

## THE LORD'S PRAYER - PETITIONS 5 and 6

The Lord's prayer or prayer to the Father is divided into 7 petitions. Today I'd like to focus on the 5th and 6th petitions to enhance our appreciation of their sacredness, their unique beauty and transcendent wisdom.

### The 5TH Petition

The 5th petition asks the Father to forgive us our sins, our trespasses "AS" we forgive those who trespass against us. It presupposes this world of sin, in our relationships with God and one another. It also reminds us that the guilt we experience, resulting from sin can only be overcome by true forgiveness. It is this theme of forgiveness that pervades the entire Gospel.

For example, we see in MT 6:23f, Jesus counsils, "If you are offering your gift to God at the altar, but then remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there and first go quickly to be reconciled with your brother, and only then offer you gift." The point is you can't come into God's presence unreconciled with your neighbor. Forgiveness is the first prerequisite for true worship of God. In fact our forgiveness toward one another is paltry and trivial as compared with God's forgiveness of us!

But the meaning of this petition varies greatly depending upon how you define the preposition "AS." The more current interpretation of "as" treats it as we would the preposition "Because." In other words, we ask the Father to grant us the strength and capacity to show forgiveness and mercy to our neighbor simply because God has previously shown mercy and forgiveness to us. To console others with that same consolation and mercy, He has already shown to us.

But there is a far more meaningful, more orthodox and accurate meaning we can ascribe to the proposition "as." The more correct, theological interpretation, and closest to the original Greek, would

be to define the word "as" to mean "to the extent that." Notice now, how the meaning and fullness of our forgiveness dramatically changes! We now ask our Father to forgive us our sins and trespasses "to the extent that" we have previously shown mercy and forgiveness to others. Notice also how much we have enlarged the richness and depth of this petition. The extent of God's mercy and forgiveness of our offenses will depend chiefly upon how much we have shown it to others! Or to put it another way, you can't expect God to forgive us our trespasses, unless we have first shown it to others! And we see this truth repeated constantly throughout the Gospels, especially in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Lazarus and the Poor Man, and the Disciple who leaves his gift at the altar. He had to be first reconciled with his brother as previously described.

But true forgiveness in this instance may exact a serious price! It requires a deep sense of humility, because it minimizes our narcissistic attitudes and feelings of self-importance. When we forgive, shouldn't we be more interested in the diminished, spiritual state of the offender, than the harm he has done to us? Didn't Jesus command us to even love our enemies, even those who persecute us? What merit is there for those who merely bestow love upon their friends? So forgiveness ultimately involves our concern for the transformation, the inner purification, and the ultimate conversion of the offender. Didn't Jesus come to bring forgiveness and restoration to all sinners? Aren't we told not to think as man thinks, but as God thinks? Didn't Jesus also suggest that, "he who brings a sinner to conversion cancels a multitude of his own sins?" In so doing, don't we actually participate in Jesus' own ministry of redemption to the world, bringing about the healing, forgiveness, and conversion to others, especially when it exerts some cost to ourselves? Finally, the point of this petition is that God will show mercy and forgiveness to us, only when and if we have first practiced the same to others.

## 6TH Petition

In the 6th petition we ask our loving Father "not to lead us into temptation." But, doesn't this statement imply that He does? This prospect may be shocking to many! Again, it suggests that God may tempt us to sin, so we pray that He not do so, not lead us into temptation! Of course the thought that God might lead or tempt us to sin is ridiculous! For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor bring anyone else into temptation! Temptation comes only from the devil. And a large part of Jesus' messianic ministry was devoted to His human nature withstanding the great temptations of Satan.

Getting back to the original question, asking God not to lead us into temptation, a brief reflection on the book of Job may serve to help our understanding. In it Satan seeks to condemn man, in order to then condemn God, by proving man is basically inept and evil, and yet created in God's image. According to Satan man is only concerned about his own well-being and any goodness he practices is merely a facade. And Satan attempts to prove this by testing the righteousness of Job. Speaking to God, Satan suggests the following challenge, "Take away all of the gifts you have given him, and allow me to dispense serious trials and afflictions, and he will quickly cave in, drop his piety and holiness, and ultimately forsake his faith, and you as well!" Here God agrees and gives Satan the freedom to test Job's spirituality, but only within well-defined limits. While God doesn't tempt Job to sin, He does allow him to be tried, tested, and challenged by Satan. Notice God never abandons Job! While He permits his exposure to sinfulness, He never leads him toward it!

In the end Job's faith and spiritual stamina was proved through his trials and suffering, and his honor and health was completely restored. In fact, Job's sufferings served as a prelude, anticipating our own sufferings, in union with those of Christ, to the honor and greater glory of God, the Father.

redemptive ministry to free the world from sin. They are very special people indeed, who are called to assume heavy burdens for the sake of others, and to help them on their way! Again, God doesn't lead us into temptation, but He does permit it occasionally for our greater good.

So when we pray the 6th petition, aren't we acknowledging that we must be prepared to tackle all the burdens and trials meted out to us, while at the same time asking God not to make them more severe than we can bear? St. Paul in First Corinthians said it best, "God is faithful and will not let you to be tempted beyond your strength, and will provide you with all the grace you will need to endure them. "For where sin abounds, God's grace abounds all the more." Now, if we can but persevere in faith, especially when we are called to endure severe trials and afflictions, always trusting in God's love for us, then some greater good will always result, some higher purpose will always be achieved.

In conclusion, sinfulness is much like sickness and disease, for without it, there would be no need for our Divine Physician! Consider the richness and beauty of the holy Exsultet hymn we proclaim at the Easter Vigil:

"This is the night that even now, throughout the world,  
sets Christian believers apart from worldly vices  
and from the gloom of sin, leading them to grace  
and joining them to his holy ones.

O truly sin of Adam, destroyed completely by the death of  
Christ!

O Happy Fault, that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!"

God bless you all