

Thine is the Kingdom: A Dialogue on the Lord's Prayer

(Person): "Our Father, who art in heaven..."

(God): Yes?

(Person): Who said that?

(God): I did. You called on me... you said "Our Father, who art in heaven".

(Person): You mean you're really listening to this prayer, God?

(God): Of course I am!

(Person): Uh-oh. Well, I...um... sometimes tune out while I'm playing this. I've been saying it for so long that it's just by rote now.

(God): I know. In fact, you have done a lot of things while you've prayed this prayer. You've planned an outfit for the evening. You've thought about how much money you have in your bank account, what you're going to say at the parish council meeting, what time you have to pick up your kids tomorrow, whether people will like your new hairdo, what your friends will think about your new car, and a lot of other things.

(Person): (sheepishly) Sorry.

(God): Well go on, say your prayer. I'm listening.

(Person): "Hallowed be thy name".

(God): Hold it. What do you mean by that?

(Person): Hallowed means holy. May your name be holy. It means I shouldn't take your name in vain, so I should say "Oh my gosh" instead of "Oh my God" or "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph"

(God): Well I'm glad to see you learned something in Sunday school. What does it really mean?

(Person): I don't know.

(God): It means that everything you do should be done in my name, and should be done with reverence. When you talk about going to church and you give off the image of being a Christian, you cannot gossip and put people down, especially in the same sentence.

(Person): I do that a lot, huh?

(God): Yes, you Armenians are very good at that. Continue with your prayer.

(Person): "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven".

(God): Take control, huh? Sounds great! Consider it done.

(Person): Come on, it's not that easy. And that's not what I meant.

(God): And why not?

(Person): Well, you're not a magician. We have to carry out your will. You don't control us like puppets.

(God): Very good! And what are you doing about it?

(Person): Doing? Well, I don't know, I mean, I'm a good person, Lord. I go to church every Sunday, I'm the chairman of parish council, I sing in the choir, I serve on the altar, AND I'm a full-time lawyer, which makes everyone proud.

(God): I'm not impressed. What about your temper? And all that pride? You're a control freak. And what about the way you spend your money, all on yourself?

(Person): Stop picking on me! I'm just as good as some of the rest of those people in church. Heck, half of them can't even show up every week like I do. And most of them aren't nearly as involved!

(God): Excuse me, I thought you were praying for my will to be done. If that's going to happen, it will have to start with those who are praying for it, like you.

(Person): Oh, all right. I know I'm not perfect, but I'd much rather not think about all those imperfections. I could probably name quite a few.

(God): So could I.

(Person): Look, Lord, this is taking a lot longer than it usually does. I need to finish up here. "Give us this day our daily bread".

(God): If you are talking about edible bread, I give you more than enough. But don't forget that you cannot live by bread alone. You must nourish your soul with me, the bread of life, as much as you nourish your body.

(Person): What is this, an exercise in finding all my faults? Here I am just doing my religious duty, and you just decide to break in and remind me of all my hang ups.

(God): Praying is a dangerous thing. You could wind up changed, you know. That's what I'm trying to get across to you. You called me, and here I am. I'm so late to stop now. Keep praying, I'm interested in the next part of your prayer (pause). Well, go on.

(Person): I'm scared to.

(God): Scared? Of what?

(Person): I know what you'll say.

(God): Try me and see.

(Person): Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us".

(God): What about Ani?

(Person): See? I knew it. I knew you would bring her up! Lord, she took all the credit for the Food Court when I did most of the work. She made sure Der Hayr thanked her in public and her name was in the newsletter and then she went around tooting her horn about how she made pilaf for 200 people. Not to mention how she tries to take over parish council, even though I'm the chairperson. I've sworn to get even with her!

(God): But your prayer. What about being forgiven in the way that you forgive others?

(Person): I didn't mean it.

(God): Well, at least you're admitting it. But it's not much fun carrying that load of bitterness around inside, is it?

(Person): No, but I'll feel better as soon as I get even.

(God): You won't feel any better. You'll feel worse. Revenge isn't sweet. Look at how miserable you are. Do you think that's really going to change if you get even with her? You'll never be satisfied. But I can change all that.

(Person): You can? How?

(God): Forgive Ani. And just as you have prayed, I will then forgive you and only then will you be able to remember how much I love you. With me there is always love and forgiveness. Let me worry about Ani. It's not for you to judge.

(Person): You know, for the first time, I'm realizing how much I want to be right with you, more than I want revenge on someone, you're right, it won't make me feel much better. All right, I forgive her. Help her to find the right road in life, Lord. She's bound to be awfully miserable now that I think about it. Anybody who goes around doing the things she does to others has to be out of it. Some way, somehow, help her.

(God): There now! Wonderful! How do you feel?

(Person): Hmm. Not too bad. Not bad at all. Actually, I feel pretty good! You know, I don't think I'll have to go to bed angry tonight for the first time since I can remember. Maybe I won't be so tired from now on because I'm not getting enough rest.

(God): You're not through with your prayer. Go on.

(Person): "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil".

(God): Good! I'll do that. Just don't put yourself in a place where you can be tempted.

(Person): What do you mean by that?

(God): Don't turn the TV when you know you have work to do. Also, about the time you spend with your friends, if you can't influence the conversation to positive things, perhaps you should rethink the value of these friendships. And please don't use me for an escape hatch.

(Person): I don't understand the last part.

(God): Sure you do. You've done it a lot of times. You get caught in a bad situation. You get into trouble and then you come running to me, "Lord, help me out of this mess and I'll promise you I'll never do it again". You remember some of those bargains you tried to make with me?

(Person): Yes, and I'm rather embarrassed now.

(God): Which bargain are you remembering?

(Person): Well. There was the time I was stuck in traffic and I was late for the parish council meeting. I was running for chairperson and I remember praying, "Oh, God, if you get me there and help me win, I'll never lose my temper again".

(God): Did you?

(Person): I'm sorry, Lord, I really am. Up until now I thought that if I just prayed the Lord's Prayer every day, then I could do what I liked. I didn't expect anything to happen like it did.

(God): Go ahead and finish your prayer.

(Person): "For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen".

(God): Do you know what would bring me glory? What would really make me happy?

(Person): No, but I'd like to know. I want now to please you. I can see what a mess I've made of my life. And I can see how great it would be to really be one of your followers.

(God): You just answered the question.

(Person): I did?

(God): Yes, the thing that would bring me glory is to have people like you truly love me. And I see that happening between us. You've gotten some of those old sins exposed and out of the way now. You are realizing that without forgiveness, you continue on the same vicious cycle in life instead of being able to grow and be happy. But better yet, you are seeing how much prayer can actually change you when you mean what you say. I never asked for big, empty words, just like my Son Jesus told you. When you pray from the heart, there is no telling what we can do together.