

HOMILY 29C 191020 SW3

Hands – have a look at your hands! Aren't they wonderful! Think of all the things we do with our hands: we use them to make things, to hold a pen when we write, perhaps to eat with or to make signs to indicate how we feel about something.

Maybe we use our hands when we pray, holding them with our palms flat together or crossed, one over the other. When we make the sign of the cross, we use our hands.

But the other day I came across a different way of using my hands when I pray. Apparently Pope Francis likes this way of praying, and encourages others to use it. So let's have a go.

Choose a hand, either will do.

Start with the thumb. This is nearest our heart, so it reminds us to pray for those we love. Our family, friends, all those dear to us. Anyone who has a place in our heart. If we are honest, there may be some people we know we should love, but something has gone wrong in our relationship. So pray for them too.

Next is the index finger, the finger we use for pointing, even if we shouldn't. Think of the people who have and who do point the way for us. Our parents, our teachers and preachers. Maybe we still remember something we were told many years ago, but it was such good advice it has stood the test of time and we rely on it still. Thank God for them, and if they made mistakes, forgive them.

If we look at our hand, the middle finger stands out, it is the tallest. Think of those whose lives are lived in the glare of publicity, especially those who put themselves forward to serve the community in positions of leadership: politicians, and those who head up important organisations, and our church leaders too. It is hard for them, when they are trying their best, but sometimes only their mistakes seem to catch our attention. And nowadays there is a whole new sort of leadership, the "influencers" who through the internet can touch the lives of millions. Have we thought of praying for them? Their choices, their values, may shape decisions made by so many people, their role is so important today.

The fourth finger is, or so I'm told, the weakest. So we pray for those who need help, who are vulnerable in any way. The sick, the elderly, the lonely, as well as those who are homeless or who can't find work. Pray that they may receive the help they need, and that the pain and suffering they experience may be relived.

The last finger, the little finger, well – that's little old me. I need to pray for myself, as you need to pray for yourself. Pray that we will be the people God is calling us to be. As Cardinal Newman says in his famous prayer, we all have some definite purpose in this life, even if, at times, we are not too sure what it is!

Today's readings at Mass make it very clear that prayer isn't always easy. Prayer is not like putting coins in a machine and getting out the sweets we want. But just because something is, at times, difficult is not reason not to start, or if we have given up, or let things slide, there's no reason for not starting again.

The last sentence of today's Gospel has Jesus challenging his disciples: "But when the Son of man comes, will he find any faith on earth?" (Lk 18.8) Well, will he? Prayer feeds faith, Our prayer feeds our faith.

So, what is the point of that Five Finger Prayer? Well, it's just this, that sometimes prayer is easier, and sometimes harder. However, little helps like the Five Finger Prayer can make all the difference when we are confused, stressed, or otherwise finding it hard to pray. And if the Pope thinks it's a good idea, who am I to argue? How about you?

Canon Paschal Ryan

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