If you are too sleepy and prefer the morning then you can look back over the previous day instead. The Examen can also be used for longer periods of time (looking back on a term, or a year, or a holiday, or a job you are leaving).

Some people find it helpful to keep a journal of those things which bring them close to God. Looking back over time, patterns can emerge and new directions suggest themselves. When times are tough your journal can be a source of hope as you remember when times were more joyful.

**Other suggestions for prayer for the November theme of remembering**:

* Sing to God the hymn, ‘For all the saints’. You can find the words in most hymn books or online, here for example: https://hymnary.org/text/for\_all\_the\_saints\_who\_from\_their\_labors
* Bring to mind someone who has died, someone who helped you on your Christian journey, or someone known and loved. Light a candle for them, trusting them to God’s gentle care and giving thanks for all that they meant to you.
* Draw the outline of a leaf on a piece of paper and cut it out. As you hold the leaf, remember something in your past which holds you back - perhaps it causes you pain, or you feel anger, bitterness or betrayal. Sit quietly in the love of God and ask for what you need for this memory to lose its hold on you. You may need to forgive or to be forgiven. You may be able to recognise that many people have shown kindness even though one person hurt you. You may need courage to trust again. Ask God for what you need, as you allow your leaf to fall from your hands to the ground.
* Use the verse from Isaiah 2.4 looked at in the reflection earlier, as a basis for prayer for the world, praying that peace might come to areas in conflict. Then look at your own life and heart, asking for God’s grace to be a peacemaker.
* A prayer:

*Gracious God,
I thank you for the gift of memory.
Help me to remember with gratitude all those times which have given me joy and drawn me closer to you and to others.
When my memories wound me and hold me back, grant me your healing touch.
When my memories remind my that I am flawed, then may I remember your infinite forgiveness and grace.
Above all, may I remember your love, present with me on every step of life’s journey.
May your love so grow in me that it might overflow to gladden the lives of those around me.
This I ask in the name of Jesus.
Amen*

**Book resources:**

* *Sleeping with bread: Holding what gives you life* by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn and Matthew Linn. (A beautiful, simple book on the Examen, illustrated by the children’s illustrator, Francisco Miranda.)
* *Listening to your life* by Julia Mourant (A book of reflective exercises which help us attend to the voice of God within us).

**Resources for the Examen:**

* *Apps*: Pray as you Go (under the ‘prayer tools’ tab) or Jesuit Prayer
* *Web pages:*
* <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/>
* <https://www.pathwaystogod.org/resources/examen-st-beunos>

**Next Month**

We hope that you have found these reflections and prayers helpful, and they may of course need thinking about and praying more than once. Next month our theme and prayers will be to consider the journeys we make, the journey to Christmas and a prayer walk.