



## **The Power of Prayer and Forgiveness**

Daniel prayed three times a day and God saved him from the lions. Therefore, said Bishop Bullen, we must do likewise.

Bishop Bullen of Lui Diocese, Sudan, was speaking at the SOMA Prayer Conference in April 2003.

He said: "We must pray without ceasing, when driving, working in the garden, cooking and so on. Pray so you don't enter into temptation." He then added simply that prayer is like a telephone to heaven and the telephone line is our faith and fasting.

He then asked: "Have any of you seen somebody killed in church?"

Back in Sudan a Lay Reader was shot by government soldiers for praising God. They came into the church to tell the Christians to stop worshipping Jesus and be quiet. The Lay Reader refused to comply and was shot dead with eight bullets through the brain. They left his body on the communion table as an example.

The bishop told his people that there should be no revenge for such acts – only forgiveness – otherwise the vicious circle would continue.

A few weeks later he was in a church that was invaded by Islamic soldiers. They selected him and four others and marched them to the cemetery where five graves had been dug. They stood them at the end of the graves ready to shoot them. They tied blindfolds on them but the bishop refused to have a blindfold. He said: "I am only going to die once and I want to see what is going on."

The captain agreed and a soldier with a loaded gun stood in front of each man.

The bishop then asked if as a final request he could say a prayer.

The soldiers taunted him saying: "Can your Jesus save you?"

But they let him pray.

The bishop thought about Jesus and how on the Cross he prayed for those who were murdering him: "Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing."

So Bishop Bullen prayed: "Father I am ready to die. But please forgive these men for what they are about to do." He prayed in Arabic which was their language.

As soon as he had finished the Holy Spirit convicted the Captain who dropped his gun, fell to the ground and said: "Your God is alive."

He then ordered his men to remove the blindfolds from the others and set them free.

They returned to church where the congregation were weeping and praying.

This turned into much rejoicing and they all sang together: "Onward Christian Soldiers..."

The bishop saw this as a further example of the both the power of prayer and the power of forgiveness.

He was tested still further when shortly afterwards soldiers murdered his brother.

This happened because somebody falsely accused him of doing something that he had never done. The soldiers captured him. They put a rope round his neck and dragged him for three miles behind an army jeep. He quickly died but the body swung from side to side on the road and most of the skin was removed. They then poured petrol over it and burnt it to ashes.

Despite all this the bishop continued to insist that the only way forwards was to keep practising the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. So he preached that he had forgiven the soldiers for murdering his brother.

After preaching on one such occasion somebody came up to him in the vestry afterwards and asked to speak to him.

The man was asking for forgiveness. He explained: "I am the man who falsely accused your brother and caused his death. I am really sorry. I know I have done wrong and have deeply hurt you. I don't deserve this. But can you forgive me?"

For a moment the bishop looked at him gravely before finally giving him a big hug and saying: "I forgive you."

He then invited the man for a meal next day with his wife at their home. Some delicious food was prepared but to make absolutely clear there was no poison anywhere the bishop insisted they all ate from the same plate.

Furthermore when his wife brought them some tea, he and the man both drank from the same large mug and from exactly the same spot on the mug. This was to demonstrate that the friendship and forgiveness was real and there was no revenge planned by placing poison on another part of the mug.

The man was overwhelmed by such an attitude. He became a committed Christian and is now a lay preacher in the church.

"This" said the bishop, "is the power of prayer and the power of forgiveness."

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