

21st November 2021

Prayers

“Prayer is the spirit speaking truth to Truth.”

Philip James Bailey, Festus (1813)

Some years ago, I wrote a short story called *Harold*, one of a series of contemporary parables in my book *A Blessing to Follow*. It's about a little boy, Sammy, who, when he's praying "The Lord's Prayer", always begins: "Our Father, who art in heaven, Harold be thy name." With God having a name like "Harold", Sammy's prayers aren't directed towards some mystical, distant, divine being, but are shared with a mate, someone who has a name like his. Imagine his consternation, therefore, when he learns that the new neighbours who've moved in next door are called Janice and *Harold* ... "God living next door ...?" Confusion reigns – at least for a while.

Sammy's prayers worked because, with Harold as a name, God made sense to a small boy. Through the years, though I've never called God "Harold", prayers make most sense to me when the language is about things I know and understand. If God and I are mates in prayer, then the language used has to bring God closer and not keep this God at a distance.

Back in the 1960s, I discovered *Prayers of Life*, a slim volume of amazing prayers by the French worker-priest, Michel Quoist. Here were prayers about familiar things, in language I could understand, prayers such as *Prayer before a five-pound note*, *To love – the prayer of the adolescent* and *Nothing, I am nothing*. Here was subject material that ranged from the pornographic magazine to hunger and homelessness, from delinquency to a priest exhausted with caring. Here was reality and relevance, subjects and language that made sense to a growing teenage boy – just as calling God "Harold" did for little Sammy.

There's a place for formal language in prayers. Words can be beautiful. God deserves the best from us, and that includes our prayers. But God also needs us to be real, to be true to ourselves, as Michel Quoist always was, and to offer prayers which are about the everyday as well as the special, the down-to-earth as well as the highfaluting.

So, today, I'm with Michel Quoist – and Sammy – as my spirit goes on "speaking truth to Truth" in my prayers. Is that OK with you, Harold?

A prayer for today

Lord, the truth is, this is me, ordinary, everyday, down-to-earth me.

Let me glimpse an acceptance from your Truth, as our spirits merge into One. Amen

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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