

## **“Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread”**

a sermon by Rev. Michael Gladish  
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The words of the Lord’s Prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread,” from Matthew 6:11, are very familiar to us. Not as familiar, but having the same meaning, are the corresponding words in Luke’s version of the prayer, “Give us *day by day* our daily bread” (Luke 11:3).

Our theme today – the first in an occasional series about the Lord’s Prayer – is what it means to ask our heavenly Father for this daily bread, and how it works, and so, BTW, what it means to live in the present – not neglecting the past or failing to plan for the future, but still living fully in the present. But first, for context, let’s remember that everything Jesus did or said in His life bears some direct reference to the Word of the Old Testament. This is because He came to fulfill and embody all the teachings of the Word and so to glorify them in His life. And this particular phrase in the Prayer is no exception, since it clearly refers back to the Israelites being given “daily bread” in the form of manna when they left Egypt for the Promised Land.

Remember the story? The people had escaped from Pharaoh, crossed the Red Sea on dry land, and come to the wilderness where, in spite of the terrific miracle they had all just witnessed, they immediately began to complain about their lack of food and water. So the Lord gave them “bread from heaven” every morning – “a small round substance as fine as frost on the ground ... like white coriander seed, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey” (Ex. 16:14&31). It appeared miraculously every day, six days a week without fail for forty years, and yet curiously it would not keep. They had to gather just enough for each day and use it that day or it would rot – except that on the sixth day they gathered enough for two days and it did not rot.

It was indeed strange stuff, but it was good, and it was life-sustaining, and in the manner of its distribution it provided the powerful *daily* lesson *that the Lord - and the Lord alone - provides*.

Concerning this bread our doctrines explain that the phrase, “Let no one leave any of it until the morning” means that they must not be anxious to acquire it *by their own devices*. This is clear from the fact that the manna was given every morning and that worms bred in what was left over, meaning that the Lord provides people’s requirements every day and that for this reason they ought not to be anxious to acquire them apart from Him. The same thing is meant by daily bread in the Lord’s Prayer and also by the Lord’s words in Matthew (6:25-e) where He warns the disciples not to be anxious about food or drink or clothing (AC 8478).

We will come back to this teaching about the manna in a few minutes. But first consider the word, “daily,” as a description of the bread of the Lord’s Prayer. In fact it is a Greek word that really means “what is sufficient.” And notably, it is a unique word in the New Testament, used *only* in the prayer! Other Greek words for “daily” are used often, and refer literally to the day, that is, the interval from one day to the next, but *this* word is not linked to time at all, but speaks only to whatever is *appointed or sufficient*.

Further, it is clear from the whole of the Scripture that “bread” does not just refer to natural food but rather is symbolic of all that is *spiritually* nourishing, thus especially in the bread of the holy supper, the goodness of Divine love. Remember, the Lord referred to *Himself* as “the bread of life,” saying, “He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). We could go on about this for a long time, as many Scripture passages about

bread come to mind, but the simple point is that the “daily” or “sufficient” bread of the Lord’s Prayer really is the goodness of love that we need for the nourishment of our spirits, and that to ask for it one day at a time is to express our trust that the Lord will provide it for us without any need on our part to fret or worry about the future.

But will the Lord give us everything we *want*? No, of course not! Much of what we want isn’t good for us, though we hardly ever realize it.

Or will He give us everything we *think we need*? No again. Of course not. To assume He should is to assume He is no wiser than we are, which would be incredibly arrogant and insulting. We should *not* be asking Him for what we *think* we need, *we should be asking Him what we need.*

This is illustrated in Swedenborg’s observation about the disposition of angels. We read,

“I have spoken with angels about the memory of things past and about consequent anxiety concerning things of the future, and I have been informed that the more interior and perfect angels are, the less they care about things of the past or think about those of the future, and that this is also the origin of their happiness. They have said that *the Lord provides them every moment with what to think*, accompanied by blessing and happiness, and that this being so they have no cares and no worries. This also is what is meant in the internal sense by the manna being received ‘day by day’ from heaven, and by the ‘daily [provision] of bread’ in the Lord’s Prayer, as well as by the statement that they must not worry about what they are to eat and drink, or what clothes they are to put on” (AC 2493).

Of course, we are not angels, least of all “more interior and perfect” angels, but if we are sincere when we pray to the Lord we will be praying for heavenly things, since these are the blessings that He teaches us to seek.

In any case, when we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” we should be aware that this is little more than a reminder – but a very important one, for our sakes – that He is already doing this to such an extent that it is almost impossible for us to comprehend. This is the very nature of God: to love and to give most perfectly without reservation, so that the only obstacle for us is our own reluctance to co-operate with Him. That said, the prayer is a means of helping us to *acknowledge* our responsibility for receiving what is given – and to recognize it as such.

So what exactly *is* it that the Lord gives? Again, as He said in John, the heavenly manna, the daily bread that He gives us essentially is *Himself*, that is, the stuff of His Divine Humanity, which, we read, “*is nothing other than love and charity, together with the goods and truths of faith.* In heaven the Lord imparts this food to angels *moment by moment*, thus perpetually and eternally, see 2493. This is also what is meant in the Lord’s Prayer by the petition, ‘Give us today our daily bread,’ Matt. 6: 11; Luke 11: 3, that is, *in every moment for evermore*” (AC 2838:e).

These are of course spiritual blessings, not necessarily natural ones, and so in this prayer especially we must be prepared to *let go* of our natural concerns and pay attention to our states of mind – our affections, our loves, our faith, our convictions. How can we do this? Well, for a start, recall the introduction to the Lord’s prayer in Matthew where He said “Go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret...” (Matt. 6:6). That word, room,

(translated “closet” in the KJV) is no ordinary private space, it is a Greek word that literally means “storehouse” or “treasury.” Thus it refers to the memory and its storehouse or treasury of affections and thoughts – all the things that really define each one of us as a person. Looking dispassionately at the things we find there, we may then humbly ask the Lord to remove what is selfish, limiting and wrong, and to replace it with what is caring, generous and right.

Now we are warned not to do this for selfish reasons, especially not for some anticipated worldly benefit. It’s not an insurance or investment plan, where we contribute now in the hope of some big payoff later. It’s not just “enlightened self-interest.” *It’s about doing what the Lord says because He says so.* But the fact is that everything in the natural world is an effect of spiritual causes, and so typically when we *do* experience a change of attitude we *also* find that our natural circumstances change; either that, or we find that we can handle them with greater acceptance and peace, and that the whole world looks and feels different – whether it actually is or not.

This brings us to the “day by day” part of the prayer. And here we can put the matter in extremely simple terms. It is true that with proper methods we can store up natural food for long periods of time, thus providing for the future – and there’s nothing wrong with this! But just try to imagine *eating* all your food for a week or a month or a year in one day. It can’t be done.

So the Lord encourages us to take it “one day at a time.” If He were to give us all His love and wisdom – or even a very large helping of it – all at once we couldn’t handle it! For one thing it would so completely change us that we would lose our sense of identity. Then, lacking the physical or psychological power to act on this overwhelming love, ironically we would fall into despair about everything. Again a very simple illustration comes to mind. We can have compassion for a person in need. We may also have compassion for a whole group. But unless we are well advanced in our spiritual life we will find it impossible to have compassion for the millions who are in need; and if we think too much about all those millions we will certainly be overwhelmed. Just as in our own work to improve our inner lives it is better to stay focused on the things in our world that are within our reach until, through practice and discipline, we are able to focus intelligently on bigger things. Practice makes perfect. The journey of 1,000 miles begins with one step.

So the Lord said, “Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things” (Matt. 6:34). And this is where the continuation of a passage quoted earlier tells us so much. We read,

“...People are concerned about the morrow when they are not content with their lot, do not trust in God but in themselves, and have solely worldly and earthly things in view, not heavenly ones. These people are ruled completely by anxiety over the future, and by the desire to possess all things and exercise control over all other people. That desire is kindled and grows greater and greater, till at length it is beyond all measure. They grieve if they do not realize the objects of their desires, and they are distressed at the loss of them....

“Those who trust in the Divine are altogether different. Though concerned about the morrow, *yet are they unconcerned*, in that they are not anxious, let alone worried, when they give thought to the morrow. They remain even-tempered whether or not they realize desires, and they do not grieve over loss; they are content with

their lot. If they become wealthy they do not become infatuated with wealth; if they are promoted to important positions they do not consider themselves worthier than others. If they become poor they are not made miserable either; if lowly in status they do not feel downcast. *They know that for those who trust in the Divine all things are moving towards an everlasting state of happiness, and that no matter what happens at any time to them, it contributes to that state*” (AC 8478).

Of course we must not be complacent. It is our duty and a vital aspect of our spiritual growth to contribute in a positive way to the people and the world around us. The challenge is to live in the present and do what we can while recognizing that the Lord is in control, and stop stressing about the future. There’s a wonderful book by a British author<sup>1</sup> that affirms this teaching in the most practical way: writing about the whole history of civilization in the western world he notes that there have always been doomsayers who say that life as we know it will be unsustainable for any number of reasons related to population growth, food and energy scarcity and so on, but that in every case new discoveries, methods or inventions have resolved the issues. Why? – because dedicated people: scientists, engineers, explorers, psychologists, sociologists, writers, activists and civil leaders (among others) have given us the tools to do better. And we can be a part of this if we just stay calm and exercise our God-given creativity.

One day at a time. One day at a time. Simply saying the Lord’s Prayer – slowly, thoughtfully – every day can help.<sup>2</sup> Planning and doing something positive – even something very simple – for another person can help. And if we want strength or nourishment a few passages from the Word read with insight into their spiritual meaning can work wonders. Not only do we learn important things as we do this, but we are connected to the Lord and His energy and power in a manner that goes way beyond our understanding.

Other disciplines – like stopping in the midst of some intense challenge and just breathing deeply, or talking to a trusted friend, or going for a long walk – can also help. There are lots of simple techniques we can use to maintain (or regain) our composure. But the key to truly living in the moment is to know *and accept* that the Lord is in charge, that He does provide *for all of us* daily what we need, whether we can see it in the midst of our problems or not, and that we can receive these blessings from Him no matter what our circumstances if we will open our hearts to Him.

So we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” but we need to know what we’re talking about, and we need to mean it.

Amen.

Lessons: *Exodus* 12:14-20  
Children’s talk about the feast of unleavened bread  
*John* 6:25-35 & AC 4217:sel. (see also *Spiritual Diary* #2188)

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<sup>1</sup> Matt Ridley, “The Rational Optimist,” 2010, 448 pages

<sup>2</sup> “There are more things,” we read, “in the contents of this prayer than the universal heaven is capable of comprehending” (AC 6619).

Arcana Caelestia #4217:selections

“When the word, bread, is used in the Word the angels do not call to mind material bread but spiritual bread, and so instead of bread perceive the Lord who, as He Himself teaches in John 6:33, 35, is the Bread of life. And because they perceive the Lord they perceive the things which derive from Him, and therefore His love towards the whole human race. In so doing they perceive at the same time man’s reciprocal love to the Lord, for these two kinds of love are knit together within one idea occupying their thought and affection.

[2] “Not unlike this are the thoughts of the person who has a holy mind, when he receives the bread in the Holy Supper; for at that time he does not think of the bread but of the Lord and His mercy, and of the things which constitute love to Him and charity towards the neighbor, because he is thinking about repentance and amendment of life.... From this it is evident that when bread is mentioned in the Word no idea of bread presents itself to angels but the idea of love and of countless things connected with love. It is similar when wine is referred to in the Word and also received in the Holy Supper. In this case angels do not think at all of wine but of charity towards the neighbor. This being so, and since man in this way is linked to heaven and through heaven to the Lord, bread and wine have been made the symbols and unite a person who leads a holy life to heaven, and through heaven to the Lord.”

Spiritual Diary (Spiritual Experiences) #2188

**Angels have no memory of things past or foresight of the future.**

“I spoke with angels, and at the time I saw in a spiritual mental image that the more inwardly perfect angels are, the less memory they have of things past, and that therein consists their happiness. For at every moment, the Lord gives them what is pleasant to them, and causes them both to think and to feel-so it is the Lord's doing, not theirs. This is the meaning of the passage, "Give us this day our daily bread" [Matt. 6:11, Luke 11:3], and that they should take no thought for the future, what they should eat and drink [Matt. 6: 25, 31], and that they gathered the manna daily [Exod. 16:14-21].

“And since angels have no memory of things past, neither do they have any foresight of the future, *which is a result of that same memory.* Yet they seem to themselves to have a memory and to know all kinds of things beyond number, *because this is granted to them by the Lord from moment to moment.* Therefore they may indeed suppose that it is their memory, when yet it is not. In short, their happiness consists in this, and in being in the Lord. 1748, 4 June.” (*Italics added.* This passage is essentially the same as AC 2498, written about a year later and quoted in the sermon.)