

1 Timothy 2:1-6a - 6th Sunday of Easter [Rogate] 1.5.2016

Prayer - as first priority!

¹ I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. ² Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. ³ This is good and pleases God our Saviour, ⁴ who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. ⁵ For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity – the man Christ Jesus. ⁶ He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time. [NLT]

A judge in the high court in Pretoria found that “... the decision taken by former NPA head Mokotedi Mpshe to drop corruption charges against President Jacob Zuma in 2009 was irrational.” (as quoted on News24 on Friday, 29th April)

We have a president who faces hundreds of charges of corruption. This in addition to the various other court cases he has faced over the past decade - not least the Constitutional Court finding that he was liable to pay a portion of the cost of having his home at Nkandla ‘upgraded’. In case you might have forgotten, Zuma’s sudden willingness to pay only came about when he knew that there was no chance of winning the case before the ConCourt.

Many South Africans not only shake their heads in disbelief at the state of affairs, there have been protest marches calling for the president to step down. A number of prominent representatives of various churches have echoed this call - and it may be that many here feel that way too.

Our first priority is not to join the #ZumaMustFall campaign, however - no matter how we may feel about him. The passage we have read from Paul’s first letter to Timothy has a different call. We are urged here to make

Prayer - the first priority!

When we consider the situation back in the 1st century it seems very likely that things were also in a shocking state. Paul’s reaction is not just to complain about the state of affairs - he shows us here that for us as Christians there is a much greater responsibility. He says, **I urge you, first of all, to pray ...**

Prayer **first of all** - and not only before meals. Not simply to get it behind us,

so that we can carry on doing what we want. Prayer is much more than a ritual, it is the expression of a relationship.

The Good News we have is that through Jesus we know that God has opened the lines of communication between himself and us. God is waiting for us: Waiting for our prayer; waiting to hear from us, who have received so much from him.

We are to pray **“first of all”**. Instead of our complaints *first of all* to anybody who will listen, we are to come to God with our concerns. Our prayers are to be **for all people. ...**, and in a special way **for kings [the emperor in the 1st century / the president today] and all who are in authority.**

Is it not absolutely amazing that God should want our prayers! After all, he really does not need them. He can rule this world quite well on his own without any input from us. Yet he wants to involve us! God wants to involve us in the unfolding of the things which happen in our world. *‘For God so loves us, that he does not want to do anything without us’!*

At the same time it becomes clear: We Christians have an enormous responsibility. Interceding, making requests for all people, for heads of state and governments. So often we say or think, ‘We’re only a small group. What difference can we make by saying something?’ [A reason why many people may feel that their vote will not make a difference as well]

What difference can you make on the political processes, on the state of the economy, on the effects of El Nino or global warming. There may be different organisations one can join - but you are already part of the one group which has brought about incredible changes in our world. As Christians we have an active part in decision-making at the very highest level. So we are not to just complain about all that is wrong in the world - instead we are to address our concerns to God.

But what can prayer do? At the time this letter was written, the Roman Emperor was to be worshipped as a god: people should pray to him as the ‘Saviour’. That means also: people should depend on him for all help and salvation. The 2 centuries before there was a change were often very hard for Christians - but

the church permeated society, and by the beginning of the 4th century the church became a recognised faith in the Roman state.

What can prayer do? In the late 80's and early 90's there were many calls for prayer so that we would have peaceful change here in South Africa - and against the expectations of many, precisely that happened. Perhaps the problem is that we stopped praying, because we thought that we could just carry on as before.

What can prayer do? The wall separating the Western part of Germany from the Eastern part seemed to be immovable. But then people started gathering to pray and to hold peaceful 'rallies' - and the wall of separation came down without a shot being fired.

What can prayer do? - a whole lot! It may at first seem that there is no change, but God stores our prayers - and he responds at his time.

That is why we pray for the government - no matter who it is made up of; no matter whether we voted for those who sit in government; also no matter that we at times don't approve of what they are doing. Paul surely did not approve of what the Roman authorities did; he most certainly did not approve of the emperor claiming to be godlike, or of his persecution of the church. Yet he urges us to pray for those who are in authority.

There is a purpose to our prayer for those in authority: **so that we can live in peace and quietness, in godliness and dignity.** We have a 'hot line' to the highest authority - God has promised to hear us at all times, because we come to him in the name of our Lord. We pray for a purpose - that we may live in **peace and quietness.** The last thing we should do is to withdraw from the happenings of our world behind a barrier of 'private' faith or beliefs. Our faith is to have a profound effect on our country and on our world - by our prayers for all people, and specifically for those in authority.

We are called on to pray - for all people. We pray not just for their physical well-being, although that is also part of it. To encourage us to pray for others

Paul tells us that it is pleasing to God, **who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.**

Praying for others - we remember those who are going through difficult times; we remember the many who are stricken with poverty and disease. But even more important than the physical well-being of those we pray for, is the fact that people are to come to know how they too may be saved. We are to pray so that people may know the truth: about God and about themselves!

We live in a time of religious tolerance - we are to believe that all religions somehow lead to the same destination. Yet, we are told here to pray to our God, **For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity – the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone.** There is only way for our world to be really changed, for people to become different - and that is if they are reconciled to God in Christ.

Prayer - as first priority. By our prayers God involves us in the way our world is run. We have been given responsibility for our world and the people around us, also our concerns about problems in our country. We are to be involved in really doing something for our fellow-citizens as well - after all, God wants all people to experience his presence - everyone is to be saved! That is not just hype, but the Gospel!