

The Whole Tenor of the Lord's Prayer

A sermon by Rev. Michael Gladish
July, 25th, 2020

“Give us this day our daily bread.” - Matthew 6:11

Jesus said, “...whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:26-28).

In teaching His disciples how to pray, the Lord didn't refer to Himself but to their heavenly Father, and in so doing, among other things He spoke as one who prayed the same way – to His heavenly Father. So now, leaving aside the issue of the Trinity in the Lord and how that works, let's note that He understood from His earliest childhood that all His work on earth was *to serve* the ends or purposes of His Divine Love. This love is what is also represented by the word, father, in our ordinary lives, since it is a father's love that we naturally honor and respect, and that inspires our loyalty and trust.

But notice the word, *serve*, in the quote from Matthew. When the Lord prayed, there is a sense in which He prayed as a servant would pray to His master, and He teaches us to do the same.: in modern English, “...not My will, but Yours, be done” (Matt. 26:39, Mark 14:36, Luke 22:42).

With this in mind, it can be deeply humbling to realize that every single phrase of the prayer we say so often is constructed in the form of a petition as from a servant to his (or her) Master.

“Father,” it begins, “Our Father,” even though the word is not used as we normally use it. It's a title of respect for, as we noted, one who loves, provides and cares for His children – *just as a master would provide and care for his servants*. So in beginning this way we are putting ourselves in exactly that position: we are recognizing that we are not just His children but His *servants*, worthy of nothing apart from our willingness to honor and obey Him (see Luke 17:10).

And, of course, we do not approach Him alone: He is not “my Father,” but “our Father.” Note, though, in the original Greek the word, Father, comes first: “Father of us.” So again, there is deference to the One being addressed, only then do we speak of ourselves. HE is the subject of our prayer, and not so much ourselves, even though we are asking for what we need.

Next we say, “Hallowed by Thy name,” or, in the vernacular, “may Your name be sanctified.” We know that a name in the Word – or in common speech, for that matter – represents a person's qualities or characteristics, in summary, his (or her) reputation. So again, in this petition what we are really doing is acknowledging that everything about Him is holy, that is, sacred, awesome, pure, powerful and worthy of worship or praise. Incidentally, if you've ever heard Muslims speak of God, or Allah, you'll know that they always follow the title with, “May His

name be praised," which is very similar to this phrase is our prayer.

But now think of it in the context of a servant appealing to his master: he bows, perhaps, before him and declares in humility, "We come before You in the recognition of Your greatness, Your power, Your perfection, *worshipping* You, realizing, as You said, that You already know about everything we need. We come before You to honor You, praying that we, together, may be given the wisdom and strength to maintain our respect for You throughout our lives.

And then what? "Thy kingdom come," or again, in the vernacular, "May Your kingdom come." Given that we know the Lord is all-powerful and that He has already provided everything we need, what can this mean other than a commitment – in so far as we are able – to do in our own lives what is necessary *to receive* what He has provided? "May Your kingdom come in OUR lives, as we strive to live by the laws of order that You have given us." Again, we are a band of servants, workers if you like, declaring our willingness to do as we are told.

"Thy will be done." May it always be so among us. We don't know what's really good for us; we depend on You. "We are here to serve *You*, to do *Your* will." Servants of course have responsibilities, but they only know what those responsibilities are, and how to fulfill them, because they have been instructed by their master. So we move from understanding the laws of the kingdom to doing the will of the King.

Naturally, all this seems very foreign to us in our modern, democratic culture. We are accustomed to being treated as equals, everyone with equal opportunities, with no single person in authority dictating how things should be. At best there is a congress, a council, or an election process by which *we* decide who will execute the collective desires of *our* will. But with the Lord it is not so. His persistent teaching throughout the Word is that *He knows best*, and that if we want to prosper, ironically we have to go completely against our instincts and lay down our own lives for His sake. This is a huge challenge, and we are reminded of it every time we say this prayer.

"As in heaven, so upon the earth." What can we possibly know about heaven without the Lord's revelation about it? Yet we are incredibly blessed in this New Church to have profound insight into that world, both from the exposition of the spiritual sense of the Word and from the personal experience of one who, as he said, really heard, saw and felt its realities. But do we really mean it when we say, "As in heaven, so upon the earth"? Many have read and continue to read these revelations and yet they say it can't be done. There are no devils in heaven, and there is certainly no hypocrisy, both of which are rife on earth. How can we expect to implement the innocent way of life of those in heaven when we live in a world of selfishness and aggression?

Well, in the end it comes down to this simple petition, "May it be so among us, Your servants." Doing what comes naturally in response to evil and falsity – reacting in kind with aggression, retaliation, or any form of concession to worldliness will make matters worse. Rather, like the

non-violent protesters who have suffered and even died in their successful struggles to obtain human rights in many countries, we need to honor the Lord's commandments to "turn the other cheek" and do the right thing no matter what the worldly consequences may be. We need to be willing to "take up our cross and follow Him" even when from the world's perspective it seems utterly foolish. We need to remember, *we don't know what is best, we only know that we need to do as we have been commanded.*

So now we say, "Give us this day our daily bread," that is, today, and one day at a time, just as a master would not give His servants everything at once, but rather what they need as they need it, or as it says in Luke's version of the prayer, day by day. The pantry does not belong to the servants, but to the master of the house, and so we ask only for what we need in the moment. "Take no thought," the Lord said, "what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, or what you shall put on.... Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?"

Trust is a hard thing to cultivate in a world of lies and deceptions. But if we know our Master we know that He can and must be trusted, for again, He alone knows what's best.

And *please*, we say, "Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors." We try, we know that we try hard to do the right thing, but we also know that we often fail, we often fall far short of the ideal. And so we come to our Master literally begging – not demanding but begging – to be forgiven for these lapses, and yet not without accepting our own responsibility to do the same for others. Later in Matthew (18:21-35) the Lord told an amazing parable to illustrate this concept, comparing one servant's debt to about four month's wages, and the other servant's to a fortune of about 200 YEARS' wages. The master, He said, forgave the whole massive debt owed by the one, but when the other servant was asked to do the same, he refused, and so was given over to the tormenters. So we, too, will be given over to the torments of a life without pity if we can't overlook the sins of others.

In any case, debts are not always sins. Sometimes they are simply obligations. We are born into this world with nothing, and we are given everything we need by the Lord, through others. We have no claim to any merit whatsoever, least of all for our natural talents or intelligence. And so we beg the Lord to overlook these debts and treat us as if we had some virtue of our own – *which amazingly He does!* He gives us a sense of self, a *proprium*, as we call it, and invites us to think of ourselves as having some intrinsic value, even though He well knows it is all on *His* account. All He asks is that we acknowledge the truth, even as He encourages us to feel good about living in the appearance.

And so we add, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." One of the most challenging temptations in our lives is that of thinking we know or can determine for ourselves what is good or evil. We can't. This would be like saying that an individual private in the army could know better than the general how to conduct a war – or even a particular battle. That private

simply doesn't have the perspective, let alone the broad spectrum of information, required to do that. And it's just the same with the servants in a household. It's not their job to know all the implications of their service; ***their job is to do as they are told.***

But why would we ask the Lord, who knows everything, not to do what He would never do, anyway? This is a perennial question, especially for people who don't understand the language of appearances. Does the sun rise over the earth? No, of course not. But it *looks* that way, and so we speak of it as if it does, *knowing* otherwise.

This part of the prayer especially speaks to that appearance. Because the Lord has all wisdom and power it is hard for us to comprehend how we can experience temptation unless it is somehow brought about by Him. But here's the thing: it doesn't start with goodness or truth, it starts with evil or falsity, ***and then, when this is exposed by goodness or truth,*** we experience temptation; we experience the test of whether we will choose the good or remain in the evil. How does this relate to the Master and servant theme of the prayer? – Well, in petitioning the Lord this way what we are really saying is, ***“Lord, please lead us*** – not into temptation but out of it, through it and away from it.” We are in effect ***reminding ourselves*** that He does not create problems for us, rather He solves them ***if we will obey.***

It's not complicated. We're not in charge. We are laborers in ***His*** vineyard. And He WILL deliver us from evil if we follow His lead.

And so, finally, we come to what is called the doxology (curiously omitted in Luke's version of the prayer), praising the Lord in recognition of the fact that the kingdom and the power and the glory ***all belong to Him*** – forever. Here we can clearly see ourselves as servants of the One who is in charge. He is the Master, the Director, the Owner, the Manager, the King, the only real Authority in our lives, and we are the laborers in His vineyard, willingly, cheerfully doing what He asks us to do.

In sum we say, “Dear Father in heaven, everything we have is Yours! None of it belongs to us. But we will do our best to use it wisely, according to Your Word. Please, allow us continue to labor in Your fields, to use the talents You have given us, to do the best we can, and to reap the benefits of Your protection, care and joyous provision – forever.”

Amen.

Lessons: *Psalm* 90: selections
Children's talk on being servants of the Lord

Matthew 6:5-13 and *Luke* 11:2-4
Arcana Caelestia #5164 (See also *Apocalypse Explained* #409:7)