

This is the third of a series of short introductions to different aspects of the pilgrimage to Walsingham. I realise that some readers will have been long-term pilgrims whereas for others the experience may be newer.

One of the first activities is “shrine prayers” on the evening of our arrival. This is an opportunity for us to lay before Jesus whatever concerns we have for the world, for others and for ourselves and to do so in company with Mary, the mother of the Lord.

One of the words we use for this kind of prayer is “intercession”. To intercede means to go or stand between, or to act on behalf of. Intercession is therefore praying to God for somebody else. But we know that there is only one mediator between ourselves and God (1 Tim. 2.5) and we also know that Jesus “ever lives to intercede for us” (Heb. 7.25). So when we pray any intercession we offer is a share in the constant prayer that Jesus makes for us all.

Although God knows all our needs before and without our expressing them (and perhaps even before we are aware of them ourselves), St Paul tells us “in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Phil 4.6). We are also urged to make “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for all people” (1 Tim.2.1). And of Jesus himself taught us to pray.

So it is clear that the heavenly prayer of Jesus is not something that happens apart from us, but constantly draws us into itself. He already wants the very best for us.

On the first evening of our pilgrimage as we gather in the Holy House for Shrine Prayers, we are not engaged in some kind of magical attempt to manipulate God to our way of thinking, but asking that his will may be done in us and in all people and that he will, during our pilgrimage, purify our desires and longings so that we shall genuinely be able to pray “in the name of Jesus,” who is himself the intercessor par excellence.