

The Anglican Herald

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The Bible – The Sacraments – And Prayer

When we say we are members of 'The Body of Christ' – the Church, what do we mean? What does our membership entail? For some reason this matter has been on my mind for quite some time so I thought I would share some of my thoughts on the subject.

There are many people (dare I say the majority) in Australia who claim to be Christians and yet do not attend or in any way support any church parish or other ministry. They may have been baptised and in some cases confirmed but in practice they only go to church for weddings and/or funerals. While many people still believe in God they don't see the necessity of associating with a particular church or religious group. I have often wondered about this but I am certain that Christians are meant to be in fellowship both with God and with each other; otherwise we cannot hope to proclaim the Good News of Jesus effectively and after all this is the task given to all who claim faith in Jesus our Lord.

In 1966 I was appointed to my first parish as Rector. Within the first week of my arrival in the parish and before my first Sunday Mass I was asked by a lady if I would give a reference for her son who was to be enrolled at a church school. I asked if they were members of the parish – "Oh no, we don't go to church, I just need this reference because it is a requirement of the school". I politely declined saying I could not give a reference to someone I had never met. This was an occasion when I felt justified in refusing a request relating to belief or church activity.

I make no judgement in regards to anyone's view about God or in how they view Christianity. What people believe about anything is their business and they are welcome to it. My purpose in this article is to outline what I seek to understand about membership within the Body of Christ.

If we consider what God has provided for us so we might be in an active relationship with Him; it seems to me that we should do more than just be at church on Sundays and other special occasions. We need to use the tools God has given us so that we might grow in our faith and in our understanding of what it is to be within the Body. I am suggesting that we consider three of God's gifts to us.

The Bible – This is a most precious gift. The Bible is the inspired word of God written down and made available to God's creation as a resource for our life here and in the life which is yet to come. We really need to learn from its pages. I couldn't possibly list here all of what the Bible has to teach us about God and His purposes. The Bible covers every aspect of life in one way or another. Learn what?

About God – His Love – His Mercy – His Justice – His Patience – His Blessings – His Gifts – His Plans – His Commandments – His Requirements – His Promises – His Dealings with Mankind.

About Jesus – The Bible helps us to appreciate more fully the gift God has given us in the Person of His Son Jesus. We can follow our Lord's ministry; be inspired by His teaching and experience the great sacrifice He offered on our behalf. We can immerse ourselves in the loving character of Jesus and come to know Him more closely as our Saviour.

There is just so much we can learn about God when we read our Bibles regularly and prayerfully. If you are not already a regular Bible reader I urge you to become one. You will be greatly blessed as you discover how great and wonderful our God is.

The Bible is the Living word of God and will speak to us as we seek to draw closer to Him. As we meditate on God's word we grow in our faith.

The Sacraments – These are what I call the practical gifts God has given to His Church. There are Seven (7) Sacraments being – Holy Baptism; Holy Communion (Mass); Confirmation; Holy Orders; Holy Matrimony; Holy Unction and Penance. While not everyone may need to partake of all the Sacraments, we recognise them as being means by which God nurtures both the Church itself and its individual members. To be full members of the Church we need to be Baptised; Confirmed and receive Holy Communion regularly. The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is for those wishing to be married. Holy Orders provides for the ordained ministry of the Church.

Holy Unction is administered to the sick and those close to death. Penance (or confession) provides the opportunity to confess your sins and receive absolution from the priest. Jesus has given the Church authority to forgive sins in His Name.

And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

John 20. 22-23

The Church does not require its members to make their confession in the hearing of a priest but it can be of great benefit in helping to open you to the love and forgiveness of God.

Prayer - I have suggested previously that Prayer for Christians is a necessity. Prayer is a vital contributor to the integrity of our faith. It is up to you whether you say your prayers from a prayer book or just speak to God in your own words. The important thing is to spend time sharing yourself with God and allowing Him to speak to you.

It is important that we set aside time each day to spend with God in prayer. May I suggest that you combine your Bible reading and

*The prayer of a righteous man
is powerful and effective.*

Prayer time because they can go hand in hand.
James 5.16

Prayer is an activity we engage in. I suggest therefore that we should pray in some sort of order. I suggest the well known pattern.

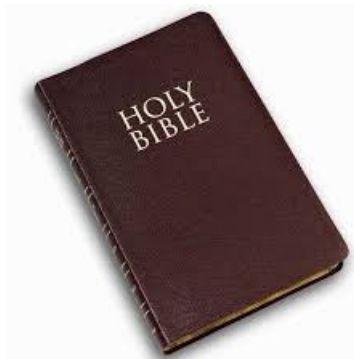


Adoration – Begin your prayer time with worship and praise to God. Praise Him for who He is and for all He has done for you.

Confession – Saying sorry for our sins and asking God's forgiveness. Pray that God will help us to do better each day.

Thanksgiving – We should always give thanks for the grace, mercy and the many blessings God gives us.

Supplication – Bringing our needs and the needs of others before God. A time to pray for our Family and Friends; The Church and Our Priest; For Persecuted Christians; For our Governments and for special needs that arise from time to time.



I would suggest that you use the English Standard Version of the Bible.

This is the version used in our Church.

As a starting point I suggest you start with the Gospel of Luke – then Acts of the Apostles – then the Gospel of John – then the Epistle to the Ephesians.

I hope what I have written will be of Help