

Our Father (Part I)

Jesus calling God as His “Father” was what eventually led to His crucifixion and death (John 5:18). For Christians to call God one’s Father is equivalent to saying; I am His child and everything concerning my life, how I think, what I do and how I act is a reflection of my Father Who is responsible for who I am. By taking a critical look at each line of the Lord’s Prayer; its inner meaning and significance will forever change how it is prayed, “...Its (The Lord’s Prayer) meaning is inexhaustible, that it is impossible to give this prayer one final and conclusive explanation...the Lord’s prayer is always addressed to each of us personally anew, in a way in which it makes it seem to have been composed specifically for me, for my needs, for my questions, for my pilgrimage (Our Father, Alexander Schmemmann).”

It might be a good thing for all Orthodox Christians to pause at the midnight Pascha (Easter) liturgy just prior to saying the Lord’s Prayer and recall its original place in the life of a new Christian on that night. In the Early Church, on the days prior to Pascha, before a new catechumen was going to be baptized on Holy Saturday morning they were taught the Lord’s Prayer. After several years of serious preparation for baptism adults were bestowed with the honor and gift to say the Lord’s Prayer. Only after one had changed their course of life, been baptized, sealed with the Holy Spirit and admitted to Holy Communion was it possible to dare call God, Father. This is why the Lord’s Prayer is said just before receiving Holy Communion. We now stand in this special relationship with God that is uniquely given only to Christians which is the high privilege and awesome responsibility to call Him, “Our Father.”

One of the aspects related to understanding the Lord’s Prayer is its translation into English. Fr. Hopko has dealt with this extensively in a series of ten lectures which offer a critical commentary. It is available for purchase at <http://www.svspress.com/lords-prayer-the-set-audio-cd/> Also, at <http://www.ancientfaith.com/houston> you can find a three part presentation on the Lord’s Prayer given by Fr. Hopko in 2011. This article will draw from Fr. Hopko for the issues related to translation of the Lord’s Prayer. Fr. Schmemmann’s book, *Our Father*, and St. Gregory of Nyssa’s commentaries on the Lord’s Prayer are the sources for the implications and significance of the prayer itself.

“Our Father”

The Lord’s Prayer is not said by Jesus in the sense that he did not pray it for His own self. It is given to his disciples in the context of the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 5. A different version is offered in Luke 11, when his disciples ask the Lord to teach them how to pray. To call God, “Our Father...This is no longer an idea about God, but already knowledge of God, this is already communion with Him in love, in unity, and trust. This is already the beginning of knowing eternity (Our Father, Schmemmann).” I recall gathering around our dinner table as a child with my Yiayia (grandmother) and her leading us all in the Lord’s Prayer. I never actually learned it (the Greek was difficult) but

it had power because of her faith. A person once related to me how when he was young and lost in life without any hope the first words that came to him were: "Our Father, Who art in heaven..." This was a beginning, an affirmation for him, a desire to make God his Father in life. Every time we recite the Lord's Prayer it is this same affirmation of one's most inner desire to make God the Father of ones' life. Otherwise, to pray the Lord's Prayer when one's heart does not desire unity with God can lead to self-condemnation.

"If he has any sense, he would obviously not dare to call God by the name Father since he does not see the same things in himself as he sees in God. For it is physically impossible that He Who is good by essence should be the Father of an evil will, nor the Holy One of him whose life is impure...For the word Father indicates the cause of what exists through Him (The Lord's Prayer, Sermon 2, Gregory of Nyssa, p. 39-40)." No person is ever completely purified; many saints on their death beds were asking for more time to repent. Nevertheless, calling upon God as Father means that this is one's deepest aspiration and goal in life; to reflect as completely as possible and to whatever extent God may allow, so that He may grant the gift to become a reflection of Himself. The rest of the Lord's Prayer is based upon this affirmation and teaches us how in one's daily life as a Christian and child of God this becomes a reality.

A paraphrasing of the Lord's Prayer based primarily upon Fr. Hopko's lecture series:

Our Father, Who art in heaven ~ Our Father of all human beings in Christ, the most-high God over and above all created things

Hallowed be Thy Name ~ May Your Name be kept sanctified in us

Thy Kingdom Come ~ May Your Kingdom come among us and may the kingship of the Holy Spirit rule our lives

Thy Will be Done, on earth as it is in heaven ~ May Your will be completed and accomplished in us. As these things are in Christ, so also let them be in us, Your members on earth.

Give us this day our daily bread ~ Give to us this day, the super-essential Bread which is beyond being, Christ Himself which will also be given to us in the age to come.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us ~ Remit from us that which we ought to have done towards others; as we have already forgiven those who have not done what they ought to have done towards us.

And lead us not into temptation - Let us not give-in and surrender when we are put to the test by our own desires.

But deliver us from evil ~ Deliver us from the evil one.

Hallowed by Thy Name ~ May Your Name be kept sanctified in us

“This is the cry of the one who has seen and recognized God, and knows that only in this vision and encounter can he find the fullness of life, full inspiration, and full happiness...This is also a petition for help in the difficult effort in this ascension and transformation, for we are surrounded and held captive to darkness, evil, pettiness, superficiality, turmoil (Our Father, Alexander Schmemmann).”

Thy Kingdom Come ~ May Your Kingdom come among us and may the kingship of the Holy Spirit rule our lives

“It tells us that the kingdom comes and begins when man meets God, recognizes Him and with love and joy offers himself to Him...this encounter takes place now, here, and today, in the present circumstances, that in my mundane and difficult life I could hear the words, ‘the kingdom is near you,’ and that my life would be filled with the power of light of the kingdom, with the power and light of faith, love and hope (Our Father, Alexander Schmemmann).”

Thy will be done ~ May Your will be completed and accomplished in us

“‘Thy will be done’ is the ultimate yardstick of faith, the measure by which one can discern, in oneself first of all, profound from superficial faith, profound religiosity from a false one...even the most ardent believer all too regularly, if not always, desires, expects, and asks...that God would fulfill precisely his own will and not the will of God ...as soon as Christ starts speaking about the fact that a person has to deny himself if he wants to follow Him, about the need to love one’s enemies, and to lay down one’s life for one’s brother, as soon as His teaching becomes difficult ... people immediately abandon Him...turn against Him in anger and hatred (Our Father, Alexander Schmemmann).”