

Never leave a job unfinished. I promised to return to the Lord's Prayer. Last time, if you remember, we got as far as *Hallowed be thy name*. So let us start where we left off...

Thy Kingdom come is a prayer for God's rule to apply to us. Before you pray this prayer, be careful you understand what you're praying for. It's a bit like the three wishes: be careful what you wish for – you might just get it. God's Kingdom is the rule of justice and righteousness. Do you really want that? We have all heard trendy parsons praying for justice in various parts of the world and for what they like to call *social justice* in Britain – by which they mean, *Please God don't let the Tories get in*. But justice is much more troublesome than that.

Justice means getting what you deserve. So before you pray *Thy Kingdom come*, ask yourself, *Would I like to get what I deserve?* I suspect only Mr Pecksniff and Mr Bulstrode think so well of themselves that they would like to get what they deserve. It is self-righteous people – those full of self-esteem – who glibly and thoughtlessly ask to be given what they deserve. The saint, the truly godly person, is scared stiff of asking to be given his desserts – because he knows he is unworthy. God help us if we ever get what we deserve!

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Do you want God's will to be done in your life? I say *in your life* and not as the sanctimonious parsons mean *in Iraq or Africa or the United Nations*. I ask this because you can be sure that God's will for you is not what you will for yourself. What do most people want? Health for themselves and their families. To have a bit more money. What you've got is never quite enough is it? You know the saying, *You can never be too rich or too thin*. And added to these things, most people want a bit of recognition – some clowns want a lot of recognition: to be thought well of by one's fellows.

Well, to be thought well of by ones fellows it is necessary not to think well of yourself. What is God's will for you? It has nothing to do with seeing you comfortably off and all your peers saying *Yes Mr Smith, three bags full Mr Smith. What a fine fellow you are!* God's will for you is that you surrender your will to him. Self-esteem is not a virtue. It is a sin. And God wants you to will to love him, serve him and obey him.

The Gospel tells us to love God with all our heart. This is misleading in an age when *heart* is a word associated with touchy-feeliness and sentimentality. The original word in the Gospel means something much more like *will*, or *deepest desire*, *what you hold most dear*. That is what Our Lord refers to when he says, *Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*.

You want God's will to be done in your daily life? Then you are asking for God to turn your heart away from yourself and towards him, to seek his will. This means prayer and service, denying yourself and turning to God and the interests of your neighbour: actually being more interested in God and your neighbour than in yourself. As Jesus said, *Take up your cross and follow me*. So just think twice – when you pray *Thy will be done*, that's what you're praying for.

Give us this day our daily bread. That is, not what you'd like over the foreseeable future. In fact the one thing you can guarantee about the foreseeable future is that it's not foreseeable. You want to make God laugh? Tell him your plans. Your *daily bread* is not what you'd like at all. It's what you need. And it's what you need only for the immediate present. For the spiritual warfare you must constantly be fighting against your own evil and selfish impulses.

The Lord's Prayer is a prayer of crisis. It imagines us as under attack from evil all the day long. Some of this evil comes from outside ourselves. But most of it lurks within us – in our own sin and weakness and lack of devotion; in our self-esteeming persistence; in our failure to love God. *Give us this day our daily bread* is then a prayer for spiritual resources in the immediate crisis. And the embodiment of it is sacramental. Stop being full of yourself. Come to the Blessed Sacrament as often as possible and be filled with the bread of life, the life of God instead.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. It's another of Our Lord's jokes. We *don't* forgive those who trespass against us. We say, *D'you know what that bastard's done to me now? I'll settle his account, make no mistake!* Here Jesus is using supreme irony to teach us something overwhelmingly important. He is drawing our attention to the fact that we know, deep down, that we don't readily forgive one another. He is telling us just how wonderful the love of God is – for while we do not forgive one another, God still forgives us. As St Paul says, *God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

Of course, the understanding that God forgives us – bad as we are – ought to give us pause for thought and to try to forgive those who wrong us. But there's nothing sappy about this. Forgiveness does not mean condoning evil. And if what the other bloke is doing is against God's will and God's kingdom, God's revealed purposes, then the right thing to do is rebuke him. This is the justification for righteous warfare, for the criminal law and for discipline in the church. Forgiveness is not laxity. As the Spirit said to the church at Laodicea, *because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth.*

Lead us not into temptation. The pathetic modern version of this, I remember, was *Do not bring us to the test.* And all I could ever think when I heard this was that God didn't want me to go to Lord's to watch the Aussies. It is often said that God does not lead us into temptation. How strange then that it should say at the beginning of chapter four of St Matthew's Gospel: *Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.* And he was tested there.

We must remember that Christianity is the religion of crisis. We are being told every moment that we must decide. The evangelicals are right to talk about *making a decision for Christ.* But they are wrong if they think this is a once-and-for-all event. Crisis, I tell you. Crisis. There is no escape from it. Beautifully and shockingly put by Mr Eliot:

*For the pattern is new in every moment
And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been.*

In the crisis there is nothing for it but to cry out, *Deliver us from evil!* This is the climax of the Lord's Prayer to which it has been building all through. When newspapers talk about evil, they mean foreign dictators and home-grown paedophiles. When Tolkein or J.K.Rowling write about evil, they mean goblins and witches. When bishops talk about evil they refer to earthquakes and floods and stockbrokers. But the evil Our Lord says we must pray to be delivered from is our own evil.

And what does our evil consist in? Entirely in this: in our willing compliance with our worst instincts; in our obsessive desire to excuse ourselves; in that accursed thing *self-esteem*; in our refusal to admit our selfishness; in our coldness towards God; in our luke-warmness about our faith; in our lack of passion and zeal for Christ; in our half-belief and paltry commitment; in our preoccupation with anything but God.

For the theme of the Lord's Prayer is that everything except God and our relationship with him is trivial and beside the point. The Lord's Prayer is a prayer that every impediment to our total being with God be removed. There is nothing else but God and his love:

For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory; forever and ever. Amen