



Pater Noster

A Few Thoughts on the Lord's Prayer

Certain prayers we have learned by heart tend to become automatic. When they are said often, they seem to speed-up and eventually they are being pronounced or mentally repeated in fast-forward. Other thoughts begin to run parallel with them. I forget who said: "I would rather have one devoutly said Our Father, than a month of Te Deums with no heart," that certainly makes a lot of sense. I am also reminded of the King's words from Hamlet: "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below." How often have we all rattled off prayers without a substantive or Sincere, meaningful thought connection?

It's amusing when I think of the school prayers we used to say; how every kid was repeating in a sing-song fashion all the words. I don't think anyone ever thought of how habitual that practice could become, how hollow and empty.

Prayers were counted, numbered, so to speak ...three Our Fathers, ten Hail Marys, one Glory Be, etc. Prayers "said" in this way may be invalid. We wound up simply "saying," not thinking of what we were saying, or about God, to whom the prayers were being addressed.

When we want something intensely, or have physical or social problems our prayers definitely become more focused. We involve our mind and heart more readily but usually our mental processes are riveted to our needs rather than the object of our supplications.

In the old Catechism, the definition of prayer was: "The lifting up of our minds and hearts to God," and just like "prayer" itself that is more easily said than done. The new Catechism says the same thing but it extends it a little by continuing: "or the requesting of good things from God."

When we are in dire need, prayer becomes legitimate begging.

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For one who prays, there has got to be an understanding in his or her mind, that the power to whom he or she is speaking, audibly or mentally, can answer their prayers and respond to their requests. In other words, one who prays must have faith in the existence of an omniscient and omnipotent God, who is the absolute authority over all life, space and time. Without this faith or understanding there would be little point in praying.

This providential Deity not only has come to us in our form, as man, with Jesus Christ, the promised and crucified one, but proceeding from the Father and Son, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, is continuously whispering to us in our very depths of our being, "Pray as the Lord has taught you." That is: Our Father, who are in heaven.

Privately or publicly it is the prayer in which Jesus told us to call God our Father, as he himself had done. We, like him, may shout, Abba, Father, with the full conviction that he who is all knowing will answer every prayer and will return every praise with abundant love, since he is Love itself.

I'm sure God, our heavenly Father, is quite content when we concentrate our prayers on Jesus or on the Spirit for all are one in the Holy Trinity, one God, not three, but one in all and all in one, and in us through the spirit. Let us try to take the "Pater Noster" in segments to help us concentrate on its meanings, which for me at least, tend to make it the universal prayer.

Our Father...

Here is the license we have been given to understand and "see" God as directly involved with each of us on an individual basis; and at the same time with all of us together as one entity.

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Since we all have or had a special relationship with our earthly fathers, whether good or bad, there is no denying that that relationship affected our lives concretely, be it genetic or psychological, for better or worse. That relationship was very personal, and has a lasting effect no matter what kind of relationship It turned out to be, it is the relationship that we are interested in here, not its physical or psychological ramifications. We must understand that our father's father and his father and all the fathers before them, back to the very beginning of humanity, had an ultimate father in God the Father; the Creator of all that is. To use the term, Abba, Father, here is to recognize that God himself, indeed, had a formal relationship with each of our forefathers and mothers.

Though we mayor may not be fathers in a physical sense, we are all sons and daughters of God, the originator of "heaven, earth and all things." For those of us who are glad to be alive, even in difficulty and travail, need to conclude that life-giving is certainly a positive event, a gift. The better parts of human nature have always considered life as most precious. Giving it up for a higher purpose has always been called the ultimate sacrifice. The taking of a life, for selfish reasons, the worst of crimes.

All life has had a start. Most of us think it was started by God. Saying "Our Father" we are speaking to the ultimate life-giver as our intimate progenitor who is pure spirit, and is eternally tending to us and our offspring with a continuous flow of immense love, so much so that John the Evangelist claimed, having heard Jesus speaking to him and of him, called God Love itself. We may not think we deserve to be loved, but we are assured by Jesus that we are. He knew the Father, and through him and in the Spirit we know "Our Father" God as well.

Who are in heaven ...

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Since no one has seen the Father, except for the Son, Jesus offers us the advice that the Father is in a "place" which is called Heaven. A spiritual place, since the Father is pure spirit; or a state of thought, as in Christian Science, in which sin is absent and the harmony of the "divine Mind" is manifest, or any other of the hundreds of names given to the home of God, the Creator.

Humanity has always objectified a place where its gods lived. It would be a place of eternal life and happiness, naturally, to get there you had to earn it. One would be joined in some way with the uncreated being who created all of us.

The book of Revelations goes into intimate detail about Heaven and the goings on there. The creative energies and artistic proclivities of men and women throughout human history have striven to supply us with a "life's-goal". A place of eternal reward. A finality where the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" would cease, and we would be at peace; at rest from the seeming unfair happenings of the common life.

The existence of God has been and continues to be revealed through history. Man with his logical mind, and the use of his reason, has determined if there is a god, he, she or it, has to be somewhere. It stands to reason, doesn't it? Again, here is a point that taxes our understanding. If God affects our lives in positive or negative ways, he has got to be a reality; if he is a reality, spirit or otherwise, he's got to be someplace. So, "it stands to reason" that we have objectified a place where God operates while dealing with us; Heaven. A simple enough premise for a human being to grasp.

Jesus spoke to us of heaven but he did ask us to look at it in a little different way also. "The Kingdom of God (Heaven) is within you." If the kingdom of God is within

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us, and that's the heaven where God lives, then God lives in us, and heaven is comprehensible to us by simply thinking about it in a spiritual way. We may talk to the God of all creation, dwelling in us, in the Spirit. A comforting thought to know, or to honestly believe.

The source of all love, or indeed Love itself, is dwelling within ourselves. In our "heart" and "soul." We all go around carrying God within us. The mystics knew this very well and many were almost able to see the "beatific vision" as the light of God himself.

When we pray "who are in heaven" it is not an out-there thing, it is an inside-track, a track that leads to the very "heart of the matter." We become a bit deified with that understanding, prompted by the Spirit. Imagine, the gift of life is "God in us." The idea of heaven begins to make sense.

There are many more analogous thoughts about the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven, but if God is the cosmic "king" and is everywhere, then heaven is everywhere that God is; and hell is everywhere he is not. So is there "heaven on earth"? In a way, yes, it is the Kingdom of God. It is a parallel "here and now" only in a spiritual sense.

Holy is your name ...

We call God: God, but that's really not a name. The Israelites called God, Yahweh. It was never pronounced, and Jewish documents today even take the "0" out of God to show that the "name" of G-d is so holy it is not to be used at all. In Islam, God is Allah. As a matter of fact, there are so many god names that there is an encyclopedia of the gods. Every belief system in the history of mankind has placed credit for their origins on an uncreated, super-essential deity. This deity has been revealed, though not seen, in every age of mankind, and

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it continues to this very day. Any super-essence who has the power to create what we see around us, and the progression we call evolution, has got to be some form that transcends all of our human understanding and current mental capacity. No wonder we don't see him.

Whatever we may call this entity, it goes without saying that it is "awesome," all mighty, if you will, and we are "in the palm of his hand" as the old spiritual says. It is the source of all that is good, and must be "worthy of complete devotion as one perfect in goodness and righteousness" according to Webster. In other words holy, Genesis says that God, Yahweh, aside from creating "light" and the "world," made man from clay (earth) and "breathed" into him life (soul). There shouldn't be any other reason than this to conclude that God's way of working is evolutionary, but that's another story. So poetically the breath of God is life, and life is, essentially, the "soul" of human beings.

We live because God's breath animates us. "It is through him we move and have our being" The myth of Adam and Eve tells us we have the option of adhering to the ways of God or not. By rejecting God, who is all good and holy, we go in the opposite direction,(via perditionis) Whenever the name of God is invoked, that Spirit we know and believe as the super-essence, that name must be worthy of complete devotion (worship) and must be regarded as holy.

The giving of an "oath" is given in the all powerful holy name of God. There is an essential affinity between Creator and created, between God and man, a "Holy Covenant" with the Spirit of God within us. To add to this, God is also the source of all true freedom, a condition many of us regard as holier than holy, "sacrosanct." Many have done wrong in the name of God out of pure selfishness or out of vincible ignorance.

Holy, must be G-d's name, certainly when contemplated or called upon.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth, as it is in Heaven. . .

Since the Kingdom of God (Heaven) is within us, the Kingdom of Heaven has already been introduced to earth, with Christ. That kingdom is what Jesus explained to us. God being "in" us as he and the Father are "in" each other. We know about this because the "Paraclete," the "Spirit of Truth," proceeding from the Father and the Son spiritually brings our attention to God being within us. Without this connection, the "abode of the gods" would only be "out-there" somewhere; whereas the uncreated, living God is everywhere.

God understood in human consciousness not as Love, would be nothing but a supreme puppeteer, wrathful and angry at pitiful man, and not in the least understood by his creations; only feared. Since love is the essence of our understanding the Heavenly Father, we have come to know, with "budding wisdom," that Love is indeed God himself, and that it is the "will" of God to love without ceasing. We ought certainly to want this love to persist and remain in us and in others while we live together on this planet. If we can accomplish this, the "Kingdom of Heaven" will thrive on earth.

WE pray that we may be worthy of these promises of God, through Jesus, in the Spirit of truth, when we say: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Give us this day our daily bread ...

The "Lord's Prayer" shifts gears at this point. Here we become beggars on the "doorstep of God" (earth). We are begging for sustenance; to be kept well enough to contribute to the "Kingdom." We plead with God to

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enrich the earth so that we are able to work our way through life enabling us to return the love that is streaming our way.

There is another meaning as well. Our daily bread also refers to Jesus leaving himself with us in the Eucharist as the "bread of life," a prime source of grace for our souls. This "consuming of Christ" is a reality based on Jesus' promises; a literal "taking-in" of Jesus' body into our bodies. What many a mystic has called a marriage of the "bridegroom" Jesus, and the "bride," our immortal souls. Realizing that the power of God can be reached most easily through Jesus, as he told us, we can then understand that anything we ask in his name we may expect to gain depending on his will.

The power of honest prayer is never refused by our Father, since it is asked in the name of Jesus, his son. We also are sons and daughters of God by adoption. Through humbled by the infinite love of the Father, we are able to share his love in the "economic" Trinity; the love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, brought home in the souls of men and women in the "Kingdom of God."

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us ...

There seems to be only two rules which have to be followed to be worthy of being "reborn" in the Spirit. The first is to return the love that the Father has given us in ways that mirror the goodness he has shown us through Christ, Jesus. The second is Simply the means of doing the first, that is, treating everyone else as sons or daughters of God, as we ourselves are. In the eyes of Love no one is any more special than another. Love is all giving as St. Paul has told us, and as Jesus himself has proven by his own life, death and resurrection. "A greater love," etc. To love completely is not to grovel in earthly self contempt or inordinate self-esteem, but to

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recognize the Spirit which exists in all of us, the Spirit which, in some, may be eclipsed by selfishness in one way or another. A contradiction which each of us has certainly experienced. Our unmitigated animal nature is attenuated by our humanity. God's love does not fail when we see the likeness of God through Jesus in each other.

Hypocrisy has no place in the Kingdom of God, and we would be hypocrites if we were to condemn others for what we, ourselves, may have been guilty of doing or thinking.

When individuals act out of deliberate hatred, always contrary to the love of God, they generally have blinded their own soul's eyes, and see only in powerfully selfish ways. We can not be enablers, and by omission, permit them to destroy other souls along with their own. Out of love for them, in their sad state, we must try to inhibit them from usurping the justice of God and protect the innocent. To do nothing would be to bury our treasure and not return an increase of the love we have been given. We should take our stance with the love shown to us by Jesus, and try to deter those who are out to destroy life and love. It is terribly wrong to act out of strict self-interest, and to "think as the world thinks." The pursuit of justice with mercy is the pursuit of God's love.

Though we are not judge and jury, we are instruments of God since we are his children. In practical ways our "light" must not be placed under a basket, and we must act as God gives us the grace to act. The martyrs did not hate the people who were about to kill them, because of their love of God. We may not hate the people who are trying to destroy life, but act to help prevent them from doing so, because life is God's gift to us all, and as Jesus taught, it is not cheap. Our acts must be temperate and reasonable but firm, based on the order of the dilemma.

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We need to learn to love one another as we have been loved by God in Christ.

Each spirit (soul/body) will have to answer for its choices. The only choice must be love. Love and hate can not exist in the same person at the same time. One cannot "serve two masters."

Each individual human being has a charism unique to himself or herself. He and she is bound to use his or her gifts to do the most good. To do nothing in the face of hatred and violence is to betray the love we have been given. The "Lamb of God" died for the sins of the world, so that we might live in him and he in us. Simply to act out of vengeance is to double selfishness. It is incumbent on us to work to keep love thriving, and to defeat selfishness and hatred, especially in ourselves. In the final analysis, "God's will be done" through his use of each one of us. '

And lead us not into temptation ...

To think that God, who is love, would purposely test us beyond our capacity to resist is not saying much for God's love.

To even consider that there is a sadistic God who would torture his beloved children happens only in the false-god pantheon, the imaginary gods of man. But, there are "tests" in this life we have been given because we are truly free, made in God's image and likeness. To be human then is to be a demi-god. So, again, this is a pleading to Our Father to keep us from harm by asking him to retain us in his love. We must have his presence to keep us from the destruction which comes from selfishness. No one is exempt from the temptation to satisfy his or her own negative desires.

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The fact that we have advanced through the animal stage and have received God's grace to be like himself, with Jesus as our exemplar, does not mean that we have been "glorified" just for being ourselves. We are working out our own fate with Christ as our Shepherd, "the good shepherd," who "laid down his life for his sheep." It is hopeless for us to bypass the examples of Jesus and barter with the Father who is pure love. He and the Father are One.

A healthy fear of an all just God suggests that we ask to be led only on the paths of what is good and holy, though we certainly know we are not on a leash. Fear of falling motivates us to beg God not to let us fall, in other words, "lead us not into temptation." When we are tempted, as Jesus was tempted in the desert, it is a test of the strength of our love, which can be habitually weakened by selfishness. "One must love the Lord your God, and him only you must serve;" that as we have said, is simply returning the love which was freely given to us, the life of God within us. The breath of the Heavenly Father.

But deliver us from evil ...

There can be no doubt that evil exists in the world as anti-love. Anti-love is not created by God, but created by men and women who are free to choose and reject what they "know" is ultimately and intrinsically good.

One may ask why is doing the wrong thing so much easier than doing the right thing? Our animal nature is not our human nature. When instinct turned into thought as in "knowing we know," all of our proto-habits did not change entirely. We are still prone to many of our animal instincts. We have since learned through Jesus that there are no forces stronger than the forces of love, for in that, we are made like our maker. The power of love is invincible no matter what other force is put up against it.

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The forces of negativity put the man Jesus to death to satisfy selfish needs. With the conditions that existed in Roman Jerusalem it was "better that one man should die, for the sake of the rest." The population was convinced of Jesus' blasphemy against the God of Abraham, thus Jesus, as "the Lamb of God," was thus sacrificed for all of us on the cross.

To prove the point of victory over death, Christ, was raised from the dead on the first Easter, as he had said. We believe in God from the revelations of sacred scripture and the witnesses to Jesus in his glorified state. From the proliferation of the Kingdom of God and the founding of the "church" on the first Pentecost. We stress that belief in God, the Father almighty, when we say Abba: Our Father who are in heaven, holy is your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done.

Amen.

When Jesus said: "I am going to prepare a place for you" he told us that we should know the way to get there. That he himself was the way, truth and life.

In the course of nature when for one reason or another our body is shed, our souls return to the place "prepared" for us by Jesus. We will be with him, in him and he in us, as he is in the Father and the Father in him. Provided, of course, we have understood and exercised the commitment to love as he has taught us. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." "Be not afraid!" Only acting contrary to this teaching with purely selfish motives, can fear and anxiety rule over our existence. Certainly, we are in this world, but we are not of this world, and this is something we all inherently know, deep in our very being. Bu the grace of God, this is our faith!

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On a lighter note, although I can't conceive of anything lighter than the gracefulness of faith, Cole Porter put it beautifully in his song "Anything Goes," back in 1934:

Intro:

Times have changed

And we've often rewound the clock

Since the Puritans got a shock

When they landed on Plymouth Rock,

If today any shock they might try to stem 'Stead of landing on Plymouth Rock Plymouth Rock would land on them.

Chorus:

In olden days a glimpse of stocking Was looked on as something shocking but now God knows,

Anything goes.