

Reflections

JULY 2023

On Praying the Lord's Prayer

C.S.

Lewis discusses a number of things about praying The Lord's Prayer in Letter V of his book *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*. One of them is his practice of “festooning”, that is, adding private overtones to the specific petitions. The letter discusses several of the petitions in The Lord's Prayer, and concludes with the following excerpt:

I expect we all do much the same with the prayer for *our daily bread*. It means, doesn't it, all we need for the day—“things requisite and necessary as well for the body as for the soul.” I should hate to make this clause “purely religious” by thinking of “spiritual” needs alone. One of its uses, to me, is to remind us daily that what Burnaby calls the *naïf* view of prayer is firmly built into Our Lord's teaching.

Forgive us... as we forgive. Unfortunately there's no need to do any festooning here. To forgive for the moment is not difficult. But to go

on forgiving, to forgive the same offence again every time it recurs to the memory—there's the real tussle. My resource is to look for some action of my

own which is open to the same charge as the one I'm resenting. If I still smart to remember how A let me down, I must still remember how I let B down. If I find it difficult to forgive those who bullied me at school, let me, at that very moment, remember, and pray for, those I bullied. (Not that we called it *bullying*, of course. That is where prayer without words can be so useful. In it there are no names; therefore no *aliases*.)

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I was never worried myself by the words *lead us not into temptation*, but a great many of my correspondents are. The words suggest to them what someone has called “a fiend-like conception of God,” as one who first forbids us certain fruits and then lures us to taste them. But the Greek word ([Greek: *peirasmos*]) means “trial”—“trying circumstances”—of every sort; a far larger word than English “temptation.” So that the

petition essentially is, “Make straight our paths. Spare us, where possible, from all crises, whether of temptation or affliction.” By the way, you yourself, though you've doubtless forgotten it, gave me an excellent gloss on it: years ago in the pub at Coton. You said it added a sort of reservation to all our preceding prayers. As if we said, “In my ignorance I have asked for A, B and C. But don't give me them if you foresee that they would in reality be to me either snares or sorrows.” And you quoted Juvenal, *numinibus vota exaudita malignis*, “enormous prayers which heaven in vengeance grants.” For we make plenty of such prayers. If God had granted all the silly prayers I've made in my life, where should I be now?

I don't often use *the kingdom, the power, and the glory*. When I do, I have an idea of the *kingdom* as sovereignty *de jure*; God, as good, would have a claim on my obedience even if He had no power. The *power* is the sovereignty *de facto*—He is omnipotent. And the *glory* is—well, the *glory*; the “beauty so old and new,” the “light from behind the sun.”¹

Do you pray The Lord's Prayer as part of your regular devotional prayers? Is this an area where you would like to ask God to help you make your prayers more effective?²



“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18 (ESV)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt, 1992), pp. 27-28.

² For a helpful course that explores The Lord's Prayer, see The Ufalme Experience, <https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/the-lords-prayer-course-experience-gods-kingdom>.

