

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes
for Sunday, 26 July

Children's Talk: Who is the Prayer about?

I hope you had a chance last week to think about the different parts of the Prayer; to think about which parts matter to you right now.

This week, we are still talking about the Lord's Prayer. My question today is, "who is the Prayer about?" What would you say is the answer? I can think of two really good answers. The first one is the Lord. Of course the *Lord's* Prayer is about the Lord. But the other answer is Us. The Lord's Prayer is not just about the Lord, it's about the Lord and us together.

You can see this when you look at the words in the Prayer. I hope you can see this clearly. I've gone through and every time a word is used about the Lord, I've coloured and highlighted it with Red. Every time there is a word about us I have coloured and highlighted it with blue. So in red, we have:

- Father
- Thy (means Your) [name]
- Thy [kingdom]
- Thy [Will]
- Thine (means Yours) [is the Kingdom, Power, and Glory]

And in blue we have:

- Our [Father]
- [Give] us
- [Our] daily bread
- [Forgive] us
- our [debts]
- We [forgive]
- our [debtors]
- [lead] us [not]
- [Deliver] us

When we do this it helps us see a couple of things: it helps us see the difference between us and the Lord. We can see that the Lord gives, and we receive. We also see that life is about what the Lord's things more than it is about our things.

It also shows the connection between the Lord and us. It starts with both together: Our Father.

Then talks about the Lord

Then about us

Then ends on the Lord

It is back and forth and woven together between us and the Lord.

And that is what our relationship with the Lord is like: He provides, and we receive, but we are also constantly connected. You cannot separate the one from the other.

Revisiting the Lord's Prayer, Part 2: Freely Gotten, Freely Given Away

A Sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn
26 July, 2020

Today we continue to look at the Lord's Prayer. We say this prayer so frequently that it can lose **some** of its power, like a piece of furniture that we see so often we hardly even notice it anymore. Last week Malcolm talked about the first few lines, and how they focus our attention on the Lord, His qualities, and aligning our lives with His will. The next couple of lines pivot from focus on the Lord towards a focus on ourselves and the things that we need:

Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors. (Matthew 6:11-12)

These lines encompass the abundance of what we receive from the Lord, our inability to ever repay it, and the need to pass it on to others.

The first line, "Give us this day our daily bread" speaks to a certain necessity and even urgency of what we receive from the Lord. This urgency is carried through some of the specific words that are used here. First, the word "daily." This is an unusual Greek word that does not show up in any other context. It derives from word meaning essential or the very existence of a thing. This does not mean daily in the sense of "normal, ordinary, everyday." It means daily in the sense of that without which we could not survive from one day to the next. Indeed, without what the Lord provides, we could not even survive from one minute to the next. Jesus taught His disciples that He was this bread of life:

I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. (John 6:48-50)

Without the Lord to give us spiritual food, we would not survive. The teachings of the New Church explain what this spiritual food is:

The fact that goods and truths are man's real food may be clear to anyone, for the person who is deprived of them has no life within himself, and is a dead man. The food on which the soul of the person feeds who is dead in this sense consists of the delights arising from evils, and of the pleasures gained from falsities. These are the food of death. These delights and pleasures also derive from bodily, worldly, and natural things, which have no life at all within them. (*Arcana Coelestia* §680)

That we need good and truth, love and charity, from the Lord to even be alive can be hard to fathom. Our experience of life is mostly that we are sustained by physical food, by clothing and shelter, by the creature comforts that keep us going, and that occasionally we need the influence of the Lord to give us purpose or sort out some issue. The underlying reality of life though is that the Lord sustains us at every

moment. We can't directly feel this sustenance, which is why it can be hard to believe in.

But we can imagine what life would be without it. Imagine trying to be a husband or wife without any goodness or truth: everything your partner did would be an irritation. There would be no satisfaction in acting kindly towards them. Even the things they would do for you would never be enough, as you would always be left wanting more love, more support, more pleasure, more attention and on and on. Without the Lord allowing you to appreciate your partner's good qualities and to selflessly work as a team, marriage would be hell. Or imagine simple acts of recreation without the Lord: there would always be someone who had it better, someone to be jealous of, something to complain about because it fell short of your expectations. Selfishness can never be satisfied. Or imagine trying to have a job without any goodness or truth: every day would feel like slavery. There would be no satisfaction in accomplishing anything, because it would be negated by the desire to not have to work our all. There would be no satisfaction in serving others, since your entire focus would be on serving self. Work would be all about living for not having to work, and then resenting even free time because it would be overshadowed by the need to return to work. We depend daily on the goodness and truth from the Lord that allows us to find enjoyment in service and delight in not being the greatest. Without that goodness and truth, life would be a misery. Goodness and truth are as necessary to life as food and water.

At the same time though, we cannot take for granted the Lord's provision of these things. In the prayer we don't just acknowledge that we receive them, we demand that He gives them. That word, "give!" is in the imperative. It is a command given to the Lord. It would sound almost blasphemous if it wasn't the Lord Himself who taught us to pray this way. He teaches us that we must ask, even demand, that He gives us our daily bread. In the Gospel of Luke, the Lord even followed up the prayer with a parable emphasizing this point. In this parable, the Lord makes the odd seeming choice of comparing Himself to someone fast asleep who only bothers to help his neighbour to make him go away:

Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, "Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him"; and he will answer from within and say, "Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you"? I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. (Luke 11:5-8)

In the parable, the friend receives the asked for bread specifically because of his persistence. We actually need to be persistent with the Lord if we want to receive our daily bread regularly.

This mind-set of demanding, especially from the Lord, can be uncomfortable, perhaps at first because of a false modesty. There is a kind of false modesty that says, "I don't need you to do this for me! It's totally fine if you can't! You can say no if you want! I don't want to inconvenience you! But it would be nice." When we really mean, "I cannot get this done without your help." I call this false modesty because although it can be genuine (and if it is, by all means, keep doing it!) it can also be a way of maintaining our dignity if we get turned down. After all, if I don't need you, it's

alright if you say “no.” But if I say that I do need you, than you have real power over me.

And so it is with the Lord. If we say to the Lord, “it would be nice if you give me my daily bread, but I don’t need it. It’s alright if you say no.” Then we can remain independent. But if we demand our daily bread as a necessity, than we must admit that we are totally dependent on the Lord with no strength of our own. I remember vividly a minister talking about “begging” the Lord for help as we try to repenet. And how in the modern world that word feels so wrong. Surely it would be better to say “asking,” or “requesting.” Those words are so much nicer. I know I felt uncomfortable (and still do thinking back on it) when he suggested using that phrase. And for me it does come down to trying to maintain my independence. I don’t want anyone to know that I am dependent on them, that without their help I won’t be able to get through this life on my own! But that is the reality. I *am* dependant on other people’s help. And I am certainly dependant on the Lord’s help. The sooner I realize that the sooner I’ll be able to demand, and so receive, the help that I need. Lord, *give us today the daily bread, the bread that we cannot live without.*

The necessity of our daily bread leads nicely into the next line of the Prayer: “forgive us our debts.” Now when Malcolm first suggested we address all these lines together in one sermon I was sceptical. But as I studied them the connection became obvious. If the Lord gives us every single day what we need, then surely we owe Him an immense debt. A debt so large that we could never possibly repay it. Framing it in modern terms, I wonder if we might say it as, “write off our bad debts” because there’s certainly no way we are going to pay it back.

Unfortunately, we sometimes try to “pay back” that debt, for much the same reason we avoid admitting we need something: being in someone’s debt puts us in their power, paying off the debt restores the balance. With people, we see this tendency in a discomfort that many people have accepting freely given help. I was talking to someone the other day who got sick and tired of ending every message she sent with “thank you” after she had gone through a tragedy. People were freely giving her support, but it became hard to receive so much without being able to give anything back. It took humility to learn how to receive, and not just to give. Likewise, with the Lord we have to learn to accept what we cannot pay back. Bargaining has no place in a relationship with the Lord. There is no way of saying, “Lord, if you do X for me, I’ll do Y for You.” As He urges as in the prophet Isaiah:

Ho! Everyone who thirsts,
Come to the waters;
And you who have no money,
Come, buy and eat.
Yes, come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without price.
Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And let your soul delight itself in abundance. (Isaiah 55:1-2)

Don’t get got up in thinking the Lord will only give you what you need up to a point and then stop, or that what He gives will only be proportional to what you can give back. Receive, now, right away, in humility. Don’t wait until you feel that you have earned it or deserve it.

That being said, my whole point seems to be contradicted by the very next line of the Prayer, “as we forgive our debtors.” Isn’t the Lord saying that our debts are only forgiven if we forgive other people? That sounds pretty conditional or limited. There certainly is a connection between God forgiving us and us forgiving others, but it is important to not think of these in transactional terms. For one thing, although the debts are similar, they can never compare in scope: what others owe us is nothing in comparison to what we owe the Lord. We could write off each and every debt we are owed and cancel out every trespass committed against us, and still it would not be comparable to what the Lord has done for us (see Matthew 18:22-35).

The truth is that although it seems we first forgive others, and then as a reward the Lord forgives us, the reality is that it is the other way around: in forgiving us, the Lord gives us the ability to forgive others as well. If we choose not to forgive others, then we reject the ability that the Lord has already freely given to us through His forgiveness. This definition of forgiveness is not common, so I think it is worth reading it as defined in the Teaching of the New Church:

Being able to be maintained by the Lord in the good of love and the truths of faith and to be withheld from evils and falsities constitutes the forgiveness of sins; and at the same time keeping well away from evil and falsity and detesting them constitutes repentance.

When the Lord forgives us our debts, it is not a matter of Him saying, “I’ve forgotten all the bad stuff you’ve done, don’t worry about it.” His forgiveness actual lies in Him saying, “In spite of all the bad stuff you’ve done, I’m still going to give you the chance to change; take this as an opportunity to do the same for others.” Or in the words that the Lord actually used: “Freely you have received; freely give” (Matthew 10:8). Rather than try to pay back the Lord, we can use the infinite opportunities He has given us to pass it on to others.

This brings us back around to where we began: the daily bread, the spiritual sustenance that we are given at every moment, free of charge, so that we can enjoy life, make choices, and become useful. As we receive freely, we can also give from our abundance. And as we are forgiven freely, we can forgive others. Accept what the Lord offers, even demand it of Him, so that you can receive, and in turn give it away. *Amen.*