

# Daily Prayer

*Joseph Butler*

*Wednesday, June 16, 2021*

*We enter into a time of quiet. We offer to God our selves and in the silence know that God embraces us as God's very own. We offer our hopes and our concerns through our prayers and in the silence listen for God. Today we hold in our prayers the ordinary moments in life—the trials and the joys—and remember Joseph Butler, Bishop of Durham, 1752.*

*We begin by saying*

I give you a wise and discerning mind.

*1 Kings 3.12b*

## **The First Reading**

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, 'Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you.

Then Solomon awoke; it had been a dream. He came to Jerusalem, where he stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. He offered up burnt-offerings and offerings of well-being, and provided a feast for all his servants.

*1 Kings 3.10-12, 15*

## The Psalm

Oh, how I love your law! \*

all the day long it is in my mind.

Your commandment has made me wiser than my enemies, \*

and it is always with me.

I have more understanding than all my teachers, \*

for your decrees are my study.

I am wiser than the elders, \*

because I observe your commandments.

I restrain my feet from every evil way, \*

that I may keep your word.

I do not shrink from your judgements, \*

because you yourself have taught me.

How sweet are your words to my taste! \*

they are sweeter than honey to my mouth.

Through your commandments I gain understanding; \*

therefore I hate every lying way.

*Psalm 119.97-104*

## The Gospel Reading

Jesus said to them, 'Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand? For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!' And he said to them, 'Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.'

*Mark 4.21-25*

*We continue with the reflection that follows. In silence, we ask what the reading has to say to us today. Is there something in the reflection that draws us more deeply into the reading? What does God have to say to us? What do we have to ask God?*

## **The Reflection**

*Paul MacLean*

I remember first encountering Joseph Butler and 'The Analogy of Religion' in 1968 when I was writing a thesis that required me to get a grip on the intellectual currents of the 18th century. Faced with writing a reflection on him and this famous work some 54 years later, I am hesitant to rely on my dodgy memory for clues about why we should be remembering him today, despite the book having made a strong impression on me all those years ago as a reasonable defence of Christianity against the claims of the dominant and widely held deist opinions of the time. And yet, here is the book itself, sitting on a shelf in my library along with other notable Anglican theologians from years and centuries past.

The 'Analogy of Religion' was first published in 1736 and the edition I have was published in 1896, reprinted in 1907. It was edited by W.E. Gladstone, the 19th century statesman and prime minister of the United Kingdom. This editing must have been a labour of love, for Gladstone died in the same year his edition came out. I spent a pivotal day in that same library in Wales where Gladstone did his work, and which he later bequeathed to the state.

And I look in the fly-leaf of the book now on my desk, and discover the signature of 'J.H. Paull' a priest who retired from his final parish of Bayfield and spent his last years in that village (where I am now residing during the pandemic). I must have acquired his copy at his death when his library was dispersed, and perhaps my mother-in-law, a warden of the village church, thought it would be of interest to a young clergy person who had recently joined the family. Canon Paull must have picked this up as part of his theological

training in the early 20th century.

So the point of all these personal stories is really to do two things. First and foremost is the remarkable staying power and relevance of Butler's work. Theology goes out of fashion faster than any other subject. Used book sellers generally will not touch works of theology. And yet, here is Butler's book being reprinted 180 years after its first publication, and not as an antiquarian exercise, but as a piece of relevant theology, trying to make sense of the enterprise of religion in an intellectually hostile environment.

For this is the purpose of the book, to show that God is the author of both the natural world and humanity, that there is a correspondence and coherence between our human nature and the created order, that there is moral purpose inherent in both human beings and the design of the universe. The dominant view of the time allowed for the creation of the world by a divine rational power, but saw Christianity as a system of myth and ignorance with its assertion of God's revelation and intervention in a rational and closed universe.

This is the debate between science and religion, begun with the Enlightenment, and still reverberating somewhat today in the 'new atheists', although I think we have more or less settled the debate with an acknowledgement of the different spheres of human thought, and an agreement that absolute certainty, whether in religion or in science, is a type of fundamentalism that is to be avoided as detrimental to our functioning as creative, loving, and limited human beings. And this was precisely Butler's point nearly two centuries ago. Absolute certainty is neither possible nor desirable. We humans operate with probability, and that is enough.

The second point of my little personal stories is that, if we take the time, we can often discover imaginative, human connections with

these figures from the past whom we remember in our prayers. They are not just names in a calendar, but actual people who in their own time influenced and shaped the Christian faith and the Christians who hold that faith. Isn't this the way in which our own faith has developed? Perhaps not directly through Joseph Butler, but certainly through people of faith who have mysteriously included us in the ever expanding 'community of saints,'

Although I wouldn't recommend 'The Analogy of Religion' as your next pandemic book, I think we can still appreciate the lasting contribution that this man gave to the Anglican Church, and know that in some ways we are the inheritors of a religious tradition that seeks to make sense of the world, combining rational inquiry and spiritual insight, and finding that both are a gift from our wonderful Creator.

*When the time is right, we conclude our time of silence with the canticle*

## **The Canticle ~ Benedicite**

Bless the Lord all you works of the Lord: ♦  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.

Bless the Lord you heavens: ♦  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.

Bless the Lord you angels of the Lord: ♦  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.

Bless the Lord all people on earth: ♦  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.

O people of God bless the Lord: ♦  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.

Bless the Lord you priests of the Lord: ♦  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.

Bless the Lord you servants of the Lord: ♦  
sing his praise and exalt him for ever.

Bless the Lord all you of upright spirit: ♦  
bless the Lord you that are holy and humble in heart.

*The Song of the Three 35-37, 60-65*

*We continue in prayer for those people and situations that we hold up before God (The Intercessions)  
and continue with the concluding collect, the Lord's prayer and the closing sentences.*

## **The Intercessions**

Let us give thanks to God,  
the God of all peoples of the earth.  
For the colour and forms of your creation  
and our place within it,  
we bring our thanks, good Lord:  
**your mercy endures for ever.**

For our daily food,  
and for those whose work and skill  
bring your good gifts to us,  
we bring our thanks, good Lord:  
**your mercy endures for ever.**

For the gifts and graces inspired in human minds and hearts;  
for insight and imagination,  
for the skills of research  
which bring healing and fulfilment to the lives of many;  
we bring our thanks, good Lord:  
**your mercy endures for ever.**

For the light and shades of the changing seasons,  
and their variety and dependability;  
for new life and growth out of barrenness and decay;  
we bring our thanks, good Lord:  
**your mercy endures for ever.**

For new hope and strength in our communities,  
especially in your Church and among all you call to serve you,  
we bring our thanks, good Lord;

**your mercy endures for ever.**

For all in whose lives we see  
goodness, kindness, gentleness, patience and humility,  
and all the fruit of the Spirit,  
we bring our thanks, good Lord:

**your mercy endures for ever.**

For the life we have been given,  
and for all those whom you have given us to share it,  
we bring our thanks, good Lord:

**your mercy endures for ever.**

*Our prayers conclude*

O God,  
by your Holy Spirit  
you give to some the word of wisdom,  
to others the word of knowledge  
and to others the word of faith.

We praise your Name for the gifts of grace  
manifested in your servant Joseph Butler,  
and we pray that by his teaching  
we may know you, the only true God,  
and Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

*[let us pray as our Saviour taught us,]*

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,

your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and for ever. Amen

*We conclude*

May God grant to the world justice, truth and peace.  
Amen.



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