

Reflections

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146 - July 01, 2013

The Our Father

The prayer of the Our Father had enormous importance in the primitive Church and the first Christians surrounded it with great respect. It was, in the first place, a prayer which was not given to or taught to everyone. To pray it was a privilege which was only given to those who were already baptized. It was the last item taught to the catechumen on the eve of their baptism. It was like the maximum and most treasured gem of the faith.

It does not happen thus for today's believer. The Our Father is the first prayer we learn as children and we have ended up not knowing what it entails nor what it implies. It happens with the Our Father like with the house where we were born: for having seen it so much, we have never seen it. It is part of our retina, of our blood. It already tells us little or nothing. It is like a coin which has been used so much that it has completely lost its embossment.

That is how the great prayer of the first Christians has become the routine prayer for the people of today. We would have to conquer it anew today like someone discovering a continent or someone taking possession of a mountain during a war. We would have to feel anew like those apostles – who on a happy day – heard those words from the lips of Jesus, those words which are, according to a Church Father, *the summary of the Gospel*.

Precisely, offered in its few words, is a summary of the correct relationship between God and man: The first part speaks in respect to the cause of God: the Father, the sanctification of his Name, his Kingdom, his Holy Will. The second part speaks on the cause of man: the necessary bread, the indispensable forgiveness, the always present temptation and the continuously threatening evil. Both parts constitute the same and only prayer of Jesus.

God is not only interested in what is his, but is also concerned for what is man's, like bread, forgiveness, temptation and evil. And likewise man: he does not hold fast only to what he cares for, but also opens himself to what concerns the Father: the sanctification of his Name, the coming of his Kingdom, the fulfillment of his Will.

That is how the Our Father does not separate what God has united. God's cause and man's cause are, after the Encarnation, only one cause. To separate them is to mutilate both of them. To forget God because of earthly problems is to offend God and to take away his ultimate sense of earthly problems for which we say we are concerned. And to believe we adore God, putting aside the daily battle on this earth, would be to adore an idol which has little to do with the true God.

On the other hand, the Lord's Prayer is not an escape, an alibi for fleeing the earthly battle. On the contrary: it is a prayer of total realism which sums up the drama of the human condition, and, at the same time, opens the doors to hope and joy in which all authentic combat of the believer will culminate.

The reality implied in the Our Father is not presented rose colored, but very controversial. Here the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan clash permanently. Christian prayer plants its campaign tent in the same center of human combat. And it is profoundly meaningful to think that Jesus, at the hour of offering us the ultimate and most profound summary of his thinking, did not do it in an intellectual sermon, but in a prayer.

Dear brothers and sisters, the response of Jesus before a world which suffers is the prayer of the Our Father united in the daily battle. And we are invited to always pray anew to the Father and, as his adult children, we strive so that our world can each day belong more to God.

Questions for reflection

1. Have I meditated on each phrase of the Our Father?
2. What does this prayer say to me today?
3. Do we prefer the "let my will be done"?

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