

THE LORD'S PRAYER
***'Give us this day our daily bread and
forgive us our trespasses as we
forgive those who trespass against us'***
**Texts from the
*Catechism of the Catholic Church***

“GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD”

Trust in God for everything

"Give us": the trust of children who look to their Father for everything is beautiful. "He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Mt 5:45) He gives to all the living "their food in due season." (Ps 104:27) Jesus teaches us this petition, because it glorifies our Father by acknowledging how good he is, beyond all goodness. (2828)

"Give us" also expresses the covenant. We are his and he is ours, for our sake. But this "us" also recognises him as the Father of all men and we pray to him for them all, in solidarity with their needs and sufferings. (2829)

For nourishment, material and spiritual

"Our bread": the Father who gives us life cannot but give us the nourishment life requires - all appropriate goods and blessings, both material and spiritual. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus insists on the filial trust that co-operates with our Father's providence. He is not inviting us to idleness, but wants to relieve us from worry and preoccupation. Such is the filial surrender of the children of God:

"To those who seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, he has promised to give all else besides. Since everything indeed belongs to God, he who possesses God wants for nothing, if he himself is not found wanting before God." (St Cyprian) (2830)

Our responsibility for others

The drama of hunger in the world calls Christians who pray sincerely to exercise responsibility toward their brethren, both in their personal behaviour and in their solidarity with the human family. This petition of the Lord's Prayer cannot be isolated from the parables of the poor man Lazarus and of the Last Judgement. (2831)

"Our" bread is the "one" loaf for the "many." In the Beatitudes "poverty" is the virtue of sharing: it calls us to share both material and spiritual goods, not by coercion but out of love, so that the abundance of some may remedy the needs of others. (2833)

Prayer and work

"Pray and work." (St Benedict) "Pray as if everything depended on God and work as if everything depended on you." (St Ignatius Loyola) Even when we have done our work, the food we receive is still a gift from our Father; it is good to ask him for it and to thank him, as Christian families do when saying grace at meals. (2834)

Hunger for the Word of God and the Bread of Life

This petition, with the responsibility it involves, also applies to another hunger from which men are perishing: "Man does not live by bread alone, but... by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God," (Mt 4:4) that is, by the Word he speaks and the Spirit he breathes forth. Christians must make every effort "to proclaim the good news to the poor." There is a famine on earth, "not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord." (Am 8:11) For this reason the specifically Christian sense of this fourth petition concerns the Bread of Life: The Word of God accepted in faith, the Body of Christ received in the Eucharist. (2835)

'This day' - the 'today' of God

"This day" is also an expression of trust taught us by the Lord, which we would never have presumed to invent. Since it refers above all to his Word and to the Body of his Son, this "today" is not only that of our mortal time, but also the "today" of God.

"If you receive the bread each day, each day is today for you. If Christ is yours today, he rises for you every day. How can this be? 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you.' Therefore, 'today' is when Christ rises." (St Ambrose) (2836)

The Eucharist is our daily bread

"Daily" (*epiousios*) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. Taken in a temporal sense, this word is a pedagogical repetition of "this day," to confirm us in trust "without reservation." Taken in the qualitative sense, it signifies what is necessary for life, and more broadly every good thing sufficient for subsistence. Taken literally (*epi-ousios*: "super-essential"), it refers directly to the Bread of Life, the Body of Christ, the "medicine of immortality," without which we have no life within us.

Finally in this connection, its heavenly meaning is evident: "this day" is the Day of the Lord, the day of the feast of the kingdom, anticipated in the Eucharist that is already the foretaste of the kingdom to come. For this reason it is fitting for the Eucharistic liturgy to be celebrated each day. (2837)

"The Eucharist is our daily bread. The power belonging to this divine food makes it a bond of union. Its effect is then understood as unity, so that, gathered into his Body and made members of him, we may become what we receive... This also is our daily bread: the readings you hear each day in church and the hymns you hear and sing. All these are necessities for our pilgrimage." (St Augustine)

"The Father in heaven urges us, as children of heaven, to ask for the bread of heaven. [Christ] himself is the bread who, sown in the Virgin, raised up in the flesh, kneaded in the Passion, baked in the oven of the tomb, reserved in churches, brought to altars, furnishes the faithful each day with food from heaven." (St Peter Chrysologus)

**“FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES,
AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US”**

The two phrases of this petition are linked

This petition is astonishing. If it consisted only of the first phrase, "And forgive us our trespasses," it might have been included, implicitly, in the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer, since Christ's sacrifice is "that sins may be forgiven." But, according to the second phrase, our petition will not be heard unless we have first met a strict requirement. Our petition looks to the future, but our response must come first, for the two parts are joined by the single word "as." (2838)

And forgive us our trespasses...

With bold confidence, we began praying to our Father. In begging him that his name be hallowed, we were in fact asking him that we ourselves might be always made more holy. But though we are clothed with the baptismal garment, we do not cease to sin, to turn away from God. Now, in this new petition, we return to him like the prodigal son and, like the tax collector, recognise that we are sinners before him.

Our petition begins with a "confession" of our wretchedness and his mercy. Our hope is firm because, in his Son, "we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Col 1:14) We find the efficacious and undoubted sign of his forgiveness in the sacraments of his Church. (2839)

To receive God's mercy our hearts must be open to forgive others

This outpouring of mercy cannot penetrate our hearts as long as we have not forgiven those who have trespassed against us. Love, like the Body of Christ, is indivisible; we cannot love the God we cannot see if we do not love the brother or sister we do see. In refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father's merciful love; but in confessing our sins, our hearts are opened to his grace. (2840)

This petition is so important that it is the only one to which the Lord returns and which he develops explicitly in the Sermon on the Mount. This crucial requirement of the covenant mystery is impossible for man. But "with God all things are possible" (Mt 19:26). (2841)

... as we forgive those who trespass against us

This "as" is not unique in Jesus' teaching: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"; "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful"; "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." (Mt 5:48; Lk 6:36; Jn 13:34)

It is impossible to keep the Lord's commandment by imitating the divine model from outside; there has to be a vital participation, coming from the depths of the heart, in the holiness and the mercy and the love of our God. Only the Spirit by whom we live can make "ours" the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. Then the unity of forgiveness becomes possible and we find ourselves "forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave" us. (Eph 4:32) (2842)

The Holy Spirit turns our injury and hurt into intercession

Thus the Lord's words on forgiveness, the love that loves to the end, become a living reality. The parable of the merciless servant, which crowns the Lord's teaching on ecclesial communion, ends with these words: "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart" (Mt 18:23-35). It is there, in fact, "in the depths of the heart", that everything is bound and loosed. It is not in our power not to feel, or to forget, an offence; but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession. (2843)

Forgiveness - the high-point of Christian prayer

Christian prayer extends to the forgiveness of enemies, transfiguring the disciple by configuring him to his Master. Forgiveness is a high-point of Christian prayer; only hearts attuned to God's compassion can receive the gift of prayer. Forgiveness also bears witness that, in our world, love is stronger than sin. The martyrs of yesterday and today bear this witness to Jesus. Forgiveness is the fundamental condition of the reconciliation of the children of God with their Father and of men with one another. (2844)

In the Holy Trinity and through the Eucharist - no limit to divine forgiveness

There is no limit or measure to this essentially divine forgiveness, whether one speaks of "sins" as in *Luke* (11:4), or "debts" as in *Matthew* (6:12). We are always debtors: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another." (Rom 13:8) The communion of the Holy Trinity is the source and criterion of truth in every relationship. It is lived out in prayer, above all in the Eucharist.

"God does not accept the sacrifice of a sower of disunion, but commands that he depart from the altar so that he may first be reconciled with his brother. For God can be appeased only by prayers that make peace. To God, the better offering is peace, brotherly concord and a people made one in the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." (St Cyprian) (2845)

IN BRIEF

- **In the fourth petition, by saying "give us", we express in communion with our brethren our filial trust in our heavenly Father. "Our daily bread" refers to the earthly nourishment necessary to everyone for subsistence, and also to the Bread of Life: the Word of God and the Body of Christ. It is received in God's "today", as the indispensable, (super-) essential nourishment of the feast of the coming Kingdom anticipated in the Eucharist. (2861)**
- **The fifth petition begs God's mercy for our offences, mercy which can penetrate our hearts only if we have learned to forgive our enemies, with the example and help of Christ. (2862)**