

A Reflection on the Lord's Prayer

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“I pray that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee.... I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:21, 23).

“*May* be,” the Lord says, implying an “if”. It seems there are conditions.

What conditions? Taking the Lord's Prayer as the key to this prayer of the Lord, it is evident that these high priestly words alone, while necessary, are by no means sufficient.

We must do something, too, if perfect unity is our goal. Cooperation, “co-working with God” (2 Corinthians 6:1), is required.

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Our. The opening plural reminds us that we are not the Lord's servants but friends (John 15:15), graciously placed in the same relationship to the Father as He, provided we have joined Him at the top of that Mountain where this Prayer was first taught, having gone apart from the crowds—the noisy, jostling multitude—whether around us or in us (Matthew 5:1).

Father. Our inner Magdalene, once she is freed from the Pharisaical rules that would have otherwise destroyed her (John 8:11), must understand that union with our common Origin, with “my Father and your Father, my God and your God” (John 20:17), depends on another, much more demanding, Dominical injunction: I am to abandon all “clinging”, be it even to Him (John 20:17).

Who art in Heaven. Where is this Heaven, the Kingdom of Him who dwells within it? “Some say, ‘Lo, here’; others, ‘Lo, there’” (Luke 17:21). But in Truth, “even if I descend into Sheol, Thou art there” (Psalm 139:8). How are we to relate to so deadly a

Heaven, a Heaven in our midst and within us? “Keep thy mind in hell,” said St Silouan the Athonite, “but do not despair.”

Hallowed be Thy Name ... on earth as it is in heaven. Do I wish to become “perfect in one”? Then I must approach the Divine Name, the I AM—both in Him and in me—with sandals off (Exodus 3:5), in full bodily contact with the earth, this “holy ground”: no longer confined to my conceptual head, but vulnerably open both above and below, come what may—for it is only thus that

Thy Kingdom come ... on earth as it is in heaven. If the Father’s rule is to be felt as palpably here below as Above, all our false I’s, ephemeral objects who only pretend to be subjects, each of whose petty desires demands for itself a democratic respect, must be put in their proper hierarchical places, in conscious submission to a monarchical Mind and its “perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25).

Thy will be done ... on earth as it is in heaven. Implicit in this appalling petition is yet a further condition, the fulfilling of which the Lord Himself dramatically modeled. One cannot but think of His own “not Mine but Thine be done” (Luke 22:42) as He struggled toward the Cross. In accepting this cup, “great drops of blood” will be required of us, too—if not those of Golgotha, at least of Gethsemane.

Give us this day our daily bread. Nothing so quotidian as the English “daily” suggests, the Greek (Matthew 6:11) raises our sights to something sublime, a truly heavenly food: an *epiousion* bread, a super-substantial bread: the Bread which He Himself *is* (John 6:51), whose uncreated energies I am permitted to ingest only if I have first been buried with Him in the mystery of Baptism.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Here begins a final crescendo of increasingly daunting conditions. First, I must submit to a dreadful “measuring” (Matthew 7:2). Only if I cease to identify with the anger and pain provoked within me by my most belligerent and destructive of enemies can I hope to be in Him as He is in me. An utterly impossible “if”, were it not that “all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:27).

And lead us not into temptation. An Aramaic idiom: Help us not to fail the tests that come our way. Tests—provocations, as the Fathers calls them—are inevitable, but we need not succumb to sin if only we cultivate the presence of mind to “take every

thought captive in obedience to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5), in this way avoiding the slippery Hesychast slope of disturbance, coupling, assent, prepossession, passion.

But deliver us from evil. Or rather, say students of the Gospels’ language, “the evil *one*”: an entity, not an abstraction. And who is this evil one? On the one hand, it is the Adversary (1 Peter 5:8). But if I observe myself closely enough, I will surely see my deep complicity, that I in fact am the “chief of sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). Only by admitting, owning, my fragmented nothingness can I be fashioned One.

Deliver me, Father: I from me.