

20. There's a world praying for us

2 Corinthians 1:10-11

He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favour granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

Within hours of the shootings, it was clear that the gunman had unwittingly made West Cumbria the most prayed for part of the U.K.

Whole churches were going to be praying, we were told. I was thankful to hear that the church I grew up in as a child, St. Peter's, Oundle, were praying. One email, from Dagenham Parish Church, said not only that they were praying but what they were praying for.

The church web site was receiving messages from more churches still. Mission societies were remembering us in their daily prayer meetings.

On the Sunday following the shooting, I doubt there were many churches in this country where our area was not prayed for. On that day, West Cumbria was lifted before the throne of God in many accents and languages.

I was also moved to read the special edition of the Whitehaven News the week following the event. There were messages of support from all over the world. A large number said they were praying for us.

To many, all this talk of prayer would be empty. Nice, of course, but powerless. The believer disagrees.

Notice how vital St. Paul considered the prayers of his friends at Corinth. Paul's work was highly dangerous. His preaching put him in constant danger of prison and violence. Yes, Paul trusted God's power to deliver him; but he trusted God to work in response to the prayers of his friends. Likewise, when prayers are answered, he expects the thanksgiving to that God worked, "In answer to the prayers of many".

Suppose all those expressions of prayer in recent weeks were no more than expressions of love and solidarity. We would still be grateful. But, in fact, every prayer will have an impact for good. God will work through them. That fills me with anticipation for the next months and years.

We must learn from this experience to be quick to pray for other parts of the church and world when they suffer. We must make sure we tell them we are praying.

This sense of mutual dependence in prayer with brothers and sisters throughout the world is a privilege to savour. I choke up nearly every time I sing this verse from the hymn, "The day thou gavest Lord is ended" is :

As o'er each continent and island
the dawn leads on another day,
the voice of prayer is never silent,
nor dies the strain of praise away.