

The Gift of his Presence

We needed a new telephone system. Modern phones could not be attached to the old system. On one phone the zero only worked after a hard bash which then sometimes made it zero, zero! An elderly lady whom we had befriended included us amongst the bequests in her will. We decided to take the plunge and see it as a last and special gift from her. We knew that it would be complicated, as we have a number of telephones, an intercom and a doorbell that all have to ring in both houses. An extra complication was the fire alarm. All had to work from the one system. In addition we needed cordless handsets, not least so that we could find each other, as we were spending considerable time upstairs, downstairs, the far corners of the garden or the basement trying to trace the recipient of a call.



We realised our limited abilities when it came to technology when a representative from the firm came to talk to us about the new system. It was spread out in miniature on our dining room table. Some of us watched bemused as with lightning speed (to us) buttons were pressed, phones rang, were lifted up, put down again, features explained and lights lit up. The work started. One Sister was dreaming about telephone systems, as she tried to identify the places where it needed final adjustments. Confusion reigned. Even the dog started to dash madly to the cat flap when the doorbell rang. One “lost” handset, the first of many we fear, was found down the side of an armchair when we rang the number.

Sometimes we approach God a little like a telephone system: if we know how to work it and have the correct number then an answer will come. A three-year-old we knew some years ago listened as his parents explained to him about prayer. God answered prayer. Later, they prayed. Not long after, the telephone rang. The little boy jumped up with excitement, “It’s God”, he shouted to his parents. It doesn’t work like that and we all know it. Many books have been written on prayer or talks given. It can be helpful but there are a few dangers. The first is that we are so busy reading about prayer that we don’t pray. The second is that we adopt a method, the “know how”, and place more faith in that, than in the One to whom we are praying. Thirdly we are praying the wrong prayer in the wrong place at the wrong time because we are not listening to the Lord.

Jesus promised that “where two or three come together in my name there am I with them”. (Matt 18:20) We can know that he is there in a way that is much better than a telephone. It isn’t by fantastic answers to prayers but by the quiet peace and holiness of his presence. Some call it the “holy hush”. It is unmistakable. Some of the saints speak about “Presence” as being the necessary starting place for prayer. Yet what often happens is that we rush on talking or singing and though Jesus is there and we may possibly but momentarily feel his presence it is as if he withdraws. It is like inviting a close friend around for the evening and then talking non-stop ourselves.

The most precious gift in prayer is the gift of God himself in Christ revealing himself to us, his children. When we are still, he comes and if we listen he will speak to us. This is true whether we are praying alone, have the privilege of praying with others, or in a large congregation.