

CELEBRATING AT THE LORD'S TABLE: PART II

THE LORD'S PRAYER

The Lord's Prayer, also called the Our Father, was taught to us by Jesus, himself, as the way to pray. The prayer is used by most Christian churches in their worship. Although theological differences and various modes of worship divide Christians, there is a sense of solidarity in knowing that Christians around the globe are praying this prayer together and that these words will always unite us. The prayer perfectly summarizes what Christians believe and how Christians should live.

MATTHEW AND LUKE

Two versions of this prayer are recorded in the Gospels: a longer form, within the Sermon on the Mount, in the Gospel of Matthew, and a shorter form from the Gospel of Luke. In each case, Jesus tells us that this is the way to pray. Both versions are on the screen. Note the portions of the prayer from Matthew, which are omitted in Luke.

MATTHEW 6:9-13 (NSRV)

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

LUKE 11:2-4 (NSRV)

Father,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins, for we
ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial.

Neither the version from Matthew nor the version from Luke contain the concluding phrase “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, now and for ever.” Many consider that this doxology, an expression of praise to God, is a later, but ancient, addition.

TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY VERSIONS

The form of the prayer in most common use, including liturgical use, is based on the version found in Matthew. The Book of Common Prayer authorizes both a traditional version and a contemporary version, which are on the screen. Note the use of the word “temptation” in the traditional version and the use of the word “trial” in the contemporary version.

TRADITIONAL

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we
forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into **temptation**,
but deliver us from evil.

CONTEMPORARY

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as is heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we
we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of **trial**,
and deliver us from evil.

This instructional Eucharist is a Rite II liturgy which provides the option to use either the traditional or the contemporary version of the Lord's Prayer. The traditional version of the Lord's prayer remained as an option in the Rite II

liturgy largely because it was so beloved of the people and the committee feared significant backlash if it was not at least included as an option. The other Anglican Prayer Book revisions were braver and eliminated the traditional version from contemporary liturgies. Now that Episcopalians are familiar with the contemporary version there is little to commend the decision to include the traditional version in a Rite II liturgy. The contemporary version comes to us from the International Consultation on English Texts (ICET), an ecumenical body that was set up in 1969. The liturgists and theologians who worked on that translation assert the following about the significant difference between the use of temptation and trial in the two versions: Two errors must be avoided in this line. The first is the misconception that God would “tempt” or entice people to evil, and the second is to think that the original Greek word *peirasmos* means “temptation” as it is meant today. The reference here is primarily a petition for deliverance from the final “time of trial” which, in biblical thought, marks the last days and the full revelation of the anti-Christ. The peril envisaged is the renunciation of the Christian faith in the time of suffering and persecution which is expected to herald the final triumph of God’s kingdom (Luke 22:31, 32, 40: Revelation 3:10).

THE PRAYER AS A WHOLE FROM DR. ROWAN WILLIAMS

Dr. Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, writes that the prayer as a whole tells us that we stand in a very vulnerable place. We stand in the middle of a human world where God's will is not the most automatic thing we do, where crisis faces us, where uncertainty is all around about tomorrow and where evil is powerfully at work.

To stand with dignity and freedom in a world like that, we need to know that God is Our Father. We need to know that, whatever happens to us, God is God, God's name and presence and power and word are holy and wonderful and that that glorious God has made us members of his family in a very intimate and direct way. We know that there is a relationship that nothing can break.

So the Lord's Prayer is a prayer that is utterly serious about the danger, the tragedy of the world. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we pray for all human beings: Give all of us what we need for life, the dignity and the hope. Keep all of us from being plunged into crisis we can't handle. Save all of us from the destructive power of evil.

Every single bit of the Lord's Prayer is radical because every single bit of it challenges our assumptions about who we are and who God is and what

the world is like. And what it's praying for is the most revolutionary change you can imagine in the world. A change to a situation where what God wants can happen, to a situation where all the hungry are fed, to a situation where forgiveness is the first imperative in all our relationships.

STRUCTURE OF THE LORD'S PRAYER

After an initial address to the Father, the prayer itself is composed of seven petitions. In scripture the number seven often symbolizes completion or perfection. St. Thomas Aquinas said "The Lord's Prayer is the most perfect of prayers . . . This prayer not only teaches us to ask for things, but also in what order we should desire them." The first three petitions draw us to the glory of God; they concern God's holy name; God's kingdom; and God's will. The last four petitions are for the needs for our life, both body and soul.

THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

Upon the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, the presider takes the Bread and holds it high. In a paced, deliberate way, the presider breaks the Bread. This is the only time in the entire Eucharistic rite when the BCP demands a time of silence. As at the Emmaus table, this breaking of the bread is a deeply significant moment of the manifestation of the sacred. It is full of

expectation that the Holy One who is surely present will become evident, even if only for a moment, before vanishing again. “Their eyes were opened” the Scripture marvels, and that is the expectation of the liturgy: that the assembly’s eyes will be opened. And so the assembly gazes and, full of expectation, waits.

During the Breaking of the Bread, as the presider holds the fractured Bread before the assembly, it is fitting for the presider to look upon the pieces even as the assembly is looking upon them. Every visual cue must point toward the Bread; nothing should draw attention away from it. The silence is not perfunctory but must be protracted. It is full of promise.

The presider lowers the Bread and begins to break it into pieces for the assembly. The presider holds the Bread high above the table so that the assembly can see what is being done, and tears it piece by piece, placing the pieces as they are broken off into the vessel from which communion will be distributed.

As we heard last week, the Eucharistic prayer recites that at supper with the disciples, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples. In the Breaking of the Bread, the presider is recreating Jesus’ actions. Moreover, the Breaking of the Bread reminds us of the breaking of the physical body of Christ on the Cross – the sacrifice of his life for ours.

Ideally, we should share the one bread that has been broken to symbolize that we are all united through the body of Christ. As 1 Corinthians 10:17 tells us, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”

THE FRACTION ANTHEM

The Fraction Anthem follows. The presider says “Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” and the assembly replies “Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleliuia.”

The Apostle Paul pointed to Passover to explain the implications of Christ’s sacrifice. As the Passover lamb slain for us, Christ’s shed blood shields us from the wrath of God. Just as the first Passover delivered Israel from slavery, Christ our Passover has broken the back of sin and has rescued us from its bondage (Rom 6:12 - 14).

LAST SUPPER AS PASSOVER MEAL?

The Last Supper, at which the Eucharist was instituted, has historically been understood as a Passover meal. It is depicted as such in the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, but John indicates that the Last Supper took place before Passover. Some modern scholars have suggested that the

Last Supper was not a Passover meal but a Kiddush. Canon Bruce Jenner describes the Kiddush as a simple repast shared by small groups of Jewish men, very often a rabbi and his disciples, to prepare for the Sabbath or a festival; it consisted of religious discussion followed by a simple meal of common bread accompanied by wine mixed with water, the cup being passed from one to another. He cites the following as evidence for this position:

PASSOVER MEAL OR KIDDUSH?

- The Kiddush was always observed by a group of men, typically a teacher and his disciples, while the Passover was a family festival, but women and children are noticeably absent from the Last Supper.
- The Passover meal included several cups of wine, the paschal lamb, and the retelling of the story of the Exodus, all of which are missing from the Gospel narrative.
- Unleavened bread (azumos) was essential to the Passover, while the Gospels specify that ordinary leavened bread (artos), typical of the Kiddush, was used at the Last Supper.
- The disciples understood from our Lord's words and actions that they were to celebrate the Eucharist frequently and from the beginning it was done weekly, as was the Kiddush, which would have been unlikely if it had been patterned after the annual Passover.

While the traditional understanding that the Last Supper was the Passover may not be accurate, that should not lead us to understate the importance of the Passover in the development and understanding of the Eucharist in the early Church. The Christian Eucharistic tradition owes its

origin to the tradition of Jewish religious meals, and further, any Eucharistic interpretation must bear this Jewish origin carefully in mind together with the Passover context in which the Eucharist was instituted.

All this scholarly debate notwithstanding, there are two realities about which we can be absolutely sure:

THE PASSEVER CONTEXT OF THE EUCHARIST

- That the Last Supper was an event in the Passover series, and what happened in that Supper, and what it came to symbolize for those who follow Jesus, must be understood from the Paschal perspective; in this sense, the Last Supper is a Paschal Supper;
- That the final cup of wine of the Passover supper is the source of the Eucharistic chalice in the Christian tradition, and in the prayer of thanksgiving said over that final cup of wine are the antecedents of the Christian Eucharistic Prayer.

AGNUS DEI

The Agnus Dei refers to Jesus, the Lamb of God. This description is found in the Gospel of John (1:29), when John the Baptist sees Jesus coming toward him and says, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Coming immediately before Communion, it unites the sacrifice of Christ on the cross with the sacrifice of praise of the Eucharist. It also calls

to mind the Old Testament sacrifice of the lamb, particularly at the Passover, continuing the imagery discussed above. On a practical level, it gives the presider time to continue the breaking of the bread and the preparation for Communion.

THE INVITATION

The presider invites the assembly to share the Gifts of God. Liturgist Patrick Molly suggests that the presider stand back from the vessels containing the bread and the wine, gesture strongly toward them, say “The Gifts of God” and then expand their arms as if to envelop the assembly, and continue “for the People of God.” In our instructional Eucharist, you will note that Father Andy elevates the elements for all in the assembly to see.

Note the rubrics after the Invitation that “All who hunger for God, including children, are cordially invited to share the Gifts of God offered at this table.” While some traditions do not give communion to children until they have attained a certain age, we, like our Eastern Orthodox brothers and sisters, invite children of all ages. Nor do we restrict communion to members of the Episcopal/Anglican church, but welcome all who hunger for God.

COMMUNION

The BCP directs the presider to receive Communion first and, without delay, to administer it to the rest of the assembly.

There are various phrases with which the Bread and Wine are offered to the assembly, such as “The Body (Blood) of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life” or “The Body of Christ, the bread of Heaven” and “The Blood of Christ, the cup of salvation”. The BCP, as an option, directs the communicant to say, “Amen,” in response to each of the formulae for the Bread and the Wine. The custom is very ancient: Augustine attests to it in the fourth century. By responding “Amen”, the communicant assents to what the minister has said, and takes a more active role in the sacramental exchange.

While Communion under the forms of both bread and wine is an important part of our Reformation heritage, both are not necessary. In other words, the sacramental encounter with Christ is full even if only one form is received. Those who are not able to consume gluten, sulfites or alcohol may not be able to receive both forms of the Eucharist, but this in no way lessens the real presence of Christ in their Communion.

Liturgist Patrick Molly emphasizes the communal aspect of Communion. He says, for example, unfortunately, it is common for the

assembly to be seated immediately after the Invitation and to stand, row by row, only when it is their turn to receive Communion. After receiving Communion, they sit again or kneel to according to taste. These are extremely privatizing postural shifts suggesting that during Communion the members of the assembly, as individuals, are one by one engaging in private devotional acts: praying privately or receiving Communion privately. In fact, while Communion certainly has a strong personal aspect, the reception of Communion is, as the word suggests, a communal action. It is the Body as a whole partaking of the sacrament that binds it together. Ideally, then, the entire assembly stands in solidarity throughout the Communion procession. Standing, furthermore, expresses and fosters reverence for the Eucharistic Presence. Kneeling has a similar impact, but kneeling during Communion is not as strong a mark of unity since, at any time, some will be kneeling and some will be on their feet moving to and from Communion.

The BCP allows hymns, psalms or anthems during the administration of Communion.

POST COMMUNION PRAYER

The post Communion prayer has two main components. It gives thanks for having received the gift of the sacrament and what that means corporately,

that we are members of the body of Christ, and it acknowledges that we are being sent out into the world to act like members of the body of Christ, doing the work he has given us to do, and that in this meal we are strengthened to go forth and accomplish it.

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