

Wendy's August Prayer Thoughts

Venice is known as the city of canals and bridges. Thinking of the latter, you will immediately think of the famous Rialto Bridge spanning the Grand Canal. It is the only pedestrian bridge crossing. It is also renowned for housing many small shops. There is only one covered bridge in the city, the equally famous Bridge of Sighs built in 1602. Its name in Italian is Ponte Dei Sospiri. Annunciating the word 'sospiri' is like uttering a sigh. This beautiful bridge, built of white limestone in decorative baroque style spans the River Palace. Its 12 windows have stone bars. 20 Macrons - faces - adorn the bottom arch, 10 on each side.. The faces are meant to scare off evil accessing the building and the people. I viewed it from the Bridge of Straw. The bridge was built to connect the new prison, (considered to be the 1st prison in the world), to the Magistrates Interrogation Room in the Doges Palace. Various theories exist for its name. One is that as men walked across to imprisonment in the cells, so losing their freedom. They gave a deep sigh as they caught their last glimpse of the outside world - St George and the Lagoon. Those sighs were not of wonder but of despair.

I am sure that we have all sighed many times, for different reasons, and on varied occasions. It may have sprung from a sudden surprise, from abounding joy, or when we have been left speechless on the receipt of bad news. Pain and frustration may cause us to sigh, so may witnessing or hearing of a broken relationship, or observing a wrong act it can also signify delight, relief or resignation. Whatever the reason, every sigh is a breath from deep within. As God's people sighs have meaning as prayers. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word *anach* translates as 'sighs, groans'. In most cases they are used in prayers to God for destruction of the enemy. "Let all their evil done come before you and deal with them, for my sighs are many and my heart is faint." Lamentations 1:22. David who often prayed knowing he could speak to God with transparency in his anguish, sorrow and sin said: "O Lord, all my longing is known to you, my sighing is not hidden to you." Psalm 38:9. In Psalm 55: 16-17 he prays for the ruin of his enemies. "I call to God, God will help me. At dusk, dawn and noon I sigh deep sighs - he rescues."

Jesus confirms how God accepts a sigh as a prayer. He had moved into the Gentile area of the Decapolis when he was met by people bringing a deaf man with speech impairment. Mark 7:31-35. They begged Him to place His hand on the man and heal him. Jesus was most sensitive to the Man's condition and the situation, so he took Him away from the gathered crowd. Aware that the man could not communicate through speech, He resorted to actions. First, Jesus put His fingers into the man's ears, and then He spat and touched his tongue. At that point I'm sure that the deaf man was aware that Jesus understood his restriction and isolation, and was about to perform a miracle it's the next action of Jesus which is key. He looked up to heaven. Then He exhaled a sigh from the depth of His being, expressing the sadness and compassion. He felt for the man's plight. Jesus lifted him to God in prayer and giving a deep sigh utters the Aramaic word *ephpatha*. "be opened." "His hearing was clear and his speech plain." MSG.

The Son of God offered prayer through a sigh We can too. It is just as effective as words. God hears and understands the deep emotion within our hearts. In 1818 the Moravian James Montgomery, poet and writer of over 400 hymns, penned a hymn about prayer in which he shows how natural and uncomplicated it is. It begins' "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire" The second verse reassures of the relevance of a sigh as prayer.

Prayer is the burden of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of an eye,
When none but God is near. .