

Sermon for the Fifth Vespers of Lent

"I and the Father are one."

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Let us now complete our meditation upon the Lord's prayer.

We pray simply: *'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'*

In these petitions, every truly godly and Christian prayer is summarized; that being redeemed by our Lord and brought into the communion of His Holy Church, we might there remain; that we might not give way to the countless temptations of this world; but that when the devil, the evil one, our ancient enemy, stalks us in the dark night of our adversity, the Father might deliver us from his murderous grasp, even as He delivered the Israelites from the oppression of the Egyptians in long lost days.

We will indeed be tempted. We must be tried, tested, that we might be proven to be the Children of God. For it is was right and proper that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, be assaulted in the wilderness by Satan, thus to prove His divine sonship; thus to prove the weakness of the devil against those guarded by the Father; so it is right that we too be brought into the contest, that we too do battle with the devil; with our Father, the source of all love and triumph, of all being and purpose, looking onto the field. And even as good soldiers of old were inspired to victory by the onlooking gaze of the general who had trained and commanded them, so the Father sends us out just as He sent out Christ the Son, that we might ourselves attain victory through Him and His Spirit, and thus deride and mock the devil, the cause of our fall, and so demonstrate that we have become God's children, knowing that *'God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with temptation, he also provides the way of a proper end.'*

Therefore we pray *'deliver us from evil.'* For we are prepared for the fight, in imitation of Our Lord and Redeemer, that we might *'complete the sufferings of Christ'* and fulfill the will of God in courage and in glory, knowing that the salvation of God is ever over us. We shall be conformed to Christ, to His suffering, to His war, to His resurrection, to His conquest. Let us therefore rejoice in the struggle, knowing that we have been found worthy of the conflict by our Heavenly Father, blessed is He, and that, regardless of the wounds and injuries, the fallings and routes we might endure, He will grant us the victory.

Now let us see Our Lord's prayer as a whole. We have noted before that this prayer is first and foremost the prayer of Jesus Christ. It is Our Lord's prayer, and we have endeavored to see how each petition applies first to His own life, and only after that, to ours.

Then let us realize how the prayer as a whole is the prayer of Christ's life.

For He and His Spirit from all eternity were with and in God: So from eternity He prays *'Our Father.'*

From all eternity the Word of His Spirit proceeded from Him unto the Father, blessing the name of the Father eternally. So from eternity He prays from within the Trinity *'Hallowed be thy name.'*

And hearing the will of the Father, that mankind might not be lost, but that all humanity return to Him and be His people forevermore, a New Israel in a New Jerusalem, He *'was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.'* For from within the womb of Mary, the infant Christ prayed *'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, my Father.'*

And being born unto this earth, He sought no success or material gain, He sought no name or honor, but sought only the will of God, living in complete dependency upon the infinite goodness of the Father. So He prayed: *'Give us this day our daily bread.'*

And seeking to redeem us, sinful humanity, who had in

disobedience condemned our race, He was washed in the river Jordan, and took upon Himself all our iniquity, that in Him, our iniquity might be put to death. Himself forgiving, and yet Himself forgiven; He who *knew no sin*, but *became sin for us*. So He prayed: *'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.'*

And soon, He shall go to the cross, to suffer, to bleed, to plead for mankind from the blood of His wounds, and to descend into Hell, into the citadel of demons, there to strike at the heart of Satan's power, there to sack the city of hell. So he prays *'deliver us from evil.'*

See, then, how this is truly our Lord's prayer, that in each of its petitions, the fullness of the Son's being and mission are laid forth.

And yet we make it our own, we who are in Him.

Though we pray the prayer as it was taught to us by Christ, perhaps it is best to understand it as also our prayer in reverse.

For we are born in subjugation to Satan, to His onslaughts and assaults. So we must pray for our baptism, our redemption, crying out to the Father *'Deliver us from evil!'*

We are formed in sin and iniquity, damned, and in condemnation. So we must plead for our atonement through the mysteries of Christ and His Church, pleading in the dark hours of shame, *'forgive us our trespasses.'*

And even in the Church, baptized and nursed by Our Lord's flesh and blood, yet we must forsake all the idols of this infernal world that promise us the satisfaction of every earthly desire, and find our fulfillment and sustenance in God alone. So we must ask in the dawn of our labor, *'give us this day our daily bread.'*

And being upheld by the benevolence of our Father, we therefore are conformed to His divine beauty, to do those glorious works of His will, hidden in inglorious callings, that in all things, this cursed world might become as the heaven of angels; that our soul, subdued by the love of God might by His grace itself become heaven on earth. So we whisper throughout the work

of our daylight *'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.'*

And this we do gladly, dear Christian, in ecstasy, *counting even our sufferings as joy*. For when it is all finished, and the race of our life is complete; when it has come to an end, and the battle of this world is over, an angel shall bear you up from your coffin, from this mortal coil unto the great majesty of heaven, to the splendor of the throne of our God, surrounded by seraph and angel of life, honored with the crown of victory for the struggle of life, that we might look up, guarded by Christ and all the saints on every side, and pray the final and only prayer we shall pray ever again, and forevermore:

'Our Father.'

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