

The Lord's Prayer (5) - Give us this day our daily bread

At a first glance it may seem little needs to be said about the words, "Give us this day our daily bread". What immediately comes to mind is our daily food and bodily necessities and the prayer, offered sincerely, is a way of acknowledging that even these things, even natural things and earthly blessings, have their source and origin in the Lord. We pray "Give us this day our daily bread" not in the expectation that having done nothing ourselves to procure it, the Lord will suddenly bestow it upon us, but as a way of acknowledging our dependance on Him even for these most natural and everyday things.

And yet, though the prayer does speak of these things, clearly other things are meant by it. It is not only the body which needs feeding; our minds and spirits need nourishment as well. People can know and experience not just a bodily hunger but a spiritual hunger also. And just as the body perishes if its hunger cannot be satisfied, so too a person's spirit, deprived of its proper food, must languish and die also. We need good food at each level, for our bodies and for our spirits; on the natural plane as well as on the spiritual.

The Lord reminded us 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'. (Matthew 4, 4). And elsewhere, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6, 35). Obviously here the Lord is speaking of nourishment above and beyond our bodily wants. He is speaking of food for the soul, and of that which strengthens and sustains the spirit. And the Lord intended that this, more than the other, should be present in our minds and thoughts when we say the prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." It is inner strengthening and spiritual nourishment for which we are praying.

If this is so, just what is meant by it? What is it that we are to ask for from the Lord which sustains us spiritually, this food for the soul? It is His goodness and His truth. This is what we are asking for and this is what is meant. To pray the words, "Give us this day our daily bread" is to ask the Lord to infill us with good affections and true thoughts; to bless our lives with unselfish love and to guide our thinking so that it is just and fair, it is a prayer that the Lord Himself will strengthen and sustain our lives; that His love will be at the centre of our relationships with all others, and that His truth will be the basis of all our thinking.

Other food is available of which we are all only too well aware. So often what is offered in the world around us is a diet of man made ideas and rationalizations about life and morality which bear no relation to the Lord's truth. So often, for example, entertainment feeds us with distortions both of human relationships and of the human situation in general. And in the midst of this, knowing this is so, we ask the Lord that He will give us our daily bread, the food for our minds and the sustenance of our souls.

"This day our daily bread". Have you ever wondered why the prayer should be phrased in this way? If it was only a general prayer for nourishment, even for spiritual nourishment, nothing more needs to be said than "Give us bread". But the prayer says more than that. It says, "Give us this day our daily bread". The question is, why is there this particular emphasis and slant on things? What is involved in these references to time? In the Word of God all references to time denote states of mind and states of life. An excellent illustration of this teaching is the six days of creation described in Genesis 1, meaning the successive stages, or the successive states through which a person passes in the course of their regeneration. Time as such doesn't enter into it. It is really states that are being spoken of; different states we go through.

"This day" means 'this state' - the particular state we are going through at the moment. It might be a state of sadness or disappointment. It might be a state of temptation. Perhaps we are worried about something. Sometimes we are dejected; at other times we are elated. Life is a constant succession of various states of mind. "Give us this day our daily bread" means "Give us", or Grant me, "according to the particular state I am in, the love and the wisdom, the goodness and the truth, which is appropriate to it". We are asking that the Lord will nourish and sustain us with the affections and the thoughts, with the love and with the wisdom, needed now in the state we are presently passing through.

It is then not without reason that the prayer doesn't read, "Give us bread". The point is that that is too general; too sweeping. In framing this petition the Lord intended that we should have in mind, and that we should bring to mind, our particular needs. He intended that we should relate our requests to the states that are with us now, and that in asking for His goodness and His wisdom we should think about it in terms of particular situations, particular problems and particular relationships. It's not that we are asking for good, loving affections from the Lord, and true, wise thoughts, full stop: A general sort of

request which doesn't get us very far. We are asking for these things mindful of how things are with us at the time; mindful of how we feel, of the way we are, of the state we are in or going through. We are asking for the Lord's blessing, mindful of our need for it in the particular situation in which we find ourself at the time of praying. "Give us this day our daily bread."

The prayer is an utterly far reaching one and covers many, many things. It is a prayer for 'the word that will help us to bear adversity'; for courage when we are frightened; for mercy when we have been wronged; for enlightenment when we need guidance; for strength to bear disappointment, and for 'a heavenly spirit in the times of our outward prosperity'. We ask for a specific thing for a specific state, and renew the prayer when another comes upon us. This is why the Prayer can be meaningfully said on a number of occasions the same day. "Give us this day", in this particular circumstance, this particular state, this trial, this joy, "our daily bread".

The Lord can and will guide, direct and sustain us in every possible state which comes upon us to eternity. However, too often we forget this. We wonder how we'll cope and what will happen. We allow the future to worry us. We think of the children growing up. We think of ourselves getting older. We forget to trust in the Lord. In any case it is not the future with which we are meant to be concerned. It is the here and now, and with things as they are with us at the moment. What matters is that we seek the Lord's blessing in the situations and circumstances which are presently upon us. If we do this all these things will be given to us. (Matthew 6, 33)

Possibly the thought has occurred to you that we are very concerned with something for ourselves. We say, "Give us this day our daily bread". People have objected that it is our own interests that we are concerned with. But this is a mistake. We are not asking for the Lord's blessings for ourselves to enjoy privately. We are asking for those blessings that they might deepen, enrich, and transform our relationships with others. We are asking that the Lord's goodness may take the place of our selfishness; that wise thoughts might come to us from Him in place of the foolishness and imaginings that are so frequently in our minds; that angelic promptings will come to us that can only be to the good, and for the benefit, of others.

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