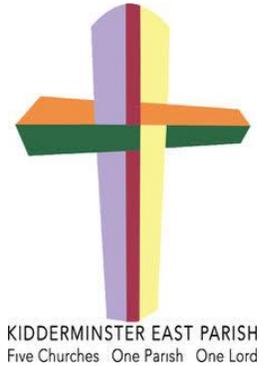


A vitally important question from the Vicar,

Is it better to play football on your own or as part of a team?

Actually I would argue that it's good fun to do both! As a child, I used to love practising my football "skills" up against the wall of our back garden occasionally slicing the ball through my Dad's greenhouse window and shattering the glass into a million fragments amongst his precious cacti plants! It helped me to develop as a world class player, or so I thought!



However, it was also amazing to be able to play as a member of a team. Even though our school team were usually 10-nil down by half-time and the final result could reduce our teacher/coach to weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth, nevertheless a game of football against another school in the area was always exciting and something to look forward to every Wednesday afternoon after school. I never played beyond primary school level but I had great fun (or *craic* as we Irish say!) while I did so.

OK, so let's change the question: Is it better to pray individually or as a team? Again, I think that the answer is it's good to do both. I know and appreciate the individual prayers that have been offered in the parish for our world, our parish and ourselves over the last few weeks since the COVID-19 pandemic hit us all so unexpectedly. Thank you and please keep on praying!

However (you just *knew* that there was going to be a "however", didn't you?), it is also essential that we find time to pray together as God's people, especially at this difficult time. We need to do so, not because we believe that the more people pray, the more God feels His arm being twisted up His almighty back and, working on the principle of "anything for a quiet life," He hears and answers our prayers. Rather, prayer is about we, as God's people, acknowledging His sovereignty in everything, seeking His face and listening for His voice. If we do this together then, perhaps, one of us might pick up something that the rest of us might miss. After all, let's always remember that prayer is about both talking *and* listening! By doing this we listen out for God's plan for our world, our parish and ourselves. Seen in this light, there is *nothing* more important for us to be doing in these times as praying.

At the current time, whilst we are unable to meet in church, we are meeting for Parish Prayer online, via Zoom, on a fortnightly basis. The next "meeting" will be on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June starting at 7:20pm, in order to join together in prayer from 7:30 to 8:00pm. These meetings are open to all in the parish to pray for our current situation and the work of Christ within the parish & further afield. If you do not have internet access, please do pray from your own home at the same time as these meetings.

Login details are automatically sent to the Parish Prayer Ministry Team and anyone else who has joined a previous meeting. If you would like to receive details, please would you send an email to: [parishcomms@kidderminstereast.org.uk](mailto:parishcomms@kidderminstereast.org.uk) by 6:00pm the day prior to the meeting (Tuesday) and you will be sent the link and sign in details on Wednesday morning. Reminders will be published in the weekly newsletters.

Of course, there will be some of you reading this who will probably be saying, "That's fine for those Prayer Warriors in the parish, who know how to pray out loud and in public and have the confidence to do so. However I am a shy, demure wee thing of very few words and I wouldn't have the courage to do such a thing as pray out loud in a meeting."

If that is how your thoughts are shaping up just now then please let me tell you a tale. The first time I ever plucked up the courage to pray out loud in a prayer meeting as a recently converted 14-year-old, my prayer went as follows:

"Dear God ..... *panicked silence, blank mind and dry mouth*..... Amen!"

Now I'm sure you will all agree that this is not the most profound, "Fire of the Spirit from Heaven" prayer you will ever ever hear in your life and you would be right. As a result of this I could have easilly been totally turned off by the whole experience, promising myself that whatever daring do's I might get up to in the future, I would *never* do anything as terrifying as pray ever again. In addition, please bear in mind that the girl I had a crush on at the time was in the meeting as well!

However, do you know what give me the most amazing encouragement that night and quite possibly rescued my whole prayer life from total extinction? Well, as I whispered that shaky little "Amen!" at the end, everyone else in the group (including my immortal beloved!) all cried out "**AMEN!**" in a collective, loud, affirmative voice with big broad smiles to boot!

That incident taught me something about Christian prayer (and perhaps, if I am honest, a little bit about Christian kindness as well!) It taught me that real prayer isn't so much about the quality of the words that we use or for how long we pray or whether or not we can get 15 different theological catagories into a single sentence, rather it's about our humble, thankful, open attitude towards the God to whom we direct our prayers.

And by the way, let's not forget what the word *Amen* actually means; it means *Let it be so!* In other words if you hear a prayer prayed by somebody else and you really like and identify with what that person has just said, then by saying *Amen*, in effect you are saying to God, "What they have just said to you in their prayer Lord holds true for me as well!" Not a bad prayer in one little word, is it?

And, of course, there is one prayer that we can all pray together no matter how experienced or otherwise we are at this praying business:

*Lord, teach us to pray, AMEN!*

May God bless us all at this difficult time.

Robert

22 May 2020