

**June 9, 2002**

**“LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION”**

**“And lead us not into temptation” Matthew 6:13**

Each Sunday morning in church and at many other times throughout our lives, we repeat the Lord’s Prayer, the “Our Father,” familiar to all denominations within the faith. In the Gospels it arises, especially in Luke but also in Mathew, as the answer Jesus gave when his disciples asked him to teach them to pray. He answered, “Pray like this:

## **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 debts**

**As we forgive our debtors.**

**And lead us not into temptation**

**But deliver us from evil...”**

The closing ascription, normally included in Protestant recitations of the prayer, “For thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory, forever, Amen,” most likely was not part of the original prayer as Jesus taught it. It was apparently added later on to complete the prayer with a familiar ending to many Jewish prayers.

It does not appear that Jesus intended the prayer to be a routine and regular part of our worship and family prayers. He offered it to the disciples as a model for their prayer, which they could adapt to their personal and community devotions.

**\*\*\*\*\***

However, it begins with the most familiar phrase of all “Our Father.” It is so often spoken by Christians that we are apt to forget how novel and personal that is. It

takes the Creator God, the infinite, unchanging ruler of the universe, and brings him down to sit with us in our homes. In other ancient religions God was hardly a heavenly father. While the word father was used from time to time in the Old Testament, Yahweh-God was seldom a friendly companion there. He was a righteous Judge and ruler of the people in conveying what he wanted them to do.

In Greek and Roman mythology, and in the mystery religions of old, God was removed, indifferent to man, unless human kind was able to placate his anger, but even there mostly unconcerned. Not that Jesus changed it all alone; there were inklings here and there. But, for example, look at one of the most familiar Greek legends, the one of Prometheus. Prometheus was a god, who lived in the Pantheon of gods on Mt. Olympus, far above and removed from the mortals of the earth. One day Prometheus looked down with pity on men and women who at that time were cold, living in the dark of night, with no light and no fire. He decided to take the fire from heaven down to cheer and warm them in their darkest hours. It was a gift from Prometheus to mortal man. Thank you very much.

But when Prometheus did it, Zeus, the chief and king of all the gods was furious, angry that one of his own would dare to be concerned and condescend to reach down to help the mere mortals of the earth who did not deserve such charity. Prometheus had committed the sin of friendship, concern and kindness to man and woman. So, as you remember, Zeus chained Prometheus to a huge rock in the middle of the Adriatic Sea where he was tortured in the heat and cold and thirst and hunger of the night. Vultures attacked him, again and again, all because He had taken a kindly interest in man.

The concept of previous gods kept them aloof and jealous and vengeful, capricious and unpredictable, which is not difficult to believe for there is much on the earth which leads to that conclusion. But along came Jesus of Nazareth and put all that to rest. He said, "When you pray, begin your communication with God by addressing him as 'Our Father.'"

Our Father, think about it, God actually and priorly was his father; Jesus is/was the only Son of God. Ponder that with me for a moment, from this angle: In the prayer, our Lord is willingly sharing his Father with each and all of us. The numberless other children of earth are offered adoption into the household of God. As St. Paul says it succinctly in Galatians four, "We were...slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe. But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, ... to redeem us, so that we might receive adoption as sons (and daughters) of the Lord."

It is as if the son of a wise and wealthy father on earth were to go out into the highways and byways and invite everyone in need to come home with him and be adopted by his own father and share his love and bounty. The creator of the universe has condescended to be our father. There are those on earth who do not, did not have a loving caring father; but we have found another one who does care,

cared enough that he gave his only begotten son. Then, as St. Augustine added “Let us consider, beloved, whose children we have begun to be; and let us live so as becomes those who have such a father.”

Notice that Jesus said our father, not my father. There is no “I,” “Me,” or “Mine” in this prayer. God belongs to humankind as father, but He is father to all of his children, everywhere. Oliver Wendell Holmes once said that those two words, “Our Father,” summarized his whole religion. They settle our relationship not only with a heavenly father who loves and accepts us; but they also settle our relationship to our fellow humans here and there and everywhere. They are our brothers and sisters of all religions, race or clime. One Father – ours.

Those words “Our Father,” also set our relationship with the unseen world in its proper perspective. The earth can be a dreary place; I do not need to remind you of that. The dangers and fears of war and terror and nuclear explosions are all around us. But “Our Father” reassures us that it is all under his control, and that He will work his purpose out.

\*\*\*\*\*

One of our members wrote to me last week, it was so thoughtful and much appreciated. She thanked me for the uplifting spirit of our worship service here at the Chapel. She added “These days it is almost impossible to be positive and upbeat and confident about the future. It sure is gratifying to have a respite from all of that in the worship and the prayers and the preaching at The Royal Poinciana Chapel.”

When the Creator God becomes “Our Father,” the universe without and the earth within become far more friendly places. The one who made it all, knows you and me by name. When Thomas Hardy finished his well-known novel Tess, his closing words, after all that had happened to her, were these, “The President of the Immortals had finished his sport with Tess.” Oh dear. It feels that way some times.

\*\*\*\*\*

We could stay there all day, but over the next while I hope to separate other petitions and requests from the Lord’s prayer and concentrate our attention on the deeper meaning of each. The first three petitions have to do with the power and love and majesty of God. “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,” etc.

After that relationship is affirmed, the prayer allows and encourages us also to ask the Father for the things we need to sustain us in life. “Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Let’s pause there. “Lead us not into temptation” at first sight, might sound a peculiar request. You might have expected Jesus to say, “Ask God for good health, and loving friends, and strong families, and great things to do.” But, he inserted “lead us not into temptation.” I wonder why it was given so high a priority by our Lord.

The Bible warns that yielding to temptation will destroy you in this life and the next. The Bible also makes it clear that God himself does not do the tempting. In the letter of James it says, "Let no one say when he is tempted 'I am tempted of God'...for everyone is tempted by himself, herself, when they are drawn away by personal desires, and yield."

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Notice that the Spirit took him there. It was Satan however who tempted him. First the devil said, "Turn these stones into bread." Jesus refused. Then he took Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple, and said, "Throw yourself down." Jesus refused. Then Satan took him to a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world. "All of these I will give you if you bow down and worship me." Again, our Lord refused.

\*\*\*\*\*

Most often in the scriptures, the devil, the evil one, Satan, the opposite of the goodness and love of God, introduces the temptation. God allows it to happen, the Bible says, to test our faithfulness. Sometimes it comes from outside the self, from the bad influence of others. We must protect ourselves from those who would undo us. Especially younger people are sometimes trapped into trying to make themselves appear to be brave and strong, even reckless, to be popular. They do not want to appear to be less experienced than others in worldliness. To please others, they compromise themselves.

But Temptation can also come from inside us, at our weakest spot, at our point of vulnerability. There is one of those in each and all of us, a weak spot is there. But, be careful, the opposite is also true. Temptation can also come from your strongest point. Pride is often the source of sin. The name "Satan" also means "Adversary." The worst adversary we have is often our own selves.

Mostly temptation comes of our own doing. For example, David had everything. He was King, wealthy and powerful. Then one evening he took a walk around the balcony of his palace, and looked down, and spied Bathsheba, the beautiful wife of his neighbor Uriah. You know the rest of the story. His betrayal of her husband was great when he yielded to the temptation, but more in the process he betrayed himself. St. Augustine advised, "Let no enemy from without be feared; conquer your own self, and the whole world is conquered too."

So, the problem is within us, in our unwillingness to stand up for what is right, or, in our need to please another. If the tempter finds no covetousness in you, the attempt to entrap you will not succeed. The trap will be set in vain. A story is told about President Garfield. During his Presidency, he was encouraged to take a profitable but dishonorable course of action. He refused. An advisor whispered "Don't worry Mr. President, no one will ever know." He answered, "But President Garfield will always know, and I can never get away from him!"

I Corinthians 10:12 says: "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has over taken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

\*\*\*\*\*

Charles Lamb wrote of a young man who was brilliant; he had skills and tons of promise. But over the years it was said that there were three ways people spoke about his promise. First, there was the time when it was said “He will one day do great things! He is a young man of great promise.” Then secondly, they began to say, “He could do great things if he would only apply himself.” There was still time left. But later on they began to say, “He might have done something great, but it is too late now.”

There were so many things I'd meant to try,  
So many contests I had hoped to win.  
But lo, the end approaches, just as I  
Was thinking of preparing to begin.”  
Ernst Gordon, Valley of The Kwai

\*\*\*\*\*

So my friend, it is almost time to go. Before we do, the question becomes personal: how are you being tempted in your life? Are you tempted to give into pressures around you, to the idea that your life cannot, does not, will not make a difference in the world? Are you tempted to become discouraged because life around us is full of penury, uncertainty, and woe? Or is it because others have taken over your former territory, or just that times have changed, or because you feel unappreciated? Are you tempted to cut a corner, which is so prevalent all around us today, especially, but not only, in the corporate world? Are you tempted to become angry with friends and family or just plain jealous of others? Have you lost control of things and it makes you sad and mad? Or, is it just that too many people have let you down, and you don't know who to trust anymore.

\*\*\*\*\*

Young people are tempted too, and not only in the obvious sins which can be committed. Sometimes they see so little light at the end of their tunnel that it does not seem worthwhile to press on. Middle aged couples get bored and settle in, and are tempted to give up on their marriages. Single people are often tempted to give up hope. Some days it seems that no matter what you try to do, it doesn't work. Others are tempted to give into an illness, or to a handicap, or to emotional problems? Etc., etc..... But, whatever that temptation is with you, what do you propose to do about it?

There are three suggestions I have to make. One, as St. Paul wrote, we should “Put on the whole armor of God.” A spiritual battle is going on in the world. We are contending with spiritual powers. Brains and brawn and clever plans will not do it. You need the Lord to help you. “Temptation is not designed to make us fall. Temptation is designed to make us stronger, to make us better men and women. Temptation is not designed to make us sinners. It is designed to make us good. We may fail in the test from time to time, but we are not meant to. We are meant to emerge stronger and finer and more worthy of being called his children.” (William Barclay, p.225, Commentary On Matthew) “Put on the armor of God” or you will not be able to stand against the adversary.

\*\*\*\*\*

Secondly, it will help to remember that *Jesus Christ has already been there*. Hebrews 2:17-18 says clearly: “Therefore he had to be made like us in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God. For because he himself has suffered and has been tempted, he is able to help others who are tempted.” Hebrews 4:15 adds, “We have (in Jesus Christ) not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” He knows what you and I are going through. He has been there.

Remember, in your time of trial, you are in the company of Jesus. That is good company to be in. I reassure you that there will be times when you might fail. The Bible says “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We each and all yield to temptations now and then. There are times, have been, will be, times when you will need to ask for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus Christ alone was perfect. We do not need to be.

\*\*\*\*\*

Then third, *Protect yourself*. Avoid situations where temptations are likely to come. We all know what they are. James 1:12-14 says, “Blessed is the one who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love “him. Let no one say who is tempted, ‘I am tempted of God’, for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when lured and enticed by personal desire.”

\*\*\*\*\*

I told you once in a different context, the story of a widely known American preacher of a century ago. As he tells it: The pastor was in his office listening to a young man who had made a sorry mess of his life, stumbling deeper and deeper into the morass with each bad decision. He had been sent by his parents to counsel with the Reverend. Running out of excuses, and near the end of his self defensive explanation of what had happened and why, he finally blurted out, “But sir, what would you have done if you had been there in my place.”

Aha, the light went on in his conscience, when the Pastor replied, “Young man, I never would have been in your place.” If you put yourself in the wrong situation, you will fail. But if not, our Lord will help you to overcome, for now and forever more. Amen.

June 9, 2002

© Copyright, Dr. Richard M. Cromie  
Palm Beach, Florida