

*This month's reflection comes from a third century commentary on the Lord's Prayer, by St Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, who was martyred in 258 A.D. I have chosen this to follow on from last month's reflection "Virtual or real"; it reminds us that Christian prayer must always be "common" even when we are apart. Even if "lockdown" means that most people are having to pray in their own homes, that doesn't make our prayer private. We should make even greater efforts to stress the OUR in Our Father.*

The Teacher of peace and unity did not want prayer to be made individually and privately, so that whoever prays should pray for himself alone. For we do not say, *My Father, who art in heaven*, or, *Give me today my daily bread*; nor does each one ask that only his own debt should be remitted or pray only for himself that he may not be led into temptation and that he may be delivered from evil. Our prayer is public and common, and when we pray, we pray not for one person but for the whole people, since we, the whole people, are one. Prayer for us is public and communal, and when we pray, we pray not for one person but for the whole people, since we, the whole people, are one.

The God of peace and Master of concord, who taught unity, wanted each person to pray for all, just as he himself, although one, carried. The three young men\* observed this rule when they were shut into the fiery furnace, praying with one voice and with one heart: this is what the faith of divine Scripture shows, and, as it teaches us how such people prayed, gives us an example that we should follow in our own prayers, so that we may become like them. *Then these three sang a hymn as if with one mouth, and blessed the Lord.* They spoke as if with one mouth, even though Christ had not yet taught them how to pray.

And therefore, as they prayed, their prayers were heard and were effective, because a peaceful, simple, and spiritual prayer deserved well from the Lord. We find the Apostles and the disciples praying in the same way after the ascension of the Lord: *They all continued with one accord in prayer, with the women and with Mary who was the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.* They continued with one accord in prayer, showing, by the perseverance and unanimity of their prayer, that *God, who makes the inhabitants of a house to be of one mind*, only admits to his divine and eternal home those among whom prayer is unanimous.

*\* This is a reference to the story of the burning fiery furnace in Daniel ch.3, including verses not in the Hebrew text, which form the Prayer of Azariah to be found in the Apocrypha. Part of this prayer is familiar to members of the Church of England as it appears as one of the optional canticles at Morning Prayer, under the title Benedicite.*