

Our Father (Part II)

Last month we began an explanation of the Lord's Prayer up to the third petition - "Thy will be done." Depending upon the English sentence structure, "on earth as it is in heaven" is usually understood to complete the sentence - "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." In the Greek however; all three preceding petitions make one complete sentence. "Make Your Name be holy, make Your Kingdom come, and make Your will be done," are all being modified by the final phrase "...on earth as it (they are) is in heaven." To better understand what is being conveyed it would be better to paraphrase it something like - "As they are in Christ, so also in us, His members here on earth." In other words, we are calling upon God the Father that He may make that which belongs to Christ also present in us, his children. Jesus was sanctified through the act of complete obedience to the will of His Father thus offering Himself as a blameless, pure, holy, acceptable, living sacrifice. Our Lord said: "'Behold, I come to do Thy will, O God.' ... By which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:9,10)."

How does all this become realized in our lives? It is something which requires the same obedience to the commandments of God, obedience to the point of dying to one's self. Sanctity, kingdom, and obedience to the will of God are all fruits of participating in the body and blood of Christ and celebrating this in worship. This is what St. Paul describes in his letter to the Hebrews, "For both He Who sanctifies (Christ) and they (members of His body i.e. Church) who are sanctified are all of one...Since then the children have partaken of flesh and blood (Holy Communion), He also Himself in like manner partook of the same, in order that through death He might bring to naught the one who hath the power of death, that is, the devil." [Heb. 2:11,14]

The precondition to participation in worship and offering oneself to Christ is an undivided dedication to the Lord. Idols fulfill living according to one's own will and come in many forms such as vice. "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of which things comes the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience, among whom you also walked once, when you used to live in them. But now you also put off from yourselves all these things: wrath, anger, malice, blasphemy, foul language out of your mouth." [Col. 3:5-8] An "idol" can be any willful habitual strong desire for something or in something which is trusted and relied upon for comfort, a solution to a problem, an escape from turmoil or the happiness it provides. "For this you know, that every fornicator or impure person, or coveter (who is an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of the Christ and of God." [Eph. 5:5]. The primary idol that Jesus warned against serving and threatened one's ability to inherit the kingdom of God was "mammon" or possessions and wealth. "No one is able to serve two lords; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to the one and despise the other. You are not able to serve God and mammon." [Mt. 6:24] God is even made into an idol anytime one's "offerings," whether they are monetary, or lighting candles, or saying 'x

amount' of liturgies on someone's behalf ~ when understood as a means of appeasing God, getting Him to accomplish my will, my prayer, my desire, are not true worship. "Do this for me and I will do this for you," is conning God and not an acceptable form of worship. Worshiping God in Spirit and Truth is always an act of absolute faith in "Your Will Be Done!" and is based upon acknowledging the workings of God in one's life and responding to Him through the act of offering Him thanks and giving Him glory!

The simple fact that coming to Church on Sundays on a regular, consistent and frequent basis is not the norm speaks volumes to how Christians are living with divided hearts, serving their own will and not God's. It is in worshipping God in Spirit and Truth that we fulfill ourselves as human beings. We are created to give thanks and to glorify God for all He has done and continues to do. In the wisdom of our Church, the Lord's Prayer finds itself placed in the liturgy just prior to receiving Holy Communion because it is being realized in and through our collective act of worship. Nothing is accomplished magically in worship without a synergy of wills noted above. God requires that our worship is a pure offering that reflects lives dedicated to living according to the teachings of Christ – we cannot just do whatever we want. When God's will becomes our will, His thoughts become our thoughts, His Life becomes our only source of life; by living the Lord's Prayer daily it becomes fulfilled, accomplished in the Eucharist when we gather!

Just see how two fruits of participating in Communion are described by Fr. Robert Taft: the Communion of the Holy Spirit and the fullness (inheritance) of the Kingdom fulfill the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer. "These two fruits of Communion are inseparable sides of the same coin. For if communion in the Holy Spirit (or the gifts of the Holy Spirit) refers primarily to our union with God via communion in the Eucharistic body of Christ, that communion in the Spirit of God unites us not only to the Divine life of the Trinity but also to one another in the mystical body of Christ which is the Church - and that is the fullness of the Kingdom, which is not just a future (eschatological) reward, but the life of the kingdom incorruptibly present to us now in the ecclesial communion of saints...which is communion in the Holy Things.

Sanctity is not something we acquire by gearing ourselves up and living a good life. Sanctity is a gift received from God and that is a gift of the Holy Spirit which is received by communion in the holy things. That's why the ancient call to Communion was: 'The holy Gifts (things) for the holy people (saints) of God.' Who are the saints? Those who have been baptized...it is a gift of God." (Lecture at the Catholic University of America, "Eucharist: A Prayer for Unity" OrientaleLumenTV, YouTube).

The Lord's Prayer is being realized and fulfilled by participating in the Body and Blood of Christ. Make Your Name be sanctified in me, Make Your Kingdom come, Make Your Will be Done; as these are in Christ so also in us, His members here on earth – the three petitions form a holy trinity of inseparable desires that fulfil a person as a human being. Three inseparable gifts of calling God 'Father' and receiving the Body and Blood of His Son, as members of His Body on earth. How important then is the manner in which we

approach, what idols are clinging to us, how making individual “entrances” into Church when convenient all make offerings corrupt and worship unacceptable before God. The 4th Petition: ~ Give us this day the supra-substantial bread of the coming Age which is Christ Himself (Give us this day our daily bread)

The patristic tradition overwhelmingly understood this petition as referring not to the food one needs to live but to the new food given as the body of Christ in the Eucharist. “This is the profound meaning of that new divine food, which constitutes from the earliest days of Christianity the main joy, the chief mystery of the Church that Christians call the Eucharist, which means Thanksgiving.” (Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, *Our Father*) The key word, “epiousion” is the adjective which modifies “bread” in the Greek: “ton arton imon, ton epiousion” and is translated as “daily bread.” The word is difficult to define because it occurs nowhere else in the New Testament and is rarely found in non-biblical writings. It means essential, necessary, needed, sustaining. Some Church Fathers understood it to refer to that which is essential. In other words, ‘Give us today that which is essential for today and nothing more.’ Most Church Fathers however see this interpretation inconsistent with the overall eschatological (the present reality of and at the same time future coming of the Age of the Kingdom) nature of the prayer. As mentioned above, the Lord’s Prayer’s liturgical context is Holy Communion and participation in the fullness of the Kingdom which is now present in the Church. Biblical scholars (For a more in depth discussion see: “The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer” by Raymond Brown, <http://www.ts.mu.edu/readers/content/pdf/22/22.2/22.2.1.pdf>) argue in favor of “daily bread” referring to the final Heavenly Banquet as eating at a table in the kingdom (Lk14:15, Matt 8:11, Lk 22:-29-30).

Our Lord taught that the meaning of manna that rained down from heaven (described in Exodus 16:4: “I will rain bread from heaven for you...a day’s portion every day,”) is fulfilled in Himself: “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Verily, verily, I say to you, Moses has not given you the bread out of the heaven, but My Father gives you the bread, the true one, out of the heavens. For the bread of God is the One coming down out of the heavens and giving life to the world.’ Then they said to Him, ‘Lord, always give us this bread.’ But Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; the one who comes to Me in no wise shall hunger; and the one who believeth in Me in no wise shall thirst at any time.” [Jn. 6:31-35]

When we come to Church and say the Lord’s Prayer it culminates with the reception of Holy Communion and is fulfilled. The prayer concludes with, “And forgive us our debts as we have already forgiven our debtors. And let us not surrender and fall when tried, tested and tempted but deliver us from the evil one.” This last sentence is about forgiveness and the judgment that awaits everyone who says the Prayer and participates in Holy Communion. Next month these final petitions will be discussed.