

God loves us from the inside

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Pentecost + 8A – Rom 8 26-39

When you pray, where is God for you? Up in heaven? Maybe kneeling beside you? Is God in front of you? Or is God right inside you? Where would you like God to be when you pray?

Paul tells us in Romans 8 that God is very close when we pray; closer than beside us or right in front of us. Paul tells us that God, the Holy Spirit is so close to our hearts that when we pray, it's not necessarily just our voice praying. It's quite likely that the Holy Spirit is praying on our behalf. And it's not necessarily a prayer made up of words, because sometimes words aren't enough to articulate our grief, our joy, our pain, our relief, our need or our gratitude. Paul reminds us that such prayers are often expressed not in words, but in sighs and groans, because these prayers are just too deep for words.

We heard Paul tell us how the Holy Spirit is inside us, crying out to the Father on our behalf. This is the intimacy of God's care of us. God, the Holy Spirit, is offering our deepest prayers when we can't find words to pray, even when we don't notice the need to pray at all. The Spirit searches our hearts. The Spirit knows what's really going on in there, so the Spirit prays for us the prayers we don't know how to pray; prays for us in sighs and groans, too deep for words.

We might think we aren't really praying if we don't tell God of our fear or sadness, or our hopes or our thanks – if all we can sense coming from us is a helpless groaning. But it's the deepest prayer of all. Paul is telling us that's the voice of the Spirit who intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. I'd say we've all heard that prayer whether we

recognised it as prayer or not.

²⁷ ... *God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

God wants this to happen. God is barracking for us; crying out for us with support, with understanding, with compassion.

If we are distressed or joyful, fearful or grateful, God is right in the thick of it with us; our closest friend and champion. And God hears our prayers, even when they seem to us just to be inarticulate groans. We know that God the Son – Jesus – prayed and struggled in just this way. So we can be sure that God really does know our prayer from the inside. That's the depth of God's care for us; *Emmanuel* God is with us. It's very important that we understand this; the Cross tells us that the care God actually wants us to receive is absolute solidarity – care that risks entering our pain to be with us in it. That's what the Spirit is doing groaning from within us; that's the Jesus we see on the Cross. This is God's love for us.

³¹ *What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?* ³² *He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?* ³³ *Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.* ³⁴ *Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.*

This is Good News of a most wonderful hope. Along with the Spirit praying on our behalf, here we see Jesus, who could by rights be the counsel for the prosecution, but he's standing pleading on our behalf to a judge who is absolutely biased in our favour. So what can separate us from the love of Christ? Paul lists the possible obstacles. He starts with death; it's

dogged us since chapter 5. But this is its last appearance in Romans! Death, life, angels, rulers, the present, the future, powers, heights, depths – the things of the end times, the marks of an enslaved creation; they are barriers no more.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. And the love of Jesus for us is one and the same as the love of God for us. God's commitment to us in Christ is central and final. This is the heart of Paul's theology; it's the heart of the Gospel. This is our salvation. Thanks be to God!

Amen