

The Lord's Prayer.

by A Monk of St. Tikhon's Monastery.

When the Disciples asked Our Lord to teach them how to pray, he gave to them the words of the Lord's Prayer, which, in St. Matthew's Gospel is worded thus:

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from the Evil One.

The words Our Father Who art in heaven bear witness to the truth that God is the Father of all that exists. He not only created the universe, the entire world material and spiritual, visible and invisible but, being the Father, He loves His creation, cares for it, and guides it to the goals of goodness and perfection as He has planned. The Father is He Who calls us to life, Who loves His creation and cares for it. According to Bishop Nicholas of Ochrid, when I open my mouth and cry: 'Father!' love expels fear, and the earth seems to draw closer to Heaven....Egoism cries to Thee: 'My Father,' but love says: 'Our Father!'

The universe created by God is diverse, for, on the one hand, it is our world the world of nature and man and, on the other hand, it is spiritual the world of the Angelic Host and the Church Triumphant-known biblically as Heaven. Therefore God is called the Father of our natural-human world and the Heavenly Father Who art in Heaven, that is, the Father of the spiritual world. Heaven also implies that purity and sanctity of divine life to which man is called, and which does not exist in him if he is entirely captivated by Sin. As Bishop Nicholas says: Heaven is very, very far for a man whose heart and soul have turned away from Thee...but Heaven is very, very close for a man whose soul is open and awaits Thy coming.

The Lord's Prayer consists of seven petitions, and these are things that we should ask of our Heavenly Father.

(1) Our Father Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name.

In the first petition, we should beseech our Heavenly Father that His name, which is always holy in itself, be hallowed, with His blessing, both in us and through us (Matt. 5:16). The Lord is the fullness and perfection of sanctity but, by glorifying Him, we sanctify ourselves and the surrounding world.

(2) Thy kingdom come.

In the second petition, we ask the Lord to help us and make us worthy, through His grace, of the Kingdom of Heaven which begins, as Christ Himself said, here on earth,

within us. But it will only come to us in the fullness of its power when Sin ceases to hold undivided sway in us and righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17) abide in us.

(3) Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven.

In the third petition, we beseech God the Father that He not allow us to live out our earthly lives according to our sinful ways, but according to His will, which is always good, and acceptable, and perfect (Rom. 12:2). By obeying the will of God, we begin to establish the Kingdom of God within ourselves.

(4) Give us this day our daily bread;

In the fourth petition we beseech God to give us our daily bread everything we need in life, spiritual as well as physical. Our spiritual bread is the grace-bestowing Sacraments of the Church, instituted for our salvation. First and foremost, our daily bread means Holy Communion, of which the Lord said: I am the bread of life...and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh (John 6:48, 51). Material bread means all that is necessary for human existence, directly associated with the surrounding world. The words this day warn us against too many cares, and teaches us to ask only for what is most essential, because the Lord says: But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day (Matt. 6:33-34).

(5) And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

In the fifth petition the Lord teaches us how to ask forgiveness for our sins from the Heavenly Father, and how they may be forgiven. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also Who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father Who is in heaven forgive your trespasses (Mark 11:25-26). Man's sins are called trespasses against God in this petition and here we beg for God's mercy. This is our confession, asking for His forgiveness. Whoever seeks forgiveness should resort to the healing power of repentance and forgive his neighbor, the trespasser. When we forgive our trespassers, then God will also forgive us our sins (Mark 4:24).

(6) And lead us not into temptation,

In the sixth petition we ask of the Lord that He not allow us to fall into sin. We ask Him to preserve us from all that confuses our spirit and from temptations that are beyond our strength to reject. If we encounter on our earthly path trials and temptations sent for our purification from sin and spiritual fortification, then we ask God to send us His timely help. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it (1 Cor. 10:13). For because He Himself has suffered and been tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted (Heb. 2:18), St. Paul says, indicating the Helper and Accomplisher of our salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ.

(7) But deliver us from the Evil One.

In the seventh and final petition, we ask that we be protected against and saved from Evil and the Devil, who is a murderer from the beginning and works for our destruction. As St. Peter says, the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). Remembering the Enemy of our salvation, the Lord urges us to be vigilant and sober of spirit, to have courage to accomplish a feat, teaches us to pray for one another, and by prayer to the Heavenly Father, to fortify ourselves spiritually and free ourselves from misfortune and disaster.

Thus the Lord's Prayer is the unfailing model and rule for all prayers. The Church uses it in all the sacramental orders, and in all the Divine Services. As St. John Chrysostom says, it is the crown of all prayers.

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