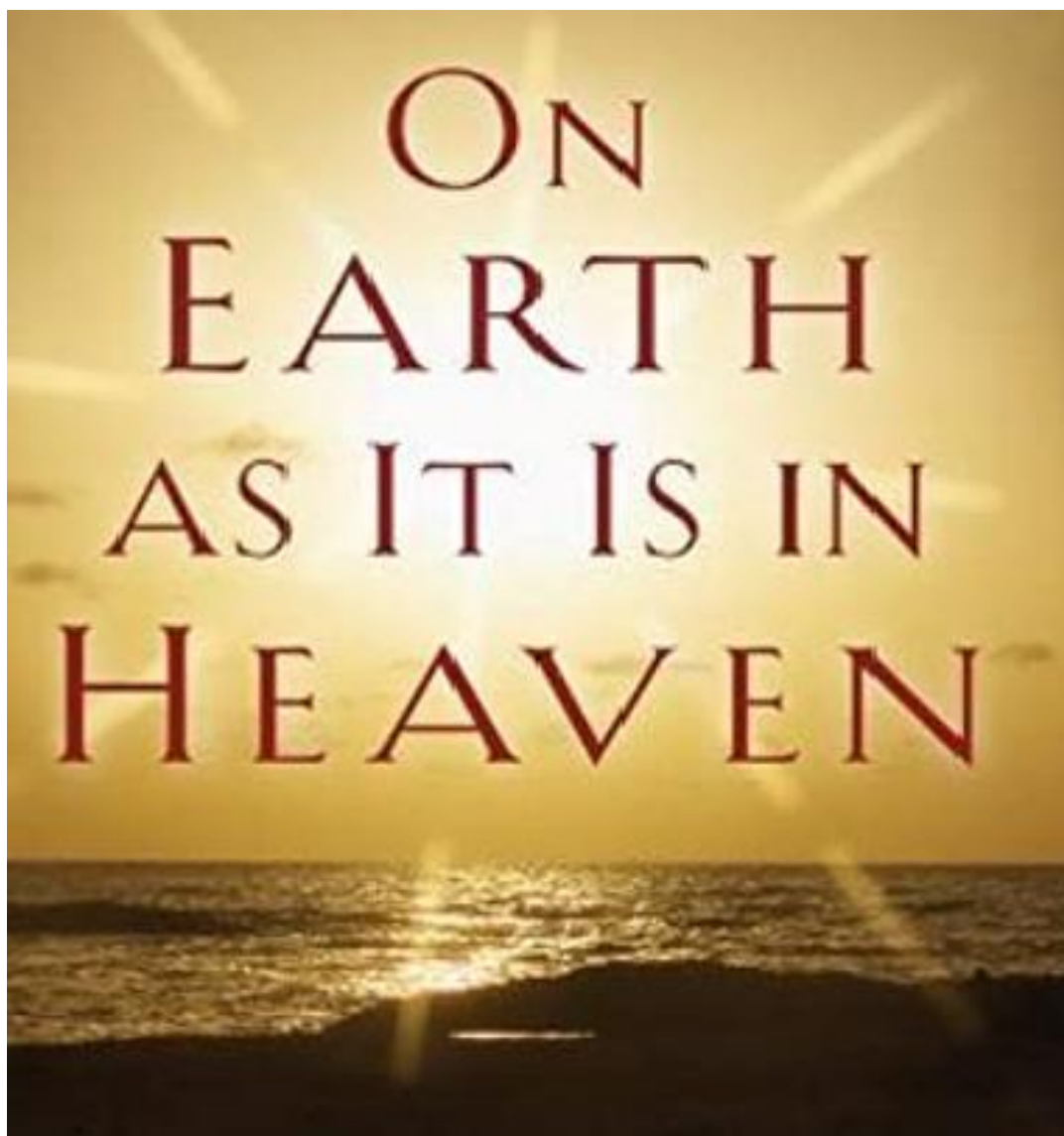


THE LORD'S PRAYER

Commentary by
Rev. Christopher V. A. Hasler



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Christopher V. A. Hasler

*The ancients performed holy acts of worship in groves and in gardens
under trees according to their representations*

– Emanuel Swedenborg: AC 10,644

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The reference to "A.C." used in the text is the work *Arcana Caelestia* by Emanuel Swedenborg (1688 - 1772)

"Our Father, who art in the heavens, Hallowed be Thy name"

Before we begin to examine the Lord's Prayer we may well ask two questions:-

- (1) Do we need to be instructed about prayer? Is it not something that comes through experience?
- (2) What is prayer?

As to the first question we should remember that the disciples went to the Lord and asked: "*Lord, teach us how to pray.*" (Luke 11: 1) Therefore they felt that they did not know how to pray instinctively and needed instruction, which the Lord gave them.

And what is a prayer? The simplest definition says: "**PRAYER IS SPEECH WITH GOD**". This does not mean a speech to God, but with God, and that establishes a very important aspect of prayer. It is not merely telling God what our wishes or needs are, but it is speaking and listening. One must be ready to receive a reply and listen to it. One must be ready to change one's attitude, for it is speech with God and not just a soliloquy.

The full definition of prayer is worth quoting: "*Prayer is speech with God. Through it, when the man is in the right state is received certain enlightenment and perception.*" (A.C. 2535).

There can be no doubt that many prayers are not effective. They show no results; they are meaningless repetition and make the speaker in no way conscious of God. If such an experience is repeated over a certain period of time, prayer is seen as a useless habit and is often discontinued. So thousands of people stop praying. It seems just too silly to carry on. The reason is that for a prayer to be effective, a person must be in the right state. Only then can they speak with God and receive that certain enlightenment.

And the right state is summarised by the word "humility", for what are we doing in a prayer? We are tuning our mind and heart to God, to our Creator, and in so doing we are acknowledging our dependence on Him. We need Him and we need something from Him. To have this thought sincerely in our mind means to put away the feeling of self sufficiency, pride or conceit.

If you can just quietly have this thought in your mind: "What am I? What is my strength, my life, my ability? Are they something that I have made or created? Am I not completely dependent on Him who is Life Itself?" If you can have just that simple thought, it is already a prayer, a communion with God, because you are receiving a certain perception which will, at least to some extent, reveal your life and its problems in the right light. This world is not quite so overwhelming when we have the deeper awareness of God which comes as we humbly acknowledge our need of His help.

Perhaps this may sound quite unnecessary, but experience teaches otherwise - a prayer must begin, not with the thought of self, but of God. We naturally pray because we have certain needs, because the self is seeking help, but we must look towards God, quite deliberately and think of Him. We must "*enter into the closet and shut the door*". We must endeavour to turn the innermost thoughts and feelings toward Him and shut out the world. Each prayer, if we are to be in the right state, must begin with that idea: "*Our Father who art in the heavens....*"

The Lord said: "*After this manner, therefore pray ye...*" Our prayers are not necessarily confined to the words of the Lord's Prayer, but to the manner, to the pattern which it reveals. And so, if not with the same words, then with a similar idea, the true prayer should begin: "*Our Father who art in the heavens....*"

That naturally brings us to a most important point, who is the Father to whom we must pray? It must be one whom we know. It is no good having a father if you do not know him. The very word "father" suggests a certain intimate relationship - familiarity in its good sense.

And of course we know Him - who is our Heavenly Father. He is our Lord Jesus Christ. One of the best loved prophecies of His birth speaks of Him in these words:

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6).

And the Lord said: "*Who has seen me, has seen the Father.*" The Lord instructed us to pray in His name and without going into long historical and theological explanations, it is surely obvious that unless we pray to the Lord directly and without any reserve, then we shall pray to an unknown God, to an invisible God, to a complete mystery and thus our mind will have no focus, but be dispersed in darkness.

If you want to see and know your Father, then pray to the Lord. He has "*all power in heaven and in earth*" (Matthew 28: 18) and it is quite impossible to conceive of the Infinite God except in the Human which has declared Him.

A prayer is a simple need of the soul and of the mind and so we should have a simple, child like idea of our heavenly Father. We do not have to study theology in order to pray. We can think of the Lord Jesus Christ, not as the dying figure on the cross, but as the Risen, Glorified God, whose nature and character we know from the Gospel. There is only one God and He has revealed Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ. We would be foolish to throw away this simple and clear idea which focuses our thoughts on the Lord most naturally and in great clarity. We see Him. We approach Him as the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End of our worship.

Why should the prayer say "*Our Father*", why the collective plural "our"?

Because when we look to the Lord Jesus Christ in a prayerful attitude we are affected by His love and so we are drawn closer to all our fellowmen. A prayer should never be exclusive of others; certainly never should we wish anything at the expense of others. He is our Father, so that each one of us personally cannot claim special dispensations or privileges. In drawing closer to Him, we draw closer to our brethren and also to angels who are our brethren in heaven.

In a true prayer we not only enter into communion with the Lord Himself, but into a communion with the spiritual world, with the realm of light and love, and this is why we can pray not only for our own needs, but even for the needs of others. Such prayers are called intercessory prayers and sometimes people often ask themselves: "What is the use of praying?" Isn't God doing all He can to preserve peace and concord? Does He need reminding that someone is sick and needs healing?" It is plainly written: "*For your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask Him....*" Yet the Lord told us to ask and He Himself prayed often and also prayed for His disciples.

The prayer provides an effective basis into which the spiritual forces can flow more readily. Although it is true that the Lord knows our every need, the point is that we do not know them and only as we begin to pray does our mind and heart become open to receive. "*Seek, and you shall find; ask, and it shall be given you.*" But how can you find your needs and receive help if your mind is not at all seeking or asking? And how can the angelical and spiritual forces become effective in us and around us if we do not enter into communion with the Lord? But as we pray for our needs and for the needs of those we love, there is a wonderful linking up of forces, a greater host is concerned with the common danger, with the evil, the disease that threatens men.

That is the point. As we lift up our hearts and minds to our Father, we become conscious that He is our Father in the heavens! That we are a part of a great heavenly host. We see that we are not alone in our struggle; help is on every side; love is on every side; heaven is around us.

Our trouble is not that we ask for too much, but that we do not ask enough. Think of the tremendous power for good, for order, for beauty, which presses down upon the world from the Lord and through the heavens.

Think of the angelical desire to be of service to us, to strengthen, enlighten, heal, protect, lead and think of the pitiable trickle that gets through to us, because we do not pray enough and when we pray, we do not pray aright. We are very blind and even in the act of asking, we doubt that the Lord will do - or can do - what we ask of Him. When the two blind men appealed to Him, He asked them: "*Believe ye that I am able to do this?*" (Matthew 9: 27).

Can you see now how a prayer should begin? We deliberately (and it may need some practice) think of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Visible God. We turn our attention to Him alone and we think also of heaven, of its reality and its presence even in this world.

Perhaps you have noticed that this deliberate approach is intellectual. We have to harness our thoughts and hold them and keep them pointing in one direction - to God. If we allow them to run away in all directions, the rest of the prayer will be nothing but words mechanically repeated from memory. But if you have at all a clear picture of the Lord, there is no reason why you should not hold your attention upon Him, and as you do, the heart responds to the thoughts of the mind: "*Hallowed be Thy name*".

To hallow is to hold in reverence and that is an emotional experience. It is the outpouring of love. We cannot hallow God by any rituals, by crossing, by kneeling, by any words of the Liturgy, but directly by our heart. It is an outcome of experience and life, and it is the reward of our humility. As we put away from us the feeling of self satisfaction and look to Him, He responds and we become aware of His presence. Reverently we desire Him and hallow His name.

His name, of course, is not merely the sound of so many letters of our alphabet. His name is not just the word or words "God", "Jesus Christ", "the Almighty". His name is the symbol or the realisation of all that He is and of all that He desires to do for us.

Remember what the angel said to Joseph. "*You shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.*" (Matthew 1: 21). His name Jesus means Salvation. His whole being is His desire to bring us to Himself and give us perfect life and perfect happiness, freedom from evil, freedom from sin, freedom from strife and pain, which corrode human society.

How then could we fail to be moved with the sweetest emotions and deepest reverence as we remember what His name means to us, His character, which is our Salvation, His love, His help, His Word.

It is not difficult to begin a prayer if we think of Him and acknowledge humbly our great need of Him.

"Our Father, who art in the heavens, Hallowed be Thy name".

"Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, as in Heaven, so upon the earth ..."

In recent years a number of religious and scientific institutions have been holding experiments in the efficacy of prayer. Certain seeds were prayed over and planted, others were merely planted. The results published in reports and a number of illustrated magazines show that those seeds and plants that had been surrounded by

a prayerful and reverent atmosphere were much stronger, healthier and grew quicker. There could be no doubt in the result.

These experiments were not designed to tempt God into giving a sign, but were a sincere attempt to see if there was any power in prayer, if in fact it brought spiritual forces nearer.

And it does!

What then will be the result if we pray for the spiritual harvest, not in a spirit of doubt, but with a clear purpose?

We come now to the first request when we ask the Lord that His kingdom come and His will be done. Surrounded as we are by international unrest and anxiety, most of us must feel quite sincerely about this. We want to see peace on earth and the reign of universal law based on the Divine laws of love and order. But in the prayer, we pray not only for the world situation, but for ourselves and this is something that we should understand clearly. As we say: "*Thy kingdom come*", it is obvious that unless our words are meaningless, we must be ourselves ready to accept the kingdom. That is where we can most effectively cooperate with the Lord.

Those words are, in a sense, a promise and resolution that the kingdom will be established in our life. It is a choice and a constant reaffirmation of that choice that the Lord is our candidate and we pledge our full support to His policy.

I have purposely chosen a political idiom to deal with these words, because this is a question of the choice of policy. Every person has some guiding policy, some philosophy of life which reigns supreme. They have their particular reasons for behaving in the way they do and they justify that behaviour.

One of the most dominating ideas today is atheism, materialism and the naturalistic outlook. That idea is king in the minds of many and the putting of this idea into effect is the kingdom. And make no mistake about it, this kingdom is being forced on mankind.

In our prayer we are doing the opposite, for we are turning to the Lord and asking Him to be our head, our guiding principle, our King of Truth; and not the tyrant of darkness and materialism, selfishness and cruelty. The prayer is leading us to make this choice and it does appear that Christians misunderstand the issue. They do not realise always as clearly as they should that there are two kingdoms claiming our minds and hearts.

Similarly, the Lord's loving appeal is often misunderstood when He calls:

"Come unto me, all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and

you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."
(Matthew 11: 28-30).

We are yoked to one kingdom or the other and that is the choice. It might appear that the choice lies between being free or bearing the yoke of the Lord. No, the choice is between the yoke of hell and its savage lusts and enslavement and the free bond of mutual love between us and the Lord Jesus Christ. His yoke is the tie of love which we accept in freedom and that is why it is easy. It is like the tie which unites the happily married partners who are true to each other. They love the yoke of love which holds them together. But between evil and selfish partners this becomes unbearable and becomes the yoke of hell, which is most difficult to bear.

And the burden of the Lord is His truth which we have to carry in our minds. Have you ever compared the transparency and lightness of truth against the machinations and intrigues of lies? Have you ever met the person who tells lies but just cannot carry them all in their mind and contradicts them self? That is a simple example of the choice which is before us.

The Lord's kingdom has reference to the orderly government of His TRUTH. That is how the Lord becomes our King, when His truth begins to reign within us.

"You say that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause I came into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." (John 18: 37)

Therefore, in our prayer, we make more than a petition, we declare our readiness to submit ourselves to the Lord's truth and commandment, always remembering that it will achieve nothing to sit and wait for the kingdom to come to us from without: it must be established within.

"The kingdom of God comes not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17: 20-21)

In Revelation 5:10, it is written: *"You have made no kings and priests unto God"*. This is a picture of the regenerate, spiritual person. We are called kings when we are guided by truth and priests when we become fully responsive to the Lord's love or His will.

"Thy will be done, as in heaven, so upon the earth":

What is His will?

"It is not the will of your Father that one of these little ones should perish."
(John 18:14)

And so, quite simply, the Lord's will is that everyone should be saved, should enter heaven and enjoy true happiness to all eternity. That is why He created man and that

is why He came on earth, when this great purpose of creation became threatened by the growing power of the hells:

"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (John 10: 10)

And yet, people often have a very cynical idea of God's will. When they think of His will, they think of the trials and miseries, diseases and pain. They remember the natural disasters and especially wars. These things are certainly not His will, even if He allows them in order that we might see the fruits of our disorderly wills: thus in freedom we may have the opportunity to learn what we are. We are the very antithesis of what the Lord is, what His will is. These terrors would disappear if His will were obeyed, for it is beauty and order; and if we wish to know what happens when His will is obeyed and received, we only have to read about the kingdom of heaven.

All the angels are united by the one universal Influx of Life. Their minds are enlightened and guided by Divine Truth; their minds animated by the Lord's Love. And so it is the Lord Himself who rules in the heart of every angel by His presence and so there is harmony and order.

Yet, harmony does not mean uniformity. The orchestra contains many instruments, but they play in harmony when led by one able conductor. So also, the angels are all different and individual, but they are all united by this one common principle, that they love the Lord and their neighbour more than themselves.

And so it is the Divine of the Lord which makes heaven with the angels and it is His Divine presence which can make heaven with us on earth.

"Thy will be done, as in heaven, so upon the earth".

This heaven is not only the spiritual abode of the angels, but it is also the spiritual part within our mind. We have a little heaven within us, but it is very weak. We know what is right. We feel what is good, but that is all. The Lord expressed it in this way:

"The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak." (Mark 14: 38)

Here we have another illustration of the heaven and earth of our prayer brought to practical terms. In the unregenerate person the earth has its own way. It rules over the finest principles that are dictated by heaven and the Lord Himself. The natural tendencies win every time, perhaps without any conflict. Yet the person who knows the Lord's Prayer has something heavenly in their mind and life and we ask for help that this spiritual part might gain ascendancy over the earth, over the weak flesh, over the habits of years, indifference and nastiness in our character. There must be that heavenly light within us and some awareness of the Lord's will and love before we can begin to bring heaven into our daily lives. We have wonderful knowledges and

beautiful perceptions of beauty and love and they are our heaven, but we want to become the image of heaven on the earth.

How then, can this phrase be translated very simply in human lives?

In our mind we realise how the perfect life is lived by the angels, how their every expression is the Lord's love in operation, a life of continual loving service seeking to make others happy. When, in our daily work, we do all things from the love of others, then we do it from the Lord's will. It is He in us bringing love and happiness to all. Only thus will His kingdom be established and His will done on earth as it is done in heaven.

"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, as in heaven, so upon the earth"

"Give us this day our daily bread..."

You are familiar with the lowing of cattle in the stall when they are hungry; with the meowing of the cat for milk. We need physical sustenance just as the animals do, but surely these words of the prayer are more than the cry of the hungry animal demanding its daily feed!

It is good for us to realise that we are dependent on God, Who is Life. If we can see this clearly enough, we shall be nearer to reality and so we shall be able to live in a greater harmony with the Lord and cooperate with His Divine purposes. We shall become labourers in His vineyard, but always we shall bear in mind that all is from Him:

"And God said. Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself upon the earth: and it was so." (Genesis 1: 11)

Therefore, even if we know no more than that in the prayer we are confessing God to be the source of all our nourishment which He increases year by year, we shall benefit by such an awareness. But surely we want to know more than that, especially when we remember the Lord's words:

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." (Matthew & Luke 4: 4)

"Labour not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you." (John 6: 27)

In other words, we must not live merely to eat. It is not enough to be like the animal that has to eat to keep alive. A person's physical needs can be measured in calories, just as a car does so many miles to the gallon; but the physical is only a small part of a person, the most external part. There must be more if a person is to be satisfied.

They must strive and attain greater things if he is to be fulfilled. They must be fed by spiritual nourishment.

But let this point be quite clear: the work of the spirit is not a separate life, far removed from all physical needs and domestic or civil duties. The spiritual life is the ability to bring something of God into our daily lives.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate this would be to look at the miracle of feeding the five thousand (John 6: 1-14). There was a very great crowd of people in that place, five thousand men, to which you may add women and children, and they had nothing to eat. Only one boy is reported to have had "*five barley loaves and two small fishes*". What the boy could have done?

1. The most natural reaction would have been to go quietly aside and behind some rock or bush and eat his little provisions. The loaves and fishes would have been worth just so many calories, but at the same time a perfect example of the food which perishes.
2. He might have been a little less selfish and shared his food with two or three of his immediate friends. What could be more natural than to help your friends, who will help you next time? Surely this is a very common attitude, give and take; help when you can; play the game! But even in such a case the five loaves and two fishes could do no wonders or satisfy more than any other five loaves and two fishes can normally satisfy.

But the boy did the best possible thing; he went to the Lord with what he had and so his offerings were infinitely multiplied and in that sense became the food which endures unto everlasting life.

This is how we lead our lives, how we labour from day to day. Either we are entirely selfish and feed our physical frame alone, or we do good according to our own lights from our own strength. We are nicer to live with in this case, but we are still only dealing with perishing values. When we look to the Lord, then we are filled with effectual power which is something far beyond our capabilities and the Lord needs human labours, our labours, in order to "*fill the hungry with good things.*" (Luke 1: 53)

How can this be? How can ordinary labours or actions assume lasting values and have the spiritual nourishment within them? What is it that makes them so? The Lord states quite plainly;

"I am the bread of life: he that comes to me shall never hunger." (John 6: 35)

The Lord's LOVE is the spiritual bread or nourishment which alone can satisfy the human soul.

This word "love" is one of the most frequently used words and one of the least understood words. Who could tell you what love is? People often think it is a sort of feeling which we have. But love is the very life of a person. It is the spiritual substance which flows from the Lord, or rather, in which we are immersed as in an infinite ocean. It is food in the highest sense, because love restores us, vivifies us, gives new energy, and strengthens the feeble. It is the source of all our being. Until we learn to see and recognise the Lord's Love as a real thing, as the spiritual substance, we shall never understand our life, or even how a prayer can be effective. Our life is true life to the extent that we have that love within us. Without it, we are weaklings in the realm of the spirit and so in our prayer we ask the Lord to give us that bread which will remove the hunger and weakness and if that prayer is humble and sincere, it cannot fail to be answered, because the Lord's Love is pressing upon us. Only our character stops it from entering.

Remember one important thing. Although the Lord calls Himself the "Bread of Life" in order to show us His power to fill the spirit of mankind with the everlasting food, He also hungers: "*I was hungry, and you gave me no meat*" (Matthew 25 : 42)

The Lord feels human hunger as His hunger. He feels it when His Love finds no demand and cannot give itself away to others. The Lord cannot give His Love to those who do not want it, or those who make no use of it. A ship cannot be steered if it is stationary. A person cannot be moved or affected by the Lord if they stand still. If they do not labour or love others outside them self, there is no demand and the supply comes to a standstill. Just as an engine cannot be refilled with oil and petrol unless it is running, so also we will not ask for the Lord's Love meaningfully unless we have a need for it and that need is found in the daily life and duties which we perform hour by hour.

Can you see now why the Lord teaches us to ask Him for our daily bread? It is not merely a confession that all things come from Him, but the Lord desires us to ask, to demand, from Him the spiritual bread, the Divine Love which will create a new life within us, give us new powers, new perceptions, deeper happiness. It will fill our soul with His presence.

And so as we say those words: "*Give us this day our daily bread*", let them be understood with a clear purpose as we look to Jesus Christ:

"Lord, give me that love which alone will make my labours of enduring importance; give me that strength and life which will enable me to see this world as a wonderful opportunity to love and to serve others. I cannot do it in my own strength. I can only do it if I am nourished by the bread of life, which is Thyself in my heart. And I need Thee daily, continually, for without Thee, I can do nothing which will not perish with time."

"Give us this day our daily bread..."

"And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors."

When the Lord Jesus Christ gave to the disciples the form of the prayer which is known to us by His Name, the subject of forgiveness is the only one that He expounded and commented on, and said:

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6: 14-15)

From this special emphasis which the Lord placed on forgiveness, we can surely see that He meant us to think about it very deeply and seriously. In fact, the first lesson that mankind has to learn before there can be permanent peace is this lesson of forgiveness. This is where the true love to the neighbour begins.

Today we do hear about many champions of the people, but the champion of the underprivileged classes is not really loving their neighbour if their love for the one class creates in them an unreasonable hatred of another class. Such is the person that their hatred will surely be keener and greater than their love and will ultimately destroy it. They will end up by loving them self alone. True progress can only come from those whose love is purified by forgiveness and humility. It is achieved by those who not only love their own, but can also understand, respect, forgive and love others.

What then is forgiveness, stripped down to its essentials? We are taught:

"To forgive, means to regard others from good and not from evil." (A.C. 7697)

This then is the first necessity for all human intercourse and conduct: "To regard others from good and not from evil" This does not mean that we should be carried away by foolish sentiments and be indiscriminate towards all forms of evil and unrighteousness. The Lord is an example, for though forgiving, He was ever ready to correct and even condemn the evils and falsities He met. The chief object of forgiveness is to regard and treat people without hatred or anger. We shall still have to correct our children: we shall have to point out wrong practices in public life: we shall have to challenge injustice: - but without harbouring resentment for the past; without passion and arrogance; with kindness and understanding.

It is common experience that in our daily contact with others we are continually disturbed and upset by their decisions, talk and behaviour. Our plans are thwarted, our hopes banished, our enjoyment spoiled, our rights unfulfilled In many ways our life in the world is very precarious because we are living among people who react very differently to us and can, if we let them, destroy our peace of mind. On the other hand, we believe that this is precisely the purpose of our life in the world, to

bring us face to face with adverse circumstances; to bring us into association with every type of human mind. Such will not be the ease in the spiritual world. There we shall be associated with those who are of similar disposition. They will not have any disturbing influences upon us and so we shall be able to develop and enlarge the character we have formed here to greater perfection. But the foundation of that character has to be laid here and now in the sphere of disharmony and clashes of opinion. We have to listen to and read objectionable ideas and we must make up our minds about them. We must steel ourselves against pitfalls and contrary circumstances. We have to attain an inner strength and understanding that will not be thrown off balance every time something crosses our path.

And the only way we can fortify ourselves against the disturbances around us, against unpleasant neighbours, disobedience, wrongs and difficulties, is by forgiveness and the right attitude to others. The phrase of the Lord's Prayer which is before us for our consideration is a complete answer to our problem:

"And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors".

This is a conditional request and forgive us to the extent that we ourselves forgive. I wonder if we always realise what responsibility we place upon ourselves as we say these words! It may appear that the Lord does not want to forgive except on a certain condition. The truth is that He cannot forgive. But let this be understood clearly. The Lord is Love Itself and His Love for us has no bounds, whatever our condition may be, but He cannot enter our heart and dwell there if our heart is full of evils and disorders, as is the case when we are unforgiving, because the inability to forgive is a sign that we regard others from evil, anger and hatred and these are murder in its beginning.

There is no other reason behind our inability to forgive and this is something that you must see within yourself by self examination. Analyse your attitude towards the person of whom you are accustomed to say: "Oh, I have no time for them", and you will find that hating that person gives you a certain amount of pleasure and satisfaction. This is now a personal problem, because we all have some men or women whom we dislike and who irritate us. We are not talking now of seeking complete agreement, but of the attitude which we feel towards those who are in disagreement with us. We must work on this problem and remove every feeling of anger and hatred that shut out the Lord's love from our hearts. Evil spirits desire to drag us down to hell by inspiring us with their own delights of poisonous hatred and revenge and malice.

Can you say those words: *"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"*, if you feel something of that? Would it not be blasphemy?

An address can do only so much and no more. It can outline and explain a truth, but the hearers and readers must think about it. Can you see why the Lord's own forgiveness is conditional?; because as soon as we refuse to harbour hatred and anger and suspicion, then the Lord can enter, although He wants to enter into our heart and mind every moment. He appeals to us again and again in His Word:

"Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eye; cease to do evil; learn to do well..." (Isaiah 1: 16)

"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you; leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5: 23-24)

And so the Lord can forgive us. His forgiveness is complete, because, of course, He was never angry with us even in our folly and error. And because He forgives freely, He seeks no repayment of past sins or expiation for them by self imposed mortification. The important thing is that we should have a heart purified of animosity or anger and even if these were in our heart in the past, they are now dead. And we should not return to them or remember them:

"Jesus said unto him. Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead". (Matthew 8: 22)

His forgiveness is ours and we are conscious of it because it is the presence of His love. *"To forgive means to regard others from good..."* The Lord always regards us from good, but how seldom are we conscious of it as we battle with the world and with those around us! But this phrase of the Lord's Prayer is a mighty call to every Christian. It is the Lord knocking on the door of our hearts and putting into our mouths His words, so that, having understood them, we can kneel and become purified of all the tensions and ill feelings that we have accumulated over the years and over the day. Two enemies kneeling together and repeating the Lord's Prayer should rise friends.

The power and life which is contained in these words is past description, because when you are ready and willing to say sincerely what the Lord has taught you to pray, you will rise from your prayer a new person, a person completely at peace with the world; a person with clear conscience who has no corroding hatreds in their heart any more, but who is conscious of the Lord's love and presence which have enabled them to be in communion with the very heavens.

Repeat not those words as though they had no meaning, as though they did not lay a spiritual responsibility on you, because salvation is in them!

"And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors..."

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil".

When we were thinking about the phrase: "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so upon the earth", we saw that in one sense the heaven and earth are both represented in our mind and life. There is the higher, nobler, spiritual part which is in harmony with the Lord and without which we would have no ideals, without which we could not advance at all. There is also the lower part, the earth of our being, in which the heavens are not reflected, in which the will of God is not done and which, in short, is in harmony with hell. And this part leads and rules, so that the other is only an echo of a dream world. The order of our life is inverted; the purpose of religion is to create in us the image of God.

Yet many people do not even realise that there is any evil in them and in fact, the lowest and most sensual people think themselves good enough. And when a person thinks they are good enough, they certainly aren't, because they have never tried to improve them self, struggled with their faults or selfishness.

The noblest and the finest person think otherwise, for they know that in order to attain perfection and strength over their weaknesses, they must wrestle with their nature. This is how we come to the subject of temptations; for temptations are the struggles that go on between good and evil in our life. They are the spiritual battles for mastery and they are a vast subject and the Word is full of descriptions of temptations, not only when they are described quite openly as the Lord's temptations in the wilderness, but also when the subject is veiled by correspondences and we read about the calming of the storm, the battles against the heathen nations, the trials in the wilderness. All these represent the struggles and trials of the spiritual person against his nature.

In each such struggle, greater forces are engaged than we realise. The truth we have learnt and the desire to keep it are inspired into us by the Lord and upheld in us by the presence of good, heavenly forces, for we all at times experience the sphere of heaven. But these resolutions and holy associations are soon attacked by evil spirits who are infuriated by this new influence in our life. The Lord once said:

"....then comes the wicked one, and catches away that which was sown in his heart." (Matthew 13. 19)

Temptations are due to the attacks of the evil spirits with whom we have association and are their attempts to destroy us. They are the enemy that sows tares among the wheat of spiritual life, the unclean spirits who wish to repossess the house of our soul in greater numbers after we have driven them out on the wave of our first enthusiasm. (Matthew 13: 25 and 12: 43). They skilfully awaken our lower loves and desires and make them increasingly more delightful before our eyes, so that we seem to be giving up our very life for a phantom of idealism.

It also appears to us that God is the source of temptation: His truth caused our doubts and anxieties. We never had them before and lived in peace. There is a text in Isaiah 45:7 which reveals something of the background of temptation:

"I form the light, and create darkness, I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things."

These words suggest that God is responsible for good and evil and creates them both, even though they are opposites. However the real meaning is to show us what happens in the human mind when it is influenced by God. The person who has no spiritual principles in their life seems to them self to be a fine person. They have no mental struggles or doubts concerning their character. They are as a person in twilight that cannot see much around them self, but they do not think about it, or where their steps are leading them. But when the spiritual light is introduced into their mind, there is a change. It is the nature of light to throw shadows, to reveal what is ugly and deformed. The dark shadows are not caused by the light, but by the obstacles that stand in the way. And so it is with us. You learn a simple truth, a simple commandment and it will show up much within you which is dark and disorderly and of which you had been unaware. And while you were unaware, while you were in the mental gloom and twilight in which you could not distinguish one thing from another, one action from another, one motive from another, then you were blameless.

"Jesus said to them. If you were blind, you should have no sin: but now you say, We see; therefore your sin remains." (John 9: 41).

The light is shining and you see.

"I form the light, and create darkness."

And similarly, when we are affected by Divine love and peace; when we taste of the order by pleasures and quiet joys in which He is present, we come to realise the shallow nature of those things we loved and enjoyed. We see how evil they were. The Lord enables us to see all this, but still the darkness and evil are not in Him, but in us. Temptations also are not of His making, but are caused by our attachment to the disorderly things of life which we do not want to give up. The apostle James wrote in his Epistle (1: 13-14);

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempts He any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."

When we realise some of the evils which are within us, some of the inclinations which can be easily aroused and excited, we also see that of ourselves we have no power to overcome them. We must turn to Him from Whom all truth and goodness comes, and Who has promised us to deliver us.

"Lead us not into temptation".

This is not only a plea, but also a confession, because as we perceive the forces of evil and their dreadful power, we realise how much we are protected by the Lord and led away from every temptation in which we would succumb to the hells. In nature, such as ours, it is fantastic that we are not overwhelmed with temptations or diabolical snares from which there would be no extrication. There is not one of us who would not commit the most heinous crime within the hour if we were not protected moment by moment from above, by the bonds of conscience and reason, by the lack of opportunity, by infinite influences which guard us.

The doctrines of the New Church state this very clearly and on many occasions:

"Few, if any, know that all men are withheld from evils by the Lord, and this with a stronger power than man can believe. For there is in every man a perpetual tendency to evil and this both from the hereditary evil in which he is born and from the actual evil which he has acquired for himself insomuch that unless he was withheld by the Lord, he would rush headlong every moment towards the lowest hell. But the mercy of the Lord is so great, that he is elevated every moment, yea, every least moment and withheld from plunging himself thither. This is even the case with the good, but with a difference according to their life of charity and faith. Thus the Lord continually fights with man and for man with hell, although it does not so appear to man." (A. C. 2406)

Therefore the prayer leads us to look to the Lord and to rely on Him. We see only too clearly that by our own strength, we shall not overcome the forces that threaten us; just as physically we cannot lift ourselves up by our own efforts, so also spiritually, we cannot elevate our nature by our own nature. Some higher aid is needed. We know also that this is what the Lord desires to do for us, provided we put away from us pride and self satisfaction: *"He that humbles himself shall be exalted"*, the Lord told us, and this is true in every attitude of our mind, if we can put away pride, then the evil spirits who continually desire to inspire us with self conceit are driven away and the angelical humility enters the heart and with it the inner strength which is the result of the Lord's presence. Thus we are exalted in spirit, and perceive that the Lord is ever leading us and protecting us from every evil which would destroy our soul.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil". What is this evil from which every person should ask to be delivered? There are, of course, many evil things in this world from which we wish to be preserved. There are many external circumstances in which we get caught up. It does not seem possible that we should be delivered from them all, but the evil which plays the most serious role in our life is that evil which we love. Yes, there are many evils which we love and are loath to give up. Examine the delights and pleasures which you have, one by one and see whether

they are all pure and innocent! How many of us can honestly claim that we don't enjoy a scandal, or that we never covet the things which are our neighbour's? And yet, such feelings are hellish. They are the evils from which we cannot deliver ourselves without the Lord's help. He will reveal them to us and thus give us the opportunity and responsibility to choose to be delivered from them.

What strength, what new life there is in those words which build up in our mind the conviction that the Lord will lead us away from temptations and out of temptations when we fall into them and thus deliver us from the evil which so easily besets us?

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil".

"For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever".

The Lord's Prayer begins by uplifting our thoughts to our Heavenly Father and then when we have looked to Him, we are led to ask for our needs and for our protection. At the end, our thoughts are again raised from ourselves to our Saviour. And what could be more logical than to confess His omnipotent reign following our appeals to Him? We have asked for daily bread, for forgiveness, for deliverance from evil, but what guarantee is there that the Lord will or can answer the prayer? Our confidence and the Divine assurance are expressed in these words: *"For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory"*.

In saying this, we should realise that in a prayer we are not trying to change God, but something in ourselves. He has the answers and the power to change many things in our life:

"Behold, I make all things new." (Revelation 21: 5).

The Divine endeavour is constant and it is the desire to give His blessings to us, if only we are willing and ready to receive them. This closing doxology of the prayer is designed to prepare us for the reception of all the Lord's gifts. It helps us, in fact, to see that we are in a large measure affected by them already.

"Thine is the kingdom".

We have seen what is involved in the term *"the Lord's kingdom"*. It is His government and our acceptance of His laws, for no kingdom can exist without willing subjects. Therefore the presence of the kingdom is chiefly through the presence of truth and is it so difficult to see how the Lord in fact reigns, at least to some extent, within us through this faculty called conscience? This faculty which asserts itself whenever we break the laws of the kingdom! This faculty which guides us! This faculty which inspires us!

Is it only a fiction of the pious mind, or is it something real and powerful? It is the Lord's kingdom within us. It is not our truth or our wisdom which guides us and

corrects us. It is not we who, from our own light know right from wrong. It is the Lord in our mind with His internal order, with His truth, with His kingdom.

The inner presence of the Lord's kingdom in the receptive mind can only have the following result: POWER. In the Lord's truths there is the potential power to overcome evil and temptations. Think of the power contained in this truth: "*Thou shall not steal*"! A person on the verge of committing some dishonesty is preserved from the act by the command. They are withheld from the thing which they desire to do. Can a person do this? Can they deliver them self by them self? Can a kingdom be divided against itself and stand?

Surely, every suppression of evil is effected by the power of God operating in a person. The Lord called His twelve disciples "*and gave them power over all devils*". (Luke 9: 1). And in Mark 6: 7, it is said that He "*gave them power over unclean spirits*". And so He gives power to their desires, thoughts and actions. The Lord describes Himself as having "*the keys of hell and of death*" (Revelation 1: 18), which means that it is His power which delivers every person from their own particular hell, created by their selfishness and passions. A person cannot break out of this bondage, for the simple reason that their nature prefers to remain in it. Only God's voice and power will awaken in them the desire and strength to leave.

If our prayers are to be effective, then the understanding of the Lord's power becomes the foundation of our confidence and faith. If we doubt His power, our prayer defeats itself, because our mind denies what the lips say and we close the mind against the Lord's entry. Moreover, we shall not come to understand His power properly, unless we remember His words after the resurrection, when He said:

"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." (Matthew 28: 18).

That is the way in which we can see the Lord God Almighty. All power in the universe is from Him, All being is from Him. It exists from no other source. Even the evil which is within us and the malignant influences around us are only a perversion of the Lord's power and life. They do not exist in their own right or independently of the Lord. From the Almighty God, as we see Him, manifested and declared in the Divine Humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ, come all things. When we look to Him in our prayers we are doing a tremendous thing. We are looking at the source of all things, conscious of His declaration:

"Without me you can do nothing". (John 15: 5), and mindful of these words in John 1: 3-4:

"All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life."

Is it then so difficult to see that the disorderly can be brought into order by the very power which gives it existence? Can disorder continue in the world if it hasn't human support and submission? Furthermore, are we not doing the right thing when we look to the Lord to remove it? Often, people believe that prayers are just so much wishful thinking and day dreaming, from which nothing of value ever comes; but the realist knows that they will never achieve anything without the Lord's power.

And now let us consider "glory". When we ascribe to the Lord "kingdom", "power", and "glory", we are not repeating three words which are unrelated and chosen perhaps from thousands of others which might have been used with equal force, but we are expressing the rising progress of a person's path to heaven. They are related as are "sowing", "growth" and "harvest", because first in our religious development we are conscious of the truth of the kingdom. Secondly, we are aware of the Lord's power which enables us to deny ourselves and overcome temptations. Thirdly, we know the glory of achievement and victory after the dark clouds of temptations are dispersed and we are surrounded by the splendour of heavenly light and wisdom.

How else is the Lord glorified than in humans, when they are full of Divine graces, charity and spiritual faith? The crowning glory of creation is the regenerated person who is the image and likeness of God. True glory arises from the Lord's love towards the whole human race, from His endeavour to impart to us His wisdom and happiness. It is this sphere which impresses upon the heavens the aura of splendour and which is felt even in this hard, material world from those men and women who have the Lord's love and wisdom in their hearts. It is always a privilege to meet such individuals who have received the kingdom and the power and who shine with unearthly glory and so illuminate and warm the dark and cold structures of human society. If we could learn to understand and live in the spirit of the Lord's Prayer, how much such glory could we shed around us!

"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." (John 15 : 8).

"For Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever".

