

the Lord's prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give *us* today our daily bread.
Forgive *us* our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against *us*.
Save *us* from the time of trial,
and deliver *us* from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever.
Amen.

AN EXPLORATION
from the Brothers of SSJE

Being an Answer to the Lord's Prayer

Curtis Almquist, SSJE

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The Son of God existed prior to Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. What we witness in the human form of Jesus is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation... All things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:15-17). The Son of God had already lived forever, eternally, prior to taking on human life as Jesus.

The best sense the Church has been able to make of this comes from experience. There is One God, the Creator of everything, who, while remaining God, takes on human form: God the Son. This is Jesus, who grows up, ministers, prays, dies, is resurrected, and returns to the life of God, who has no beginning or ending. Jesus departs from earth. He ascends. He leaves us, not abandoned, but with another manifestation of the One God, whom Jesus calls "the Spirit," another Person of the One God (John 14:26; 15:26). It took the Church several centuries to find the language to try to describe this mysterious yet undeniable experience: that there is One God in Three Persons.

God took on human form in Jesus. How did God make this decision? (I'm speaking here very anthropomorphically.) How did God decide to become human? What was the

"cost" to God to become human? The great Welsh poet and Anglican priest, R. S. Thomas, in his poem "The Coming," pictures God's decision in a primordial conversation between God the Father and God the Son. The picture is of a desolated, hopeless, helpless earth:

And God held in his hand
A small globe. Look he said.
The son looked. Far off,
As through water, he saw
A scorched land of fierce
Colour. The light burned
There; crusted buildings
Cast their shadows: a bright
Serpent, a river
Uncoiled itself, radiant
With slime.

On a bare
Hill a bare tree saddened
The sky. Many People
Held out their thin arms
To it, as though waiting
For a vanished April
To return to its crossed
Boughs. The son watched
Them. Let me go there, he said.

God comes to us as a child of Bethlehem. We know him as Jesus, who grows up, like we grow up, and after many, many years, he finds his voice and claims his power.

He also prays. Jesus prays, enough so as to catch people's attention. This is God the Son in a very human way praying to God the Father. Very mysterious, and yet, clearly, this is what was happening... frequently. Jesus prays.

Eventually, Jesus' disciples ask him to teach them how to pray. Jesus responds with what we call "the Lord's Prayer" (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4). Most revealing in the Lord's Prayer is the opening word, the plural pronoun: "Our Father in heaven." The Greek word translated "our" literally means "of us," i.e., "Father of us."

Consider the context: Jesus is speaking to his disciples, and Jesus' prayer envelopes his disciples as if he and they

are all one: the first person, plural possessive pronoun, "our." How to pray? Jesus says we begin like this: *Our* Father... Jesus and we are one with the Father (John 10:30; 17:20-23).

Jesus here regards his disciples not as his servants, but as his friends. They are his peers. They share the same prayer. He doesn't say, "My Father," or "Your Father." He says, "*Our* Father."

The name Jesus uses for "Father" shows a very tender, childlike, trusting intimacy. A better, sweeter translation of the Greek word would be "Papa" rather than "Father." "*Our* Papa in heaven."

Jesus speaks as a human being, as human as you and I are, and as full of as many wonders and needs as the rest of us. His prayer is not just "heavenly"; his prayer includes our need for food - our "daily bread" - and this is not metaphorical. This is about sustenance.

Just prior to this - the verse preceding this prayer - Jesus has said, "Your Father already knows what you need before you ask him" (Matthew 6:8). So Jesus is teaching us to pray, but this is *not* about the dissemination of information to God. God already knows our needs because God is God. This prayer is about our trusted and tender relationship to God.

The Lord's Prayer is so familiar, perhaps too familiar to some of us for us to be mindful of its profundity, revealed even just in these opening words. Jesus' words completely embrace us, as if we, with Jesus, all belong to the same Father, the same Papa. I invite you to ponder and pray on the Lord's Prayer as if you are hearing it again for the first time.

You might use it to reflect on God's "deciding" to become human, and its "cost" to God to be both truly human and truly divine: the humility of God. Take R. S. Thomas' haunting last line in his poem, "Let me go there." Why? Why did Jesus come to us? Why does Jesus come to *you*? How might this prayer, which he taught us, help you to draw near, with him, to "*Our* Papa in heaven?"

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your

NAME

Remember the Words He Taught You

Lucas Hall, SSJE

I have been spending quite a lot of time with the Lord's Prayer lately. It has become a regular feature in my own private prayer, and I have relished it more than I typically do when the Brothers come together to pray in the chapel. I have seen much of what's going on in the world for months, and sometimes, I just cannot put together my own words. "What more can I say? What more can any of us say?" is the common refrain of my heart. I can't imagine I'm alone. Sometimes, in those moments, through some prompting of the same Spirit whose sighs are enough, I am given the gentle reminder, "Remember the words he has taught you."

Of particular note for me recently is the plea, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven." It's difficult for me not to pay attention to the political situation of the country, from the very big stories to the particular zigs and zags of individual newsworthy figures. Again, I can't imagine I'm alone. And, paying that attention in the midst of all that has gone on, the picture seems very bleak. The failures, incompetencies, and abuses of those in power right now leave me feeling sad and angry. But the words of the Lord's Prayer, the hope for the coming of God's kingdom, is a touchstone of hope for me, for three

reasons.

First, that this is the prayer of Jesus, the one who intercedes for us, and who abides close to the Father's heart, comforts me. Christ assures us that we, even in our imperfection, know how to give to the needy. "How much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" The promises of Jesus, and the hope of Jesus, are not idle, for he knows the heart of the One from whom all good comes. The kingdom of God will come. When we show forth the love of God, we participate in that kingdom, and anticipate its full revelation.

Second, it assures me that God's kingdom is something fundamentally different from what we see before us. It's not the domain of earthly rulers to enact for themselves, even in the best of times. It is certainly at odds with rank and blatant injustice; as the psalmist writes, "Can a corrupt tribunal have any part with you, one which frames evil into law?"

Third, it reminds me that this sadness and anger, this dissonance between what is and what should be, is a normal part of what it means to be a Christian. "Here we have no lasting city," reads the letter to the Hebrews, "but we are looking for the city that is to come." We have been called to the greater kingdom, and it has not yet been revealed in its fullness and glory, its mercy and justice. We should feel somewhat alienated from the halls of power; we should be able to see what's wrong. And the fact that we do is itself a sign of the hope to come.

Many of us are wearied by the changes and the uncertainty of our civil lives, our political communities. I certainly am. But we can take heart, and pray together for the coming of God's kingdom; it is a hope, big and sturdy enough for us all.

The Lord's Prayer *from the New Zealand Prayer Book*

Eternal Spirit,
Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and shall be,
Mother and Father of us all,
Loving God in whom is heaven -

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe;
the way of your justice be followed by all peoples on Earth;
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings;
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope
and come on Earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us;
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us;
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us;
From trials too great to endure, spare us;
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is Love,
Now and forever.
Amen.

*From the New Zealand Prayerbook;
written by the Reverend Jim Cotter.*

your
KINGDOM
COME

your
wILL
be **DONE**

Our Daily Bread

Lain Wilson, n/SSJE

One of the great gifts of living at the Monastery is the view from my cell window. It's not just the beauty of the Charles River; it's the activity that takes place on it that captivates me, which resonates with my own deep-seated need.

I rowed crew off and on for fifteen years before entering the Monastery last winter. Watching the stream of crew boats cutting across my window now, I remember the feeling of being in a boat and I can imagine myself in one again. But more than anything, I feel the beauty of it all. I feel it in my body as tension unknitting in my stomach, as a weight lifting from my shoulders. In this physical response, I become aware of how important this encounter with beauty is for me - not only in watching the river, but in countless small and unexpected ways each day. I realize how much this beauty nourishes me, giving shape and color and texture to my day - to my life. And I recognize, deep down, how my senses, my memory, and my imagination - all those faculties that allow me to find, experience, and appreciate this beauty - are total gifts from God.

You may be surprised that this image of a crew boat on the Charles River emerges in the context of the familiar line from the heart of the Lord's Prayer, "Give us today our daily

bread." I know I was. You may be surprised that beauty, not bread, is the need I name. I know I was. It can be difficult, for those of us who don't lack food or experience the sharp pangs of hunger, to know how to pray this petition. It can feel abstract, disembodied. Are you, like me, lucky enough to feel far removed from the precariousness and scarcity that we hear about in the Israelites' journey through the desert, or that we read about in stories of famine, or that we see around us in those who sleep on the streets? Are you blessed enough to know you will have bread today?

You might not know the urgent cry for bread that haunts others. But we all have needs. We all have hungers. And I think that by identifying them, and in recognizing how these needs affect us physically, we can begin to recapture something of the immediacy and materiality of praying for our daily bread.

In praying to God to meet those needs, to nourish us, we are invited to move beyond ourselves to trust in and rely on God's limitless provision. And, perhaps most importantly, when we name our needs and realize how often their satisfaction lies beyond our control, we can grow in compassion for those whose lives are more precarious and whose needs are more urgent than our own. In recognizing our commonality as needful people, we can stand alongside our brothers and sisters, placing our trust in the God who gives us our daily bread, in all its many forms.

God Loves Humans

David Vryhof, SSJE

If forgiveness is one of the most powerful forces for redemption in the Christian faith, unforgiveness is one of the most powerful forces for destruction. Unforgiveness hardens the heart. It magnifies a perceived offense to the point where we can no longer appreciate a person's value because all we see is how they have grieved us. No wonder the petition about forgiveness - "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us" - sits at the heart of the Lord's Prayer.

In the gospels, Peter asks Jesus, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" (Matthew 18:21). In this question, Peter thinks he is being generous. The rabbis of Jesus' day taught that a person was obliged to forgive three times; Peter raises it to seven. "No," Jesus answers, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."

The astounding generosity of such forgiveness can only come in response to the extravagant mercy and compassion of God.

Here's the Good News: Jesus came for sinners. He was born, lived and died, and was raised again for people like

you and me. When he lived among us, he preferred the company of sinful humans to that of those righteous souls who believed they were pure and above reproach. He befriended tax collectors and prostitutes. He made it clear that he had come not for the righteous, but for sinners. He insisted that his purpose was not to condemn, but to save. Even now, he unveils our hypocrisies not to shame us, but to help us to see how much we need him, how much we need his divine life flowing through us, transforming and changing us so that our actions may become true expressions of who we really are, so that we can live authentically as God's children in the world.

If we consider our sinfulness; if we are aware of our countless transgressions against God and against our neighbors in thought, word and deed; if we realize our need for forgiveness and mercy; then we will begin to appreciate what has been done for us.

Forgiven people should not be unforgiving towards others. "Be kind to one another," Saint Paul urges the Christians at Ephesus, "tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). Those who have been forgiven much ought to love much, and that love should include forgiving others with the same generosity with which we have been forgiven.

Living in a fallen world means that it is inevitable that we will be sinned against. Christian faith does not diminish the pain or damage that someone's sin against us has inflicted. We need God's help to work through our anger and bitterness to arrive at the place where forgiveness is possible. But we need to do this work - it is not an option - because without it, we will be imprisoned by our own unforgiveness.

Sometimes forgiveness can only come over time. Be patient with yourself but be equally determined to stay on the path towards forgiveness, even if it is an uphill climb. Our hearts harden when we harbor unforgiveness. Forgive, then, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

An Intercessory Lord's Prayer

Where [name] appears below, substitute the name of the person whom you will hold in prayer.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name in [name],
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven for [name].
Give [name] this day his/her/their daily bread.
And forgive [name] his/her/their trespasses,
as he/she/they forgive those
who trespass against him/her/them.
And lead [name] not into temptation,
but deliver him/her/them from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

FORGIVE
US

our
SINS

Prayer with Substance

Keith Nelson, SSJE

Monks pray often. But as we learn, many times over, quantity or frequency in prayer doesn't equal quality or depth. Neither, as Jesus points out, does length or verbal sophistication equal substance. Even when the phrases of our prayer are full of meaning – such as those drawn directly from Scripture – it is possible to come to them with absence of mind or heart, or to miss their meaning because something in us is missing.

The Church, throughout its history, has sometimes wrestled to strike a balance between praying beautifully and praying simply, directly, and with purpose. Individual believers can struggle with the same temptation. When we “heap up empty phrases,” we ultimately miss the mark on both accounts.

You may be the type of person who crafts words because you love them. You may be that way by temperament, by communication style, by education, by vocational calling, by type of employment, by personal talent, by gift of the Holy Spirit, or any combination of the above. Maybe fine phrases follow you, are attached to your name, or the things you have produced. Maybe they flow from your mouth or pen: phrases with power to express, to articulate,

to persuade, and to impress. I have had the privilege to meet, work alongside, and pray with many such people. Sometimes, I am told, I am one of them. A venerable company of monks, past and present, have been just such people.

If you are that type of person, you have probably experienced the occupational hazard – or the temperamental, communicational, stylistic, educational, vocational, or personal hazard – of heaping up an empty phrase or two. Maybe you've experienced that moment when the words sound smooth but ring hollow. Or when the undergrowth of verbiage obscures the path onward or homeward. Perhaps your words were beautiful, but lacked the gracious editing of the Author of Life.

It is quite easy to heap up empty phrases. In such moments, what hope do we have?

For me, it is the Lord's Prayer. The prayer that Jesus taught is a simple, supremely effective tool to slice away anything in us that is not humble or sincere. It is the best, most straightforward antidote to all our articulate spiritual *nonsense*. Over time, it makes us *real*: real servants of a Savior with substance, which a world full of words desperately needs.

Lead Us Not into Temptation

Jim Woodrum, SSJE

Of all the petitions offered in the Lord's Prayer, the one that most provokes my curiosity is "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

The early desert monastics (beginning in the fourth century) acknowledged the sobering reality of temptation in their lives. Yet for them, temptation was not something to be avoided, since the refining of our spiritual lives required an engagement with temptation. My study of that period of monasticism has helped me to appreciate that temptation reveals areas of my spiritual armor that need to be fortified in order for me to become more fully the person God created me to be.

Even Jesus, in his humanity, was tempted after his baptism by John in the Jordan River. You'll recall that he withdraws into the desert for forty days, where he faces a series of temptations. In each temptation delivered upon him by the devil, Jesus withstands by recalling scripture that he had learned and memorized growing up in his faith. The desert monk, Evagrius Ponticus, adapted this method of engaging temptation in his book *Antirrhêtikos*, which means "Talking Back," by using scripture to confront the wiles of the devil, empowering the individual to avoid acting upon temptation.

The crucial insight we can take from the desert monastics is seeing that temptation itself is not a sin. They deemed that only entertaining temptation in such a way as led to acting upon it was sinful.

Like the teachings of the desert monastics, our own Rule of Life acknowledges the reality of temptation in our life of faith: "For the hours of the day to be permeated by mindfulness of the divine life we must be engaged in constant struggle, depending on God's grace. Powerful forces are bent on separating us from God, our own souls, and one another through the din of noise and the whirl of preoccupation." For me, this preoccupation usually occurs when I'm not feeling my best. When Jesus was tempted by the devil in the desert, he was in the midst of a forty-day fast from food and water. In my own life, when I am facing temptation, I recall a slogan from the rooms of 12-step recovery: H.A.L.T., which is an acronym for "Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired." Whenever you feel tempted to do or say something that is not conducive to the life to which God has called you, you might find it helpful to notice if you are feeling hungry, angry, lonely, or tired and then tend to some self-care. Seek nourishment, counsel for your anger, the company of a trusted friend, or take some time for respite. You might want to recall the words of Jesus in Matthew's gospel: "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Temptation is inevitable; and we have at our disposal many tools we can use to help us withstand it.

In our Monastery, we use a modern adaptation of the Lord's Prayer in contemporary language which renders this line, "Save us from the time of trial." For me, this prayer means asking for God's grace in resisting the trap of entertaining temptation, which I can do by remembering Jesus' example and recalling God's desire for wholeness and abundance of life for me.

In the recitation of the Lord's Prayer each day, I am reminded that if I turn to God in my moments of temptation, then I, like Jesus, will be able to dismiss temptation's toxicity, and be fortified and empowered to live into the divine life which God has enabled in me.

The Prayer of Jesus

This interpretation of the Lord's Prayer comes from the Benedictine Women of Madison (Holy Wisdom Monastery, Madison, WI: 2007).

Holy One, our only Home,
blessed be your name,
may your day dawn,
your will be done,
here, as in heaven.
Feed us today, and forgive us,
as we forgive each other.
Do not forsake us at the test,
but deliver us from evil.
For the glory, the power,
and the mercy are yours
now and forever,
Amen.

FOR

the
KINGDOM

the
POWER



AS HUMANS MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE, WE CO-CREATE WITH GOD , BUILDING UP THE KINGDOM, USING GOD'S POWER, AND REFLECTING GOD'S GLORY. HOW MIGHT YOU OFFER YOURSELF MORE FULLY TO GOD IN THIS ?

Handwriting practice lines consisting of ten horizontal dotted lines.

WHERE ARE YOU IN TOUCH WITH GOD'S POWER AND GOD'S GLORY?
HOW CAN YOU CHANNEL THEM IN YOUR LIFE?

Handwriting practice lines consisting of ten horizontal dotted lines.



Lord, Teach Us to Pray

James Koester, SSJE

Several years ago, I found myself in a small, subterranean chapel within sight of the Old City of Jerusalem. It had once been a cave. At some point, a modern church was built over it. The floor was littered with scraps of paper. On them people had written prayers, and then dropped them through a grille in the floor of the upper church, onto the floor of this cave chapel, where I stood with Sr. Elspeth. Elspeth was an American. She had begun her religious life as a sister of the Order of Saint Anne, here in Arlington, Massachusetts. The deeper she entered the mystery of her vocation, the more she realized it was to the contemplative life she was called. So, there she was, a Carmelite nun of the Pater Noster Carmel, showing me the cave where, tradition says, Jesus taught his disciples the Lord's Prayer.

Like many of the holy sites in Jerusalem, it is impossible to know if this is *the* place where Jesus taught his disciples the Lord's Prayer. Nonetheless, this place has been hallowed by the memory of that occasion, as well as by the prayers of countless believers. Like our Monastery Chapel, the walls of that cave are soaked in prayer. You feel it the moment you enter.

Of all the prayers we pray, none is so universal, so loved as the Lord's Prayer. Wherever we go as Christians, we find others who love and pray this prayer. We may be divided by language, culture, race, gender, economics, education, ecclesiology, or theology, but we are united by this prayer and by praying it.

For all its familiarity, the Lord's Prayer is one of the most radical acts a Christian can do. It is radical, because from the first two words, we say something profound about ourselves and about God.

The prayer begins not with Almighty and Everlasting God, or Holy God. It does not begin with Merciful God, or Blessed Lord. It begins quite simply: Our Father. With those two words, we enter a relationship with all the people throughout time and space, who have ever said them, and we enter a relationship with the One whom we call Father.

At its heart, the Lord's Prayer is about *belonging*. That is what we proclaim whenever we say: Our Father. In those words, we proclaim that we belong to God.

And in praying this prayer, we proclaim that we belong to one another. It is through our relationship as the beloved daughters and sons of God that we are sisters and brothers to one another. Thus, we have the audacity to say "Our," in union with those near and far, those like us and those different from us. In this prayer of belonging, we affirm our common identity as God's children, and we place ourselves in relationship, with God and one another. In this age of individualism, being in relationship - especially with people who are not like us - is a radical act.

And we do more.

As we proclaim our belongingness to God and to one another, we affirm our common need and responsibility for one another. As the prayer progresses, we pray: give us, forgive us, save us, deliver us. Nowhere do we say *me* or *I*. Instead, we pray, *us, us, us, us*.

In this prayer, we come to God not as individuals, demanding our share, but as members of a community, who know our common need for sustenance, forgiveness,

salvation, and liberation. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from the evil one. In those words, we pray for all in need, and we take responsibility, not just for our own well-being, but for the well-being of others.

The Lord's Prayer unites us, makes us and shapes us into a communion, a community, a commonwealth, where none are left out, left behind, or left alone. In an age of self-interest, taking responsibility for the well-being of another, especially if they are not like us, is a radical act.

That is what I felt standing in that cave chapel. What was important was the union I felt with thousands, if not billions of Christians who have said those same words, no matter the language, the place, or the time.

No matter how different, they are my sisters and brothers, related not by blood, but by the waters of Baptism, and we all have the same Father.

In that prayer, they prayed for, cared for, and were concerned for me, just as I prayed for, cared for, and was concerned for them.

What I heard as Elspeth and I prayed together, was not just the familiar words, but also the echo of other voices, in other places, and other times, which joined our voices, making Elspeth's and my two rather feeble voices into *the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out: Our Father in heaven!*

It's easy to pray the Lord's Prayer. It trips lightly off our tongues.

In fact, we should pray it with fear and trembling, not as individuals cataloging our personal needs, but as part of a great chorus of believers, stretching across time and space, united as sisters and brothers of one Father, who are asking, not for our own needs, but for the needs of those we love and those we don't, those we know and those whom we may never know.

Praying the Lord's Prayer is perhaps the most radical thing a Christian can do. It reminds us who we are, and to whom we belong. It reminds us that we are not a collection of individuals, but the community of the redeemed who, in the words of SSJE's founder, Father Benson, "live like the saints not as separate individuals...but...as members of one living body."

We belong. And with this prayer, we remember that we live, not for ourselves, but for all those to whom we belong - God, our neighbor, and everyone who has ever said those words: *Our Father in heaven...*

Now

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Forever

OFFER TO GOD A PROMISE OR A PRAYER ABOUT RIGHT "NOW."

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OFFER A PROMISE OR PRAYER ABOUT THE FUTURE, GOD'S "FOREVER."

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