

THE BIG REVIEW

Say it to God

By Luigi Gioia

It might seem strange that the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book for 2018 has been written by a Benedictine monk who is Professor of Theology at the Pontifical University of Sant' Anselmo in Rome but Luigi Gioia's book, *Say it to God* will take the reader on a prayer journey that lasts way beyond the 40 days of Lent.

In his foreword, Justin Welby confirms what we all experience but may be afraid to admit: prayer is not easy and not always enjoyable but he encourages readers to respond to the God who has already started the conversation. It's not about us knocking timidly on the door of a busy God who can't be interrupted; it's about touching God and being touched by Him.

This book is an ideal companion and study book for Lent but it's far more than that, it could well be a book for life as you return to it again and again as you go deeper into your prayer journey. The author does not promise easy solutions as he takes us through some of the great Old Testament prayers, particularly Psalms, but it is as we look at the prayers of Jesus that we learn most and are challenged most deeply.

Professor Gioia adamantly contends that it's prayer we're talking about, not prayers. An attitude or posture that we aspire to dwell in constantly, not just a snatched, structured ten minute slot in your busy day. It will be deeply comforting to people going through tough times to be assured that there's nothing wrong with expressing anger, frustration and disappointment, even with God.

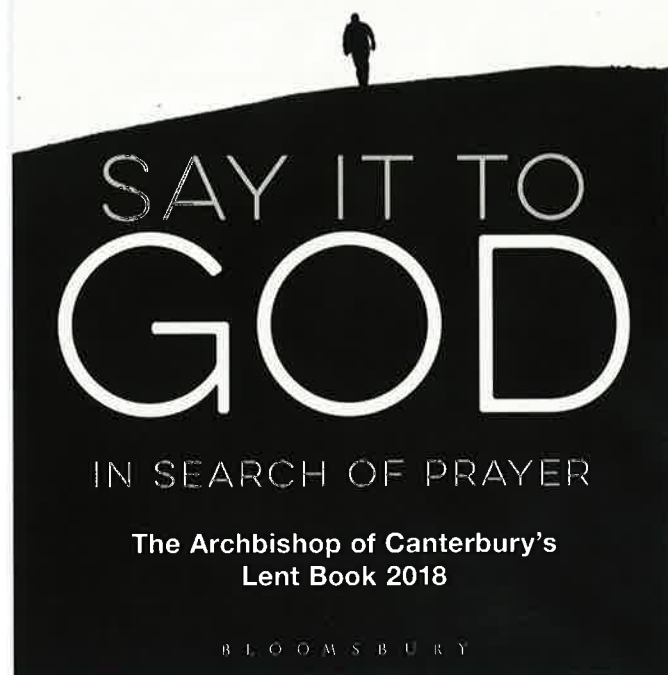
The heart of the book is Gioia's in-depth study of what most Protestants call 'The Lord's Prayer' which he refers to as 'The Our Father'. This unfamiliar title is soon forgotten as he expounds what he calls 'the very heart of the mystery of prayer' and we see Jesus praying in various situations and circumstances.

The paradox of prayer is that although we desire to do it and we know we should do it we can spend so long searching for the best time, the best place and the ideal conditions that we leave no time to spend with God. We can also be so crushed by guilt and anger, feelings of unworthiness or disappointment that we no longer feel able to approach a holy God. Gioia recommends that we use these feelings as a springboard for prayer and be honest and tell it like it is. It won't come as any surprise to God, he knows anyway. We take heart from the disciples who, even in the presence of Jesus, misunderstand, quarrel and aren't there when Jesus needs them most in the Garden of Gethsemane as he turns his face towards the cross. Professor Gioia lifts the veil on a concept so beautiful that it takes our breath away when he says, 'God looks in our faces and he sees the face of Jesus'.

He cautions against dismissing prayers that are only spoken in times of deepest trouble or greatest need because at least they're authentic and not just a recitation of well-known phrases.

The Lord's Prayer, he says, is about the Father's name and Kingdom which most of us struggle to understand as we are consumed with

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ourselves, our needs and the concerns of the people we love. Begin to focus on God and his kingdom and we will sense the wings of the Spirit lifting us to higher planes and our real prayer journey will take off.

In the 21st Century, surrounded by technology and the social network, where we are always reachable it's good to be reminded that we need constantly to be reviewing our schedules and workload and that there are times when it's right to step back, even from Christian work, to reflect and recharge.

'There are many and various ways to God,' says Professor Gioia; and the invitation to engage with him is open to all. Avoid piety and praying 'nice' prayers; he recounts several occasions when Jesus is moved and even pleased by people who approach him bluntly. Keep it simple, keep it short and above all, keep it real and yet the further we go along the bridge between earth and heaven the more we begin to see that prayer is not just our armour, our shield and our helmet but also a golden woven and many coloured robe in which the Holy Spirit clothes us and leads us to God.

Kath Cope lives in Lancashire with her husband, Nigel. They own the Christian Resource Centre in Preston. After becoming a Christian in her late teens, Kath was involved in Youth Work for many years until the birth of their two children who are now grown up, she has two grandchildren. After a career working in schools and Educational Publishing, she had her first Children's novel, 'New Life in Nepal' published in 2016. An avid reader and member of a local book group, she is passionate about Literature and also enjoys going to the theatre and walking in the Lake District.

