

The Lord's Prayer

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem

(From the First Mystagogical Catechesis written around 350 AD.)

After this you say the family prayer that the Savior taught his disciples. With a pure conscience we address God as our Father and we say: "*Our Father*, who art in the heavens!" O how immense God's love is for men! To those who have gone far from him and fallen into the worst evil he grants so great a pardon for their sins and makes them share so greatly in his grace that they can call him "Father."

"*Our Father, who are in the heavens!*" The heavens may also be those which are the likeness of the heavenly man (1 Cor 15:49), in the midst of which God walks and dwells (2 Cor 6:16)!
(Cat 23, 11)

"*Hallowed be thy name!*" Whether or not we call God's name "holy", it is holy by its nature. But since that name is at times profaned among sinners, as it is written: "Because of you my name is constantly blasphemed among the gentiles" (Is 52:5), we ask that God's name be hallowed among us. Not that it should become holy as though it were not previously holy, but that it may become holy in us when we are sanctified and act in a manner worthy of its holiness.
(Cat 23, 12)

Thy kingdom come! A pure soul can say with assurance: "Thy kingdom come!" For the person who has heeded St. Paul's words: "Let sin, therefore, no longer reign in your mortal body" (Rom 6:12) and who has achieved purity in action, thought, and words, can say to God: "Thy kingdom come!"
(Cat 23, 13)

"*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" The godlike, blessed angels of God do his will, as David sings in the psalm:

"Bless the Lord, all his angels,
who are mighty and strong,
who fulfill his word!" (Ps 103:20)

Your fervent prayer, then, has this meaning: Your will is done in the angels, Master, may it likewise be done in me on earth!"

Give us this day our substantial bread." The bread over there, which is ordinary bread, is not "substantial." But this bread on the altar, which is now holy, is indeed substantial: in other words, it has been instituted for the "subsistence" of the soul. This bread does not enter the stomach and then pass from it in a private place, but it nourishes you in your entirety, for the good of body and soul. As for the words "this day," they mean "day after day." Paul speaks in a similar manner: "As long as the time called 'today' lasts..." (Heb 3:13).
(Cat 23, 15)

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” We have many sins, for we stumble in word and thought; we do a large number of condemnable actions, and if we claim “to be without sin, we lie,” as John says (1Jn 1:8). We enter into a contract with God” we ask him to forgive us our sins, as we forgive our neighbors his debts. Let us consider, then, what we receive and the exchange we are making. Let us not delay, let us not hesitate to forgive one another. The offenses committed against us are small, light, easy to blot out. But those we have committed against God are great, and the only thing we can appeal to is to his love. Be on guard, then, lest because of the small and light offenses committed against you, you block God’s forgiveness for very serious sins.

(Cat 23, 16)

“And lead us not into temptation, Lord.” Is the Lord teaching us to ask that we never be tempted? But how could we then read elsewhere: “The man who has been tempted has not been tested” (Sir 34:10). And again: “Regard it as a supreme joy, my brethren, that you are subject to all kinds of temptations” (Jas 1:2). But, then, does “entering into temptation” mean “being submerged by temptation”? Temptation is in fact comparable to a torrent that is difficult to cross; those who are not submerged by temptations pass through them; they are excellent swimmers, and the temptations have no power to drag them down. But when those who do not have the same qualities enter the stream, they are swallowed up. Judas is an example: he entered into the temptation of avarice; he did not pass through it, but was swallowed up and perished body and soul. Peter entered into the temptation of denial; he entered but was not swallowed up; he swam nobly and was saved from the temptation.

Listen, too, to the choir of the saints who were saved and who offer thanks for having been delivered from the temptation:

“You put us to the test,
you tried us with fire as they purify silver in a fire,
you brought us into the net,
you loaded us down with afflictions;
you let men tread upon our heads,
we passed through fire and water.

Then you led us to the place of refreshment” (Ps 66:10-12).

You see with what assurance they speak, these men and women who passed through without being swallowed up. “You led us,” they sing, “to the place of refreshment.” To go to the place of refreshment means to be saved from temptation.

(Cat 23,17)

“But deliver us from the Evil One.” If the words “Lead us not into temptation” means never to be tempted, the Lord would not have added: “But deliver us from the Evil One.” The Evil One is the devil, the adversary, and we ask to be delivered from him.

At the end of the prayer you add: “Amen!” “Amen” means “Let it be so!” With this word you put your seal on the content of the prayer that God has taught us.

(Cat 23, 18)

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