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Pray if you wish to be saved

Reminder that the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before Ascension Thursday are Rogation Days in which the Church would have us pray the Litany of the Saints. Ascension Thursday is a Holy Day of Obligation.

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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love You, save souls

O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+++ Jesus, Mary, Joseph +++

VOL. I = THE BAD CHRISTIAN

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

False and useless prayer

“Ask, and you shall receive.” St. John 16:24.

Here you have an unlimited permission to request whatever favor you desire with a full assurance of obtaining it. And yet there is nothing more common than to hear men complaining that their prayers seem to be of no avail. What is the cause of that? If ever our hearts and desires are in contradiction with the words we utter, they are so very often when we pray; for we are not always earnest in our prayers, nor do we really wish to be heard; in fact, we desire the very contrary of what we ask for. This is the case especially when we ask for heavenly graces and spiritual blessings, which ought to be the chief object of our prayers.

Many pray, but they do not wish to receive what they pray for.

He does not pray who does not wish to receive what he prays for, because the nature of prayer consists in the desire of obtaining what we ask for; because asking is but an outward sign of our inward desire. And this was the first condition that our Lord required from the sick and infirm whom he healed. “Wilt thou be made whole?” (St John 5:6) he asked the infirm man who had no one to put him in the pond at Bethsaida. “What will ye that I do to you?” (St. Matthew 20:32) he said to the two blind men by the roadside when they cried out to him to have mercy on them. If he had seen that those people were not in earnest in their prayers for health and sight, and that they would have preferred money instead, he would certainly not have healed them. And that is perfectly just; for who would force his gifts and graces on one who is unwilling to receive them, and who sets no store by them? To ask, and not to desire what one asks for, is not to pray, but to deceive and lie. Such is the complaint that Jesus Christ makes of those hypocrites who pray to him with their lips, while their hearts and desires are in utter contradiction with their words: “This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (St. Matthew 15:7, 8).

Such is the conduct of those who ask for heavenly goods and do not wish to get them. They are not in earnest with a single petition of the Lord’s prayer, in which the lips and the heart, the words and the will should always be in perfect accord.

1. They are not in earnest in the first petition: “Hallowed be thy name,” the meaning of which is: We wish and desire, with our whole hearts, that the holy name of God be always praised, honored, glorified, and blessed by all creatures in the world, in a manner befitting his infinite majesty and sanctity; that his glory be every day increased by us and all belonging to us, and by all his creatures; that He be always known and loved by all men, above all things. Now, I ask all who say that prayer: are you really in earnest? Have you a sincere desire to obtain your request? Are you in earnest, if you use irreverently and disrespectfully the most holy Name of Jesus, at which every knee must bend in heaven and in hell; if you utter it in astonishment, or in jest? And you who, by

your inveterate and horrible habit of cursing, pay more honor to the name of the devil than to the name of God, and by your bad example teach your children to use a language fit for demons? You who so often speak of God and his Saints in contemptuous, profane, or blasphemous terms? Are you in earnest, I ask, in your prayer that the name of God be hallowed, and his glory increased by all men? Or do you think that you are going the right way about blessing his name? Meanwhile, all these people say every day:

“Hallowed be thy name;” but they do not take the least trouble to amend their own conduct. Away with such beggars as those! Either they do not know what they are asking for, or they do not want it.

2. The second petition is, “Thy kingdom come.” Do you know what it means? If there was question here of a great and glorious kingdom, such as the two Apostles imagined when their mother asked our Lord: “Say that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left, in thy kingdom” (St. Matthew 20:21), then, indeed, I should have no doubt of the earnestness of your prayer. Unceasingly you would cry out: Grant, oh, Lord, that thy kingdom may come! It is my most ardent wish! Let me be the first in thy kingdom! I desire with all my heart to sit next to thee! But that is not the meaning of those words, and therefore, although you pray a hundred times a day, “Thy kingdom come,” thou, oh, Lord, shalt alone rule in my heart! you cry out far louder with your hearts, which are already possessed by something else: “We will not have this man to reign over us” (St. Luke 19:14). No; the Lord is too severe and he is opposed to our desires; we do not want him to rule over us. Like the wicked Jews, when Pilate showed them Christ, saying, “Behold your King!” they cried out: “We have no king but Caesar” (St. John 19:14, 15). Thus many Christians really cry out when they pray: We have no king but our unmortified flesh, whose desires we always are willing to gratify; we have no ruler but that person to whom we have sold our heart, our love and our freedom, and whom we adore as an idol; we will have no master but the world, whose laws we observe most obediently; no lord but the devil, whose slaves we make ourselves by sin. Again, how few Christians there are who pray earnestly for the eternal kingdom of heaven! If the Lord were to come and knock at their door while they are praying over and over again, “Thy kingdom come,” oh, what troubled countenances there would be! with what fear and dread they would cry out: Give us till tomorrow! Wait a little, oh, Lord; we have had no time to prepare! Give me a few years longer; I am not so old yet! There are many who, if the choice were given them between heaven and earth, between eternal joys and the allurements of the world and the delights of the flesh, would cry out at once, in the words of the psalmist: “The heaven of heaven is the Lord’s; but the earth he hath given to the children of men” (Ps. 113:16), therefore I prefer to remain on earth amongst men. Oh, you may pray as much as you like, “Thy kingdom come,” you will not be one bit better, for you are not in earnest; you do not want it.

3. The third petition is: “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” What a beautiful and angelic prayer that is! Are you all in earnest about it? If so, you are not in need of any more virtue; you are all perfect and holy. In earnest, indeed! A likely thing, to be sure! you poor, oppressed and needy Christians! See how this prayer of yours, “Thy will be done,” chimes in with your actions! God has been pleased to place one man in humble and reduced circumstances; another he has deprived of honor and respectability before the world; a third he has commanded to work hard for daily bread; a fourth he visits with sickness or bodily pain, or with temporal losses, or with different crosses and trials; the husband, the wife, the father, the mother, must look on while the object of their dearest affection lies dangerously ill, and may die at any moment. All these people say, “Thy will be done;” but how do they say it? What a want of resignation they show! What tears they shed! How impatient they are! How they murmur and complain! They almost give way to despair. It is natural to weep and be afflicted at misfortune, nor can we help feeling pain and grief; that is the reason why God sends us crosses; we must feel them; we must weep and be afflicted; but our sorrow should not interfere with patience and resignation to the will of God. Job certainly felt his sufferings when he was lying on the dunghill; he cried out: “Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you my friends, because the hand of the Lord hath touched me” (Job 19:21.). And yet he was patient in the highest degree, and was quite satisfied with the punishment inflicted on him by God; for he said: “Blessed be the name of the Lord.” David wept bitterly when he heard of the death of his son Absalom:

“My son Absalom, Absalom, my son,” said he; “would God that I might die for thee”; but at the same time he praised God with the most humble submission to his will. Jesus Christ himself was troubled in the garden of Gethsemane at the thought of the sufferings that were in store for him, and He was sorrowful even to death. He

even asked his heavenly father to free him from such a shameful death, saying: “My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me;” but at once, with the utmost resignation, he added: “nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt” (St. Matthew 26:38, 39). So that sorrow is not a sign of dissatisfaction and discontent when he who suffers it says and thinks: Oh, Lord, it is thy will for me to suffer; thy will be done!

4. If we are to be earnest about any petition we surely should be so about the fourth: “Give us this day our daily bread.” I do not think that any one would refuse to pray earnestly for this, or to stretch out both hands eagerly to seize hold of any blessings of the kind that are bestowed on him; in fact, the more one receives of those blessings the better he is pleased. Still, surprising as it is, even in this petition we are not always in earnest. And why? Consider what we ask for “bread,” that is, whatever is necessary to support life, but nothing superfluous. According to the well-known exhortation of St. Paul:

“Having food, and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content” (I Tim. 6:8); nor should we desire any more: “For they that will become rich fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdition” (I Tim. 6:9). Give us “our daily bread;” that is to say, our neighbor must share with us, and he to whom God has given much must help the poor and needy. Give us our “daily bread,” by which we acknowledge our constant and humble dependence on God, and, like poor beggars, expect our food from his hands. Give us “this day ;” we do not say to-morrow, so as not to show too great an anxiety for the future, and to prove our confidence in the common Father of all, who feeds the birds of the air and the worms of the earth.

From this you can see what your desire is regarding this petition. Judge yourselves if they are satisfied with their daily bread who squander away their lives in immoderate pleasures, and indulge in too great an extravagance in dress. They are not content with their bread, although there are so many poor who have no bread whom they could and should help out of their superfluous wealth. Do they ask for “our” daily bread who are concerned for themselves alone, and do not trouble themselves about others, while they look upon the law of alms-giving as not binding in conscience, and very often resort to all kinds of tricks to plunder poor widows and orphans? Are they content with their daily bread for “this day” who, through greed of gold, are most anxious to save all they can, and to increase their treasures, as if they expected never to die, but to live in this world for ever? All these people do not really desire what they ask for; they are not satisfied with that for which they pray to God.

5. “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us” that is, as we deal with our neighbor, with him who has offended and injured us, and who says he is our sworn enemy; so, also, oh, Lord, do we wish and desire that thou shouldst deal with us, and with our sins! Oh, vindictive man! do you mean that? You cannot bear the man who has injured you, or with whom you have a difference or a lawsuit; you do not speak a friendly word to him; your heart is full of bitterness toward him; you will never forget the harm he has done you; if you wish him no harm, neither do you wish well to him; you eagerly avail yourself of every opportunity of paying him off in his own coin. Now, do you really wish and desire that God should deal with you in the same way, and take vengeance on you for the sins you have committed against him? Do you really mean that? Then woe to you if he were to do as you ask! And yet you say every day to him: “forgive us, as we forgive!” No; I cannot believe that you really wish to be heard; and so you do not desire what you pray for.

6. “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” that is, keep off from us, oh, Lord, the evil spirit, that he may not deceive us by his wiles, temptations and suggestions; keep down in us the unruly desires of the flesh, that we may not be led by them to transgress thy law; keep our souls from all dangerous occasions, and “deliver us from evil,” and especially from the greatest of all evils, sin! Such is the tenor of our prayer; but what is really our wish and desire? Truly, the devil is not always to blame for every temptation and sin! Much less is God an occasion of evil to us. He permits us to be tempted, but not more than we can bear; and his only object in doing so is to prove our virtue, and to increase our merit and eternal glory. But very often we tempt ourselves and do our best to lead ourselves into evil; we go without necessity into the dangerous occasions of sin; we give full liberty to our eyes, ears, tongue and all our senses; we are fond of, and seek conversations, friendships and acquaintances that the holiest and most mortified servants of God shunned through fear of falling, and which we must acknowledge in conscience to be dangerous to innocence; we read books, novels and love tales, and think

about what we read, until it would be a miracle indeed if we did not give way to our evil desires. And still we pray daily, "Lead us not into temptation!" Truly there is no earnestness in our prayer!

Will God, who "is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things" (I John 3:20), not only the words we speak, but also the desires of our hearts, listen with favor to a prayer which our own conscience tells us to be false and deceitful? Yes, he says; I will grant the prayer of your heart, but not that of your lips! You speak of the salvation of your soul, and the kingdom of heaven; but in reality you desire eternal ruin; "be it done to thee as thou wilt!" You say with the lips to me: "Thy will be done," but you are not satisfied with my will; "be it done to thee as thou wilt;" remain in your impatience and discontent. You say that I must forgive you your trespasses as you forgive those of others against you; but you refuse to forgive; I will do the same. You ask me to free you from danger of sin; but you run willfully into the danger; go on, then, to your own destruction. You say that I must convert you; but you remain in the state of mortal sin; "be it done to thee as thou wilt." Amen! So be it! You will live and die in sin, and perish eternally! And why? Because such is your will. Alas, what a fearful Amen that is! God grant that it may never be said to any of our prayers! Amen.

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