

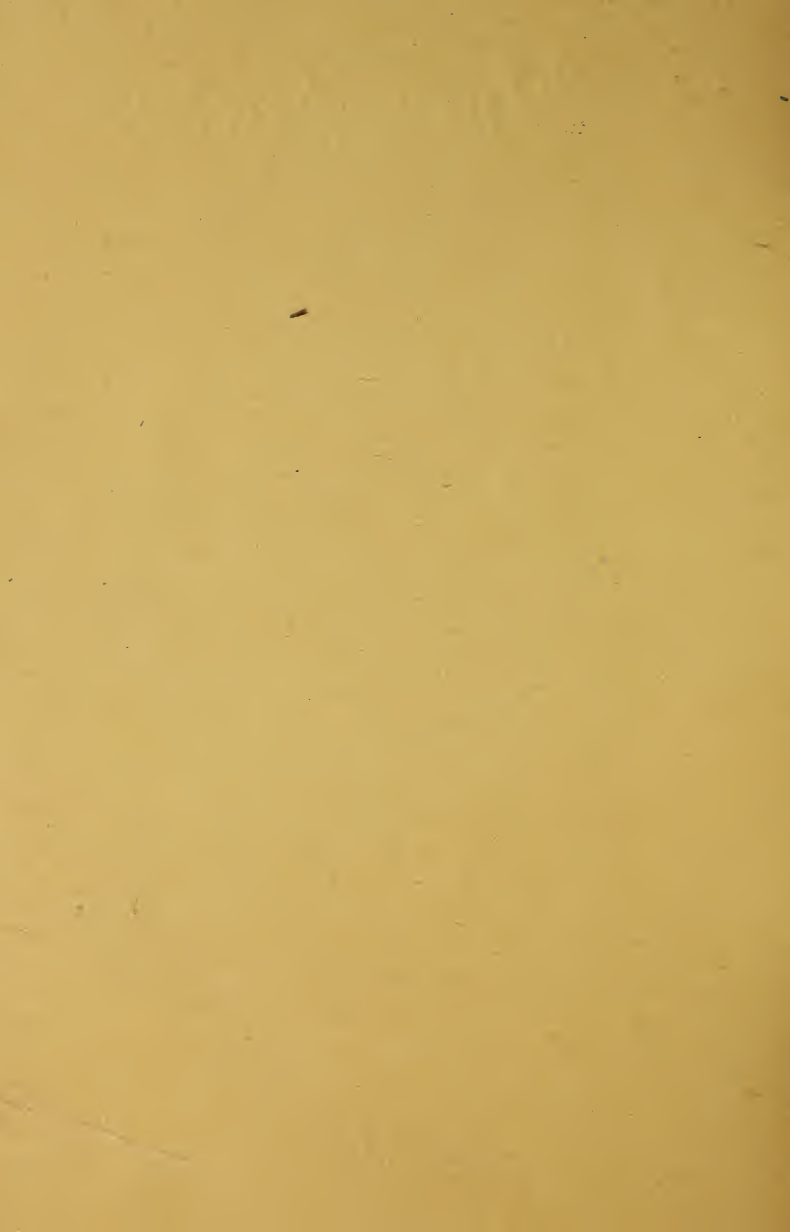
Grou, Jean Nicholas
The Our Father
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By
THE ABBÉ GROU, S.J.



New York, N. Y.
THE PAULIST PRESS
401 West 59th Street



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S.D. 1731-1803.

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Researched and compiled by Anne
Reference Bibliography Series #3
June 1984

THE OUR FATHER

Adapted from the writings of

THE ABBÉ GROU, S.J.

NEW YORK
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INTRODUCTION

THE Lord's Prayer was the fruit of the request which the Apostles, inspired by the Holy Ghost, made to our Blessed Lord when they said to Him: "Lord teach us to pray!" (Luke xi. 2.) It is a divine prayer, divine in its author and in the sentiments it expresses; a prayer Jesus Christ taught us all, in the person of the Apostles, whom He commissioned to instruct all nations. It contains everything. Our Blessed Savior, Who knew our duties and our wants, has, in a few words, comprised them all in it. By its simplicity it is within the reach of all; by the sublimity of its thoughts, it surpasses the intellect of the highest genius; to understand it we need supernatural light.

Our Lord's intention in teaching it could not be that it should be merely recited, He wished us to understand it, to adopt its sentiments, and to make it our rule of life. Do we understand it? Have we searched into its meaning? Have we ever asked Our Lord Himself to open our mind to its teaching? Can we say after each word, after each petition: "This is what I think, what I feel, what I desire?" If we have not habitually in our souls the feelings it expresses, we cannot flatter ourselves that we are good Christians.

Do we believe this prayer to be an indispensable rule of life, an epitome of the Gospel, an extract of all that is most perfect in the moral teaching of Jesus Christ? In practice do we judge, speak, and act in conformity with it?

Jesus Christ gave it to us, and in drawing it up did not consult our ideas, but His own when He said: "Thus will you pray." He says to us: "You must rule your life according to the spirit of this prayer. If you do not you will be condemned by your own lips."

As it is certain that we shall one day be judged by Jesus Christ on the prayer that bears His name, let us give our attention and application to understanding its meaning, and weighing the obligations it imposes.

The Our Father

OUR FATHER

I SPEAK to my Father. Never should I have dared, sinner as I am, to give this title to God, or consider myself His child. Jesus Christ inspires me with the boldness to do so. He reminds me that grace has made me a child of God—by adoption; I have been raised to this glorious privilege by the ineffable mystery of the union of the Word with His Sacred Humanity. As man, Jesus Christ is my Brother; after His resurrection He calls His disciples by this name, and in them He included us all. In the Gospel He constantly says: “My Father and your Father,” authorizing us, and even obliging us, to share His nature and His reward.

God is my Father by creation. He created the matter. He formed it in my mother’s womb. From Him it received the power of life and movement; He gave to it nourishment and growth. If I owe respect, love, and obedience to those of whom I am born, how much more do I owe to God, Who has greater and more unlimited rights over the work of His Hands!

My soul, free, spiritual, and immortal, made to the image of God, is from Him and solely from Him. This soul has absolutely no Father but God. To Him is it beholden for its being, its powers, its qualities. He made it what it is because He so willed, as an act of pure goodness, for He had no need of it, being perfectly happy and independent of it.

The action by which God created me continues always; if it ceased for a single moment my body and my soul would return to nothingness. So that not only is He my Father, but He continues to be such without interruption; until I breathe my last sigh it is He that preserves the life of my body; after death He preserves that of my soul; and

when, at the general resurrection, He reunites my body and my soul, He will preserve them both for all eternity.

Yet what God is to me, in the order of nature, is little compared with what He is in the order of grace, where He shows Himself to be my Father in an infinitely more excellent manner. To have created me is certainly a great benefit; it is the beginning and foundation of all the rest. But to have created me in His friendship and grace; to have adorned my soul with supernatural gifts; to have destined it to possess, and love, and eternally enjoy the same happiness as Himself, this is a benefit incomparably greater than the first. Child of God by my birth, I am so in a far higher sense, and more intimate manner by what He destines for me. This draws me nearer to Him, unites me inseparably to Him, and morally makes of Him and of me but one being, having but one will and a joint possession of the same goods. I was by no means entitled to such a destiny; I might have been deprived of it without any right to complain. I should even have been ignorant of my capacity for it, if God had not deigned to reveal it to me.

God is eager to give us all He has, and all He is; after the short trial of a temporal life, which would have been happy if sin had not entered in, He designed to admit us to the enjoyment of eternal life. To attain this second life, we were not even to pass through death; such was our original condition. Fatherly goodness of God, couldst Thou go beyond this?

The first man and the first woman rebelled against their Creator and their Father; through the most foolish pride they disobeyed His command, hoping to become equal to Him. Behold them, with their posterity, fallen forever from the privileges of their condition! They have deservedly incurred forever the hatred of God and His chastisements. Their only hope is in His mercy; but He had foreseen the evil and had prepared the remedy. And what a remedy!

Eternally productive in Himself, this Father had an only Son, equal to Himself. He sacrifices Him for the salvation of man; He sends Him on earth, clothes Him in our degraded and guilty nature, and, by a counsel decreed from

all eternity, in this nature He wills that He should suffer and die for us, and as a voluntary victim expiate the first sin and all those that have followed from it. Adopted in the person of this Son, the first-born of creatures, all men are thus reinstated in the quality and rights of children of God. Heaven, which was closed through their fault, opens anew to them; more efficacious and abundant means are given them to reach it; and, incapable of any merit as they are of themselves, they can hope and aspire to all through the merits of the God-man, which have become theirs.

The Father has so loved these rebellious and ungrateful creatures as to deliver up and sacrifice for them the object of His eternal love. . . . Let us be silent, let us adore and love this best of Fathers, and consecrate ourselves to His glory!

Man, himself, disowned, outraged, and put to death the Son of God Who had come to save him. The blow fell whence it should have been least expected, from a nation chosen by an especial predilection; from a nation of which God had chosen to be the Lawgiver and King; from a nation which He had made the sole depository of revelation, and to whom He had sent a long line of Prophets to announce the coming of a Redeemer of the world. Still the crime this nation committed any other nation would have committed also; of this there is no plainer proof than that by our sins we crucify anew the Son of God.

With incomprehensible goodness, God made the most execrable crime of which mankind could be guilty serve for our salvation. He had foreseen this crime, and knew it would be renewed from century to century by sinners on earth. These blessings and favors of our Heavenly Father belong to each one of us personally.

Let each one, as he says *Our Father*, call to mind all he owes to God. This thought alone is sufficient to fill us with wondering admiration, and make us fall into an ecstasy of love and gratitude at the mere recollection of such excessive charity. The simple word Father is good enough for thought and love for a whole lifetime. No meditation can exhaust its deep meaning; no contemplation can attain the height of this ideal!

Yet I have not said all: for I have not spoken of what this Father is in Himself, of His nature, and of His infinite perfections—another abyss where the mind loses itself, and where the heart discovers purer and more powerful motives of love. If “the glory of the children” are their fathers, what a glory is ours? What cause for triumphs and thankfulness is this thought: God Himself is my Father!

O my Father! I feel raised above everything of this earth, when I think that Thou art God; that Thou dost exist by the very necessity of Thy nature; that Thou art infinitely perfect, the Sovereign Being, eternal, infinite, independent of all else, and that I belong to Thee; that I am Thy child, and that Thou dost glory in it! May I then not glory in it also? How happy I am to have such a Father!

O my Savior, and my Master! I have recourse to Thee; teach me to pronounce this word *Father* as I ought.

OUR FATHER

Jesus Christ does not teach you to say *My Father*. He enjoins you to say *Our Father*. As in the word *Father* is contained every motive for loving God, so in the words *Our Father* are reasons for loving our neighbor. For God being the Father of all men, He loves them all, and consequently wishes them to love one another. We should be wanting in love of God if we did not love our neighbor; because to love God is to pledge ourselves to love what He loves, and for His reasons and for the same end. His fatherly love causes Him to do good to all men, to desire their eternal salvation, and to provide them with the means of attaining it, according to the order of His divine Providence. We have the same duties towards one another, both temporal and spiritual. It is not enough not to injure others; we must strive to do them good, whenever occasion offers, as far as lies in our power; we must desire their salvation, and contribute towards it by our prayers, our conversation and example.

Let us dwell on this a little, and draw from the divine Paternity motives of love for all men. God as our Creator is our Common Father; as creatures we are all brothers;

we form but one large family.. Our souls came from the hand of God at the first moment of existence, and are in the closest relationship. Moreover, if our destination is the same; if we are called by Our Father to the same heavenly inheritance; if we hope to be one day reunited in the same country, and enjoy everlastingly the same happiness, certainly this is an urgent reason for loving one another as citizens of the same City, co-heirs of the same inheritance which we shall share without disputing, or rather which will belong to each one of us without division as travelers on the one road whose end is the same; which, once obtained, charity will make of us but one heart and one soul. Why hate one another, why quarrel; why try to injure one another on the journey? Is this the disposition that can conduce to our love of one another when we are together in our Father's House?

What after all is this home to which we are journeying? It is our Heavenly Father Himself. "The Creator's hand is the creature's home." There He is all; He does all; He takes the place of everything for those who dwell with Him. Is it conceivable that children hastening towards the same Father, eager to enjoy His caresses, who ought to draw nearer to one another the nearer they come to Him; is it conceivable that they should be so disunited that they cannot bear one another, and even wish each other harm? And why? Because of worthless temporal interests that impede their career, and which, if obtained, will deprive them forever of the end to which they ought to aspire. Besides, this Heavenly Father has adopted us in the Person of His only Son, so that in His sight we form but one with His Son, and He extends the love He bears Him to us also. He has redeemed us by the death of this Son; cleansed and purified us in His Blood, nourished us with His Body, which is inseparably united to His divinity He has showered numberless graces on us by the merits of this Son; this same Son, having become our Brother, turns with an infinite love of all His desire on us. The one great commandment of His law, sealed with His Blood, is that we should love one another as He has loved us, and as His Father loves us in Him. Whether our neighbor be or be not

lovable in himself is not the question. Do you yourself deserve to be loved? He whom God has found worthy of His love, do you consider unworthy of yours?

But he whom you ask me to love does not love me; he speaks ill of me; he tries to injure me; and has even cruelly offended me. Because he is wanting in his duty, are you to fail in yours? Where would you be if your Heavenly Father had based His love of you on your dispositions and your conduct towards Him? Where were you when He adopted you? What have you been since you were adopted? Have your grievous and repeated sins made Him disown you? Yet you would disown your brother! You break all the bonds of charity, and think you have a right to do so, because he has offended you! By your own lips you will be condemned, and your Heavenly Father will follow the same rule you lay down for others.

Has the following reflection ever come to your mind? Am I fit to pronounce these words *Our Father*? Can the Holy Ghost cry "Father" in my heart if by sin I have made Him leave me? If I hate my brother; if I wish him harm; if I rejoice secretly at his misfortune; if I speak of his defects and vices, and perhaps make his good qualities and virtues the subject of my malicious remarks, or if it gives me pleasure to hear my neighbor spoken ill of, and I incite others to do so, how dare I say to God *Our Father*? Can I acknowledge Him to be the Father of this neighbor whom I hate and pull to pieces? Can He be mine when I indulge in sentiments so opposite to His? Has not St. Paul declared that it is the Spirit of adoption, the Spirit of charity, which cries in us, and makes us exclaim *Father, Father*?

Does He dwell in you, pray in you, if you love not your brother? Can you say *Our Father!* as Jesus Christ wished you to say it?

OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN

As heaven is the dwelling place of my Father, it must be my true Fatherland. Therefore I am but a stranger on earth; it is for me only a place of transition. God keeps me here in a state of probation, that through my faith, the

ardor of my desires, and my fidelity in obeying Him, I may merit to be called back to Him.

Heaven, properly speaking, is God Himself—His immensity. There is not, and cannot be for Him, any place but Himself; and when we say *Our Father, Who art in Heaven!* it is as if we said Our Father, Who existest, and Who dwellest in Thyself, Whose substance, as simple as it is infinite, fills all, and in Whom, as in a measureless and unlimited space, all created beings subsist. I exist, even now, in the immensity of God, for where else could I exist? But I am not there as I hope one day to be. I know God here but very imperfectly. I think of Him, but my daily wants, my business, the objects that surround me, are continually distracting me. I love Him; but not with a purely disinterested love, for my will is constantly drawing me to outward things and transferring my love to them. I possess Him, but rather through hope than in actual enjoyment; and this possession which faith gives me I may lose through my own fault. In the next life it will not be so. I can neither explain nor understand how my soul will then be in God's immensity. But this I do know that it will see God, and know Him with the capacity of understanding proportioned to the height of glory it will have merited. I know that it will always be occupied with the contemplation of God, and that no other thought, no need, no business, no object whatsoever will ever distract it. I know it will love Him with full strength of will, with a love that will never be turned away from Him, nor divided, nor weakened. I know it will possess God by a most close and intimate union, and with the certainty that it will never be dissolved.

Oh! what reason then have I to sigh after heaven, my true country, the abode of my happiness, where my Father awaits me, where He invites me to come, where He shows me the place He has prepared for me! Can I pronounce these words, *Our Father, Who art in heaven*, without my soul being lifted up to Him with the most ardent longing, or without striving to disengage myself from all transitory things that hold me back from Him? Since my Father is in heaven, how can I be contented with the things of earth,

and seek far from Him an imaginary happiness? All I have to do is to bend to His will. He has placed me here to try my obedience and my love, because He intends that my eternal dwelling in His mansion shall be a reward which I have, in a measure, earned. It is, truly, a grace and a favor from Him to which I have no right whatever; yet, on my part, it is to be a prize, a conquest, and all my care must be to esteem it as I ought, to long for it and to spare no pains to attain it, despising, avoiding, and hating everything that can turn my thoughts and affections away from it.

What good has the frequent repetition of the Our Father done you if it has not made you long for heaven; if you still cling to this earth; if you cherish all that binds you to it; if each day you multiply and draw still tighter its bonds; if you know of no other goods than those of earth; and if to them you sacrifice without regret the lasting blessings of eternity? Never again, with such dispositions, say *Our Father, Who art in heaven!*

HALLOWED BE THY NAME

God has not, properly speaking, a name. His unapproachable and uncommunicable nature distinguishes Him from all that is not Himself. Nevertheless, He has chosen to give Himself a name, in making Himself known to men. He told Moses His name was Jehovah—He Who is. This name, infinitely holy in itself, has no need to be made holy; indeed, it cannot be, as it is above all holiness; besides, who is there who can make it holy?

What then do we wish for God when we say: *Hallowed be Thy name?* We wish that all men should know Him, adore Him, love Him, obey Him, and give Him the honor which is His due. It is right, it is most natural, that a child should be interested in his father's honor; that he should desire his exaltation and his glory; that he should exult in it, and contribute to it, by every means in his power. But if our desire be sincere, it is plain we must begin by glorifying it ourselves. The desire that others should glorify it is the result of our own determination to glorify it. If we do nothing for the glory of God, if this

is not our chief intention, the end of all our actions, if we scarcely think of it, and our own interest lies at the bottom of our service of Him, it is a mockery to say *Hallowed be Thy name!*

Desire and zeal for the sanctifying of God's name obliges me, first of all, to sanctify it in my own person, by consecrating to God my entire being, my thoughts, my affections, my actions; not only by never allowing myself to do anything to its dishonor, but by trying on every occasion to glorify it. If I love God thus it is impossible for me not to desire that He should be loved and glorified by all men, because they owe Him the same homage as myself. This desire will urge me to devote all my strength to this end, according to my state of life and my power. It will lead me to ask God how best I can promote His glory and zealously further His designs on me; to think that the only object for which I am on earth, the only reason why talents, influence, authority have been given me, is that I may see that God is honored, and may consider as lost any other use I may make of my time, my liberty, and anything else I have at my disposal.

Daily we say to God: *Hallowed be Thy name.* Which of us studies to sanctify this name to the full extent of his capability, as much as God wishes and expects of him? Yet such is the rule and measure of our duty. And which of us labors to make others sanctify it according to the same rule and measure? Every omission and negligence is blameworthy. Let us judge our conduct by the words of St. Paul: "Do all for the glory of God." This is not a counsel, but a precept for every Christian. Would this holy name be profaned, outraged, blasphemed, as it is daily, if each one acquitted himself of his duty in this respect? But how are we to fulfill our duty on this point? Is it an empty formula we recite? Do we think to discharge our duty by pronouncing a few words? Do we understand all that this petition or desire includes?

The name of the true God is not known to idolaters, who still exist in three-quarters of the world. You pray that they may renounce their false divinities and adore God alone. You pray that He may enlighten these poor

nations who still lie in the shadow of death. If, by any means, you are able to forward this holy enterprise, can you, without remorse of conscience, omit to give your aid, or give it only scantily?

The Catholic Church, which is the center of Christianity, is calumniated and persecuted by heretics and schismatics. You pray that they may see their errors and unjust prejudices and renounce them, to crown their Mother's joy of reëntering her bosom.

All over the world, in every place, in every class, there is need of reform. You pray that all may enter into themselves, and, confessing themselves guilty, may implore the Divine mercy; you ask that society, families, and Christians may be holy according to the degree of sanctity required of each state of life, and that God may be glorified in all, as He wills to be and as He ought to be. The solemn prayers of the Church on Good Friday are implied in these simple words: *Hallowed be Thy name*. Do you begin to understand, now, the scope of this short prayer?

Have you any idea of the particular perfection to which it calls you? It requires that the first desire of your heart, the one to which all others refer, should be the glory of your Heavenly Father; and not simply His glory, but His greatest glory. It requires that you should seek it, that you should try to obtain it in everything, every day and every instant of the day. Not content with this, it requires you to desire ardently that others should do the same, and should even excel you. It requires that zeal for the glory of God must inflame and consume you; that you should only breathe for His glory, and never cease reproaching yourself that you glorify Him so little.

Think of what Christ had in His mind when He dictated this petition, and of the meaning He applied to it. Think how He Himself sanctified His Father's Name; and how it is chiefly in this that He wishes us to imitate Him. Think what God is, what He deserves, what He has done for you, what He promises you, what He expects from you. Is it possible for a Christian to do too much to glorify Him? It would be blasphemy to think so.

THY KINGDOM COME

What Kingdom of God do we wish may come? The Kingdom over which we ask Him to reign is one infinitely dear to His Sacred Heart, which consists in the voluntary surrender of our will to His orders, in the free homage we pay to Him. This supernatural reign, which is the source of the glory of God and of our happiness, is exempt from all constraint on His side. He commands, but it is optional for us to obey; He invites, solicits, urges us by His grace, but we are free to resist; He reproaches us, and excites in us lively feelings of remorse, but we are at liberty to take no notice of His reproaches, and we can harden ourselves against this remorse. In fine, we are left to our own counsel, and we may glorify God, or we may offend Him. Any other kind of dominion over our free will would be contrary to His designs, and would be neither a source of glory to Him nor of merit to ourselves. Such is the Kingdom for which Jesus Christ teaches us to pray, and which should be the object of our most ardent longings. Nothing but love can excite in us these desires, whose sincerity, vehemence, and efficacy correspond to the degree of charity that is in us.

This Kingdom of grace lasts only for our mortal life; it will be followed by an eternal Kingdom, where God will crown our obedience and make it His glory to be our happiness. This second kingdom is the end and aim of the first; and God will only reign over us for eternity in so far as we shall have submitted to the empire of His grace in this life. It is our duty to desire these two kingdoms more for God's sake than for our own, because we should have His glory more at heart than our own happiness.

The temporal Kingdom of God necessarily requires sacrifices on our part, even, to speak more correctly, one continual sacrifice. Everything within us and around us is opposed to His empire; everything inclines us to shake off His yoke, so it is only by dint of struggling and combating that we can persevere in obedience till death. If Adam had persevered in a state of innocence; if we ourselves were careful to keep in the state of sanctifying grace received at

baptism, we should only feel sweetness and ease in the reign of God within us. We must, therefore, attribute only to ourselves all that is hard or troublesome in it. Let us then resist our evil inclinations whence come all obstacles; and let us bless God for the powerful helps He gives us to triumph over them.

Every day we say *Thy Kingdom come!* but do we say it from our heart? Do we do all in our power to advance this kingdom? Grace is the instrument of God's power. Are we submissive to His grace, attentive to it, following it when we know what it requires of us? Does God reign over our senses; are we careful to keep a strict guard over them? Does He reign over our imagination; or do we suffer it to run wild and carry us on to evil? Does He rule over our passions; are we careful to repress the first movements that would draw us on to sin? Does He reign supreme over our intellect; do we study to conform our ideas to His, and judge of things even as He judges them? Is our will subject to His; or do we not sometimes, nay very often, resist? Are we not impatient under the least contradiction; rebellious against the designs of Providence when they do not accommodate themselves to our views or plans or inclinations?

There are a great number of Christians who are resolved to die rather than violate seriously and deliberately any one commandment of God or His Church. But is the Kingdom of God limited to this? Can we flatter ourselves that we obey Him through love if we intend to go no further? Does not God expect more from us? Would Jesus Christ have limited the meaning of the prayer He teaches us, to not resisting His Father's orders under pain of incurring His anger? An earthly father has the right to expect much more from his children. God, Who has infinitely superior claims, wishes to reign over us absolutely and supremely. This it is that Jesus Christ meant, and thus are we to understand His words.

Then, you will say, "can I dispose of myself in nothing and in no way?" No, not independently of God, for you renounce this when you say *Thy Kingdom come;* and if such is not your intention, you give to these words a mean-

ing which God cannot accept. God's rights have not and cannot have limits.

Reason and grace are the two means by which God exercises His dominion over us; the coöperation of both is necessary in order that you may be subject to Him as a man and a Christian. There is no exception to this; by it you can measure the extent of God's dominion over you and your voluntary dependence on Him. Do not say, "I shall not be lost if I disregard God's right in small things; for who would be saved if His Kingdom is to be extended to such a high degree of perfection?" A Christian who speaks or thinks thus does not enter into the spirit of the Lord's Prayer, and is far from thinking rightly. Take notice that your salvation is only secondary in this prayer; the Kingdom of God, much more important in itself than in regard to you, takes the first place. The question is not how far you are to make God's Kingdom reign in you so as to secure your salvation. Who could determine this exactly? And even were it possible to settle this question, is it seemly for a child of God to dwell upon it? Does he not lower himself, by the meanness of his sentiments, when he limits the rights of such a Father to his own interests, only thinking of himself in the submission he renders Him? Watch over the Kingdom of God in you and leave to Him the care of your eternal salvation. All power is His, and He desires your salvation even more than you do; He will look to it when He sees you occupied with His interests rather than your own. If you love Him, and can extend His rights over you, will you for a moment hesitate? His fatherly rule is so sweet!

Instead of narrowing the empire of His grace to yourself, you should wish this Kingdom to extend over all men. Give subjects to God. Pray that He may reign in your home and wherever you have any authority. Be extremely sensitive to all that touches the honor of religion, the propagation of the Faith, the increasing of religion. Let the whole universe be included in your intention when you say:
Thy Kingdom come.

**THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH
AS IT IS IN HEAVEN**

What perfection there is in this petition! We desire that God should meet with no greater opposition in us to His will than He finds among the saints in heaven. It is impossible to wish or to ask for anything more perfect. If we realized what it means; if we put in practice what we ask, God would be as promptly and as punctually obeyed, and with the same affection and disinterestedness by His children on earth as He is by the saints and angels in heaven. One will alone prevails in heaven—the will of God. Why is not heaven, in this, the model for earth? Why do we not in this copy the Blessed? It is the will of our Heavenly Father that we should do so, and the intention of Jesus Christ; for this end He taught us the Lord's Prayer.

He who has not this sentiment at heart does not honor God as he should, and is not worthy to call Him his Father. For God is no less the God of heaven than He is the God of earth, and He is no more the Father of the Blessed than He is ours; consequently He has the same right to our obedience as He has to theirs. Free will is not given us to authorize us to do our own will; liberty does not give us the right to dispose of ourselves. We are gifted with free will that our submission may be meritorious. How could we glorify God, how could we be worthy of our eternal reward, if we had not our free will? For these two ends God created and endowed us, not to dispense us from giving Him His due. The imperfection of our liberty here below consists in the abuse we make of it, preferring our will to God's will. In heaven, as St. Augustine says, this defect in our liberty will be taken away; then we shall no longer make a bad use of it. "It is not true," says this holy Doctor, "that the blessed will have no free will, because sin has no longer any attraction for them; on the contrary, they will be all the more free, being freed from taking any delight in sin, so as to feel no delight but that of not sinning." So our present liberty, which is a gift of God, does not prevent His will from being our rule of life, as well as that of the saints in heaven; they have not the unfortunate

power of turning aside from this rule, a power which is the cause of all the disorder and danger in our present life. We ask in the Lord's Prayer that we may never use this power so as to withdraw ourselves ever so little from the Divine Will. We must struggle, and struggle hard, and without ceasing to attain this.

In heaven we will see things and judge of them as God sees and judges. Self-love and self-seeking will be banished; there no other interest is known but God's interest, and no other love but the love of God. This is the perfection to which a Christian should aspire on earth; for this reason the Gospel lays down the express law that we must detach ourselves from all created objects and deny ourselves. If the Christian does not strive, with all his might, to put himself in the same dispositions as the Blessed in heaven, he will not be able to do the will of God as it is done in heaven; yet this he is enjoined to do every day, not only for his own sake, but for that of others.

God's will not only meets with no obstacles in heaven, but it is fulfilled with love and joy. The Blessed find in it their glory and happiness; to them nothing is preferable, or even comparable to the will of God, and His good pleasure is above all else. This is the model Jesus Christ proposes for our imitation.

But does He mean that there should be no difference in the fulfillment of His will by the saints in heaven and men on earth? He means there should be none so far as the intention and disposition of the will is concerned. And so it ought to be, God being, as I have said, as much to us as He is to the Blessed, and His good pleasure as much our supreme law as it is theirs. Where then is the difference? For there must be some, and a very great difference. It consists in this: our submission has obstacles to overcome, that of the Blessed has none; we feel aversions and repugnances, they none; we are always liable to fail in respect for God's will; they have nothing of the kind to fear. Our obedience is a source of merit on account of the difficulties we have to encounter; theirs is a reward. Because they have struggled and combated, they struggle no more; they have overcome repugnances, they feel them no more; they

have been faithful unto death, and rest in the assurance they shall be so forever.

Is it possible, you will ask me, for the will of God to be as perfectly accomplished on earth as it is in heaven? If it were not possible would Jesus Christ have made it one of the principal petitions of His prayer? He knew our weakness better than we, and He knew also the strength of grace, and the power it has over a heart that is entirely submitted to it. "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew xix. 26). Man left to himself can do nothing, but supported by grace he can do all things, as St. Paul does not hesitate to say. It is possible through grace to have a sincere desire of doing the will of God as the saints do it in heaven. It is possible when we have resisted, hesitated and even murmured against the will of God, humbly to repent and make a firm purpose to sin no more, and at last to attain to a state of perfect conformity to the will of God. Human weakness, however great it may be, is capable of this perfection. This is precisely what God requires of us, what Jesus Christ commands us to ask for, and to attain which the whole Christian life should be devoted.

Each day I say to God: *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* Do I seek His will in all that depends on me? Do I submit to it in all those things over which I have no control? Is this thought: God wills it, the chief motive of my actions? Is it my support and comfort in all my sufferings? Do I strive more and more to conform myself to this Divine Will by making the vain reasonings of my mind and the rebelliousness of my heart submit to it? Do I seek perfection by not deviating from the order of Providence, by forming no plans of my own, by disposing of myself in nothing, and by being content with all that happens to me? If not, do not flatter yourself that you have the spirit of Christianity and of its Divine Author. You are not, however, expected to arrive all at once at the highest degree of perfection; the Christian life is one long, continual apprenticeship, there is always something more to be acquired, however advanced in holiness we may be.

Let us pause a while, and dwell a little longer on these

three first petitions, which contain a most important truth: let us see how these three petitions formed the basis of Jesus Christ's prayer during His whole mortal life.

What did He say to His Father in prayer? Nothing more than: *Hallowed be Thy name! Thy Kingdom come! Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!* God-man as He was, He could make no holier prayer, nor have in His heart any purer desire; His life was the perfect fulfillment of these prayers. Forgetting Himself, He was wholly occupied with the sanctification of His Father's name. He sought only to establish His Father's Kingdom; His food was His Father's will; He came into the world to do it; He left the world in sacrifice to it. Immediately before His passion He says to His Eternal Father: *I have glorified Thee on earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do. I have manifested Thy name to the men whom Thou hast given Me out of the world* (John xvii. 4, 6).

As Son of God by nature, speaking to His brothers by adoption; as Master teaching His disciples; as Leader of the elect, showing the way to heaven to the members of His mystical body, He neither could nor should have taught any other prayer than the one He Himself addressed to God. If I have not His sentiments; if I excuse myself by saying they are too perfect, I have never understood the beauty, the sublimity, the perfection, of the Christian doctrine, and the duties it imposes; and must even now begin to imbibe the spirit of Jesus Christ, and to imitate His conduct since I say His prayer with Him.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

God, like the father of a large family, feeds mankind, His children. To deserve their maintenance, they must earn it by labor and industry. This is the universal law established since the first sin. God said to Adam: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." The earth which before his sin brought forth everything spontaneously, yields her fruits no longer, except to persevering cultivation. This is the penance God imposed on guilty man; it is on this condition only that He will give him bread.

Moreover He wishes man to acknowledge that he re-

ceives it from His bounty, and to ask for it daily; indeed all labor would be fruitless and sterile if God did not bless it. Man does not give the earth its inexhaustible fertility; he does not give the seed its power of multiplying; he does not send the fertilizing rain and the warming sun to fructify it and bring it gradually to perfect maturity.

All labor, whether of mind or body, necessary or useful to the well-being of society, is comprised in the sentence pronounced against the first man; and the man who does not work in one way or another, or gives himself up to a useless or pernicious life, does not deserve the bread he eats. He has no right to ask for it, and if God gives it to him, it is only in consequence of that universal Providence of God, "Who maketh the sun to rise upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust" (Matthew v. 45). The petition for food and the other necessities of life does not dispense us from labor; neither does our labor exempt us from the gratitude we owe God as the Author of all good.

This petition manifestly condemns all unjust means of acquiring property which would be unjust or hurtful to our neighbor. Any man who uses unlawful means to amass temporal goods is unworthy to repeat the Lord's Prayer, and pronounces it to his own condemnation.

GIVE US

It is not for yourself alone and your family that you ask bread, but for all Christians, since they are your brothers. You ought to interest yourself in their welfare as in your own, for all are children of the same Father. It is culpable avarice to wish to possess more than others; it is foolish pride to imagine more is due to you; it is crying injustice to diminish or take any part of what belongs to them, to increase your portion, and it is also mean jealousy to envy them if God has given them more and you less. When you say *Give us*, leave it to God, Who is Master, to distribute as He pleases. For God wishes to give to all; He commands you to ask for all men; He does not understand the petition *give us* as restricted to your personal needs. If, then, He gives you more than you need

and leaves your brother in want, this is not because He forgets him; He simply wishes to give to him through you, and to make both of you practice the virtues suited to your state, and to unite you by liberality and compassion shown on one side, and the spirit of gratitude on the other. When your brother asks you, in God's name, for his part of what you possess and you refuse him, you are not only cruel and inhuman, but you retain what does not belong to you—what you only hold as a deposit, placed in your hands for distribution to those in need.

GIVE US THIS DAY

You ask for to-day and not for to-morrow. To-morrow, when it comes, "will be solicitous for itself" (Matthew vi. 34), says Jesus Christ. God wishes you to rest day by day on His Providence, and does not approve of your being eager to provide for the future. A child lets itself be cared for by its father and mother; have you forgotten that Jesus Christ has more than once said you were to be as little children, and that the kingdom of heaven is for those who are like them? Do not wrong God, your Father, by distrusting Him; do not trouble about the morrow; He takes thought of it for you—foresees everything, arranges everything. To leave the future to Providence is recommended in this petition; not that Jesus Christ forbids a certain prudent provision; He only wishes us not to be over-anxious; He discourages that anxiety which tries to ward off evils which may never occur. Is He not right? Does He not thereby do us a great service? Is it not true that the thought: "What shall I live on to-morrow?" poisons our life for to-day? The greater part of mankind are made more wretched on account of what they apprehend for the future than by what they suffer in the present. Foolish men! why give way to useless thoughts that only torment you and worry you? Eat in peace the bread God gives you to-day, and trust to His Fatherly kindness for to-morrow. These cares that undermine your health, and are injurious to your soul, will not avert the accidents you dread, and which you see looming in the distant future. God alone can preserve you from evil; how better can you secure His aid than by trusting implicitly to Him?

GIVE US OUR BREAD

You ask for bread; for the absolute necessities of life. When God gives you these He fulfills His promise, and you cannot complain. He is not obliged to give you anything more. Shall God or you measure the extent of your necessities? If it depends on you, you will never think you have enough; and so long as there is someone richer than yourself, you will always think you are poor because you have less than he. Do not listen to your cupidity, your ambition, or the maxims of the world that places its happiness in unlimited wealth. In the eyes of the wise man, and with greater reason in the eyes of the Christian, competence is preferable to opulence for the peace of our present life and the security of our future happiness.

OUR DAILY BREAD

Your petition is repeated every day, because each day your wants are renewed.

God, out of pure kindness to you, has willed that you should be in a continual state of dependence for the needs of your body as well as those of your soul. It is generally true that those who live by the work of their hands, or by some business, are more mindful of God's Providence, more careful to invoke Him, more attentive in thanking Him, and more full of confidence in Him, than the rich, who see their future provided for, and consequently do not put their dependence on the daily benefits of God. It is but too common for them to forget Him, and remember their need of Him only when in danger of sustaining some heavy loss.

Rich or poor (for the Lord's Prayer is for all), let us enter into the mind of Jesus Christ when He made this petition, and let us be sure that those who are abundantly supplied with the goods of this world are no less bound to practice virtue than those whose share is small, or have nothing at all. Above all let us remember that our spiritual should go before our corporal wants, and to relieve the body, even in its most pressing necessities, we must never endanger our salvation. The true Christian never

compromises his eternal interests; he never even harbors the thought that the necessity of living authorizes him in offending God. A Christian should ask for nothing for himself until he has petitioned for the sanctification of his Father's name, the coming of His Kingdom, and the perfect accomplishment of His will; what a subversion of the right order it is if he not only thinks first of his temporal life before thinking of God's interests, but to advance himself in life, or, to save himself from a passing misery, is willing to offend this best of Fathers.

FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE ALSO FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS

The Gospel on more than one occasion speaks of our sins as debts we owe to God's justice, and of His pardon as the remission of the debt. For this reason, to make the matter clearer and more intelligible, instead of the words of Christ the following, having the same meaning, have been substituted: *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.* This conditional petition is very noteworthy. Nothing shows more emphatically how dear to God's heart is the forgiveness of injuries. To put us, as it were, under the obligation of forgiving, He prescribes a form of prayer whereby we expressly promise to do so. Forgive us, we say to Him, as we forgive; that is evidently: Forgive us if we forgive, and do not forgive us if we refuse to forgive.

The revengeful Christian is here judged by his own lips; or else, so long as he keeps in his heart any desire for revenge, he must desist from saying the Lord's Prayer. A sad alternative, indeed, however little be his faith! Jesus Christ foresaw how hard it would be to our pride and self-love to forgive injuries, and on how many pretexts we should seek to be dispensed from so doing; to cut short all our reasonings, to silence us, and to overcome our pride and self-love, He prompts us to act for our higher interests: He makes the forgiveness of injuries the essential condition of the far more important pardon we need and each day beg of God,

Which of us has not offended God? and does not need pardon for his sins? Which of us is not more or less uneasy about this pardon, and longs to have some certainty of it for the peace of his heart? Well, here is that certainty formally given by Jesus Christ Himself: If your brother has offended you and you are sincerely desirous of forgiving him; if you are firmly resolved to pardon him as often as he offends you, be at peace and full of confidence for the pardon of your sins; you have every reason to believe it will be granted you, and you can say to God: *Lord, I have been very guilty in Thy sight; I do not deserve Thy grace, but I have freely forgiven my brother as Thou hast commanded me, so I hope, yes, I hope for everything from Thy goodness and mercy, and my hope rests on Thy promises, which are infallible.* For the Christian who knows the happiness of which sin deprives him, and the chastisement to which it exposes him, is there any consolation to be compared with this? On the other hand, what desolation, what despair, what a sad certainty of eternal reprobation, awaits him who obstinately refuses to forgive to his dying day, and who entertains feelings of revenge! His sentence is passed; he has signed it beforehand. It is out of his power to say to God: *Forgive me.* He has had no mercy on his neighbor, so he can expect nothing but a judgment without mercy. He knows this: no truth is more clearly nor more frequently expressed in the Gospel, and the *Our Father* he has recited from childhood witnesses against him.

Do you really think Jesus Christ, Who on the cross had our sins present to His mind, and there shed His Precious Blood for us who crucified Him no less than for the Jews, asks too much of us when He asks us to forgive each other as He forgave us?

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

What do we pray for here? It cannot be that we ask God not to tempt us Himself, and put us in the occasion of offending Him. God tries our virtue but He does not tempt us. As St. James says: *God is not a tempter of evils, and He tempteth no man. But every man is tempted by*

his own concupiscence, being drawn away and allured (James i. 13, 14).

Neither do we ask God to save us from all temptation. Adam, when in a state of innocence, was tempted; God permitted it for His own wise reasons. Temptations try our fidelity, they are necessary to keep us humble, and to excite us to watchfulness and prayer. They can do us no harm without the consent of our will. Grace to resist temptation is never wanting except through our own fault. Temptations are necessary to teach us not only to fear them, but to struggle against them and overcome them. Even the God-man allowed Himself to be tempted. What we ask for is that we may not give way to temptation; and that God will proportion it to our strength; that He will come to our assistance; that He will protect us by His grace against the snares and the assaults of the devil; and that He will strengthen our will against the seductions of concupiscence. We say this prayer daily, because there is not a day, nor a moment, in which we are not, or may not be, exposed to sin. Each age, each state, has its temptations; the sanctity of our profession, seclusion from the world, even complete solitude does not protect us from them; and the most subtle and dangerous assaults threaten those most advanced in the way of perfection, if they are not on their guard. Therefore, of all the petitions of the Lord's Prayer this, in a certain sense, is the most necessary, for until our last breath we are on the brink of an abyss, always in danger of falling into it, always in danger of losing the state of grace until the moment of our death.

Each time then that we recite the Lord's Prayer let us awaken within ourselves the consciousness of our own misery; let us cast a look on the dangers surrounding us, and the enemies that beset us on every side. Let us acknowledge the great and continual need we have of God's grace, humbly confessing that though with it we can do all things, yet of ourselves we can do no good at all. Let us never cease to beg it of God; He is bound to give it, and never refuses His grace to those who are diffident of themselves, who, firmly convinced of their own weakness, take all the means that Christian prudence suggests to keep out of the

way of temptation. He never refuses it to those who are faithful in small things, in order to be faithful in great things.

The grace which God bestows at these times is not simply the ordinary grace; it is a special grace that supports us powerfully, and has always the effect we ask for. The rash man who faces danger, without consulting God's will; the presumptuous man who relies on his own strength, on acquired virtues, on past victories, or on the fleeting impulses of fervor; the cowardly and tepid, who neglect small faults and call them light because they do not kill the soul: such persons must not expect the assistance of divine grace in times of temptation, or under difficult circumstances. They have of their own fault exposed themselves to danger; they have presumed on their virtue; they have weakened themselves by a long series of slight infidelities; they will have a lamentable fall from which they may never rise. Remember, when we pray not to be led into temptation, the prayer refers only to those occasions in which God has placed us Himself; occasions for which an habitual fidelity has prepared us and disciplined us; or, at most, to occasions where, although our intention is good, we are exposed to danger through imprudence, carelessness, surprise, indiscreet zeal, or misplaced kindness.

God, Who sees the inmost heart, never abandons an upright soul that is without malice; and if He allows it to fall, it is that it may become more humble and more on its guard.

The world is full of snares. To seek its esteem, fear its censures, its jesting, its scoffing, is evidently to place oneself in danger of falling into the many temptations to be met with each day; and it would be a decided illusion to expect grace to preserve you from these dangers into which you deliberately throw yourself.

We must not, however, imitate those who, overcome by fear of being lost, fly from all occasions of working for the salvation of souls, under pretext of the danger of offending God, nor those who give up leading a spiritual life, frightened by the difficulties the devil lays in the way, and the trying temptations through which they may have to

pass. We must expect to encounter mighty assaults from the devil when we choose to devote ourselves entirely to God. But we must not for one moment doubt the divine protection, and must rest assured that it will enable us to triumph over the spirit of darkness. We must walk steadily between the two precipices of presumption and pusillanimity, and then we shall never ask God in vain to *Lead us not into temptation.*

BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL. AMEN

Nothing is more important for us to know than from what evil Jesus wishes us to ask to be delivered. For in all things, and in this most especially, His intention should be the sole rule and guide of ours. As the sovereign good of the rational creature is the eternal possession of God, to which the soul is destined, his sovereign evil is to be forever deprived of this possession. The deliverance from so great an evil is therefore the principal object of our last petition. Only through faith can we understand how great is the evil of being deprived of the possession of God through our own fault. It is quite impossible for us to put ourselves in the position in which a soul finds itself at the moment of its separation from the body, when it sees and feels that it has lost God forever. It then knows very clearly and distinctly what God is in Himself; what He is in relation to it; and the infinite and irreparable loss it has to suffer. All the objects that occupied and engrossed it in this life are nothing now; all are snatched away by death and if it still thinks of them, it is only to reproach itself for the extreme folly of ever having cared for them. The desire for happiness possesses it now with full force and without cessation; and this inexpressibly intense desire can never be satisfied. An inconceivable and everlasting agony!

This eternal loss of God is the evil from which, above all, the Christian begs to be delivered, the evil he must dread supremely, and must do all in his power to avoid. For this depends on himself. He has but to preserve him-

self from that other evil which alone causes him to lose God.

That other evil is sin, of which damnation is the just punishment. The one is the cause, the other the effect and inevitable consequence. Although that sin which kills the soul is the greatest of evils, every sin is likewise an evil, because every sin wounds the soul and makes her sick and languid. A slight fault leads to greater ones; and if we do not endeavor to avoid the lesser, we are liable to commit the greater; all the more because it is not always easy for us to discern what is grievous from what is not.

It is not enough, if we would correspond with the intentions of Jesus Christ and place our salvation beyond doubt, to pray to be delivered only from mortal sin; every Christian should ask to be preserved from every deliberate sin. Moreover, if he truly love God, he will make this request more from fear of offending so good a Father than from the fear of drawing down punishment on himself. As the Christian is bound to love God more than himself, it is but right he should have a greater horror of sin, because it is an evil to God than because it is an evil to himself. This is the right understanding of the words, *Deliver us from evil.*

Faith utters these words, and faith knows of no other evil than the supernatural evil, the evil that wounds the holiness of God, stains the purity of the soul, deprives it of sanctifying grace, or puts it in danger of losing that grace, and so exposes it to eternal misery. Are these our thoughts and heartfelt sentiments as we say this prayer? The Christian who knows he is in a state of mortal sin, and deserving of hell, does not sincerely ask God to deliver him from evil, when he does nothing to correspond with the grace of God. It is mockery to ask to be delivered from an evil we do not fear, an evil we love and take pleasure in.

Those to whom slight faults seem trivial, because they only see in them an offence against God, not dangerous to their salvation, are not only mistaken on this point, but they insult Him Whom they call Father by troubling themselves very little about what offends Him, providing their soul runs no risk for eternity.

The Gospel teaches us that the evils of this life are not

real evils, rather, seen by the light of faith, they may be to us very great benefits by the holy use we make of them. Jesus Christ chose for Himself the heaviest of these evils, those most repugnant to nature. His disciples must not make their natural aversion an excuse, nor judge of them according to the dictates of flesh and blood. They must remember He took them upon Himself, in our stead, by way of a pledge and security; He used them to repair the injury done to God, to expiate our sins, to merit for us the graces necessary to preserve us from them and to blot them out. The perfect Christian will not, therefore, ask to be delivered from these evils, but will rather ask to suffer patiently that he may glorify God, and sanctify himself by accepting them. As to imperfect Christians, who have not sufficient virtue to draw spiritual profit from temporal afflictions, but are only provoked by them to sin through impatience, murmurings, rebellion, and despair, God does not take it ill when they pray to be delivered from them. Still He wishes our principal motive in asking relief to be the desire to serve Him with greater liberty, more love, gratitude, and fidelity. He wishes us, humbled by the knowledge of our want of virtue, to pray to be freed from afflictions, not because they are painful to nature, but because through our own fault they may prove obstacles to our salvation. In short, He wishes no comparison to be made between temporal ills and the one true evil—sin—and requires that we be determined to suffer to the last extremity rather than be freed at the expense of conscience. We are not Christians at all if we do not think and act in this manner with regard to the pains and afflictions of life.

To say this prayer well, to have its sentiments engraved in our hearts, and to put them into daily practice, is to be on the road of perfection. Are we on this road? I do not ask whether we have made progress on it, only, have we entered upon it, or at least do we desire to do so—we who from our very childhood say the *Our Father* many times a day? Let us examine our conscience on this subject, let us remember one day we shall be judged by Him Who taught us this prayer.

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