

Early Church Classics.

ST. CYPRIAN
ON
THE LORD'S PRAYER

*AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION, WITH
INTRODUCTION*

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INTRODUCTION

THE little work of St. Cyprian's which is here presented in an English translation is in a very true and real sense an "EARLY CHURCH CLASSIC," for it was early accorded by the Church the position of the recognized standard treatise on the LORD'S PRAYER. So high was the esteem in which it was held that St. Hilary of Poitiers, writing just one hundred years later (A.D. 354), considered himself relieved from the task of commenting on the LORD'S PRAYER when, in the course of his Exposition on St. Matthew, he came to Chapter 6.9-13, preferring rather to send his readers to St. Cyprian's well-known book.¹

St. Ambrose, again, in his Commentary on St. Luke,

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makes no remarks on Chapter 11.1-4 (the verses containing the LORD'S PRAYER).

The value of the work was very fully recognized also by St. Augustine, who read it over to some delegates from the monks at Adrumetum who were inclined to Pelagianism, and strongly recommended the study of it to the monastery, "because it taught that all things which relate to character, whereby we live rightly, are to be asked of Our Father in heaven, and that to presume on the strength of our free-will is to fall from grace."²

More than a dozen times in his anti-Pelagian treatises, St. Augustine quotes this small work of St. Cyprian, whom he calls "superlatively victorious" because he had anticipatorily refuted heresies as yet unborn.

The scheme of the book, it must be admitted, is borrowed by St. Cyprian from the work on the same subject (*De Oratione*) by his "master" Tertullian. But if Tertullian provided the rough blocks in the quarry, it is St. Cyprian who smoothed and shaped and polished them, adding in almost every case some beautiful thought all his own.³ And he fortunately avoids both the rugged obliquity of style⁴ and diffuseness of treatment

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which to some extent disfigure Tertullian's tract. Doubtless he lacks both the genius and the passion and the forcefulness of his "master;" but the genius was often wayward, the passion fanatical, and the forcefulness overbold. St. Cyprian's gift was to rule, to administer, to interpret; and he remained calm and level-headed in days of pest, of panic, and of persecution, which must have sorely tried his patience and his perseverance.

§ 2. ST. CYPRIAN'S LIFE.

Some slight sketch of St. Cyprian's life must be given here, inasmuch as several points which he emphasizes in his exposition of the LORD'S PRAYER are illuminated by the personality, the character, and the actions of the writer.

This great representative of the Church of Africa — Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus, to give him his full name — was born (not, it would appear, at Carthage) of wealthy parentage in the earlier

¹ "De orationis autem sacramento necessitate commentandi Cyprianus vir sanctae memoriae liberavit. Quanquam et Tertullianus hinc volumen aptissimum scripserit; sed consequens error hominis detraxit scriptis probabilibus auctoritatem." So St. Hilary. St. Vincent of Lerins has some similar remarks in his Commonitory (chap. 18.). Some passages from Tertullian's "very appropriate volume" will be found below (pages 71 f.).

² Augustine, *Epist.* 215 *ad Valerian*.

³ The verbal coincidences, not many in number, are collected in Archbishop Benson's *Cyprian*, p. 276.

⁴ On the style of St. Cyprian, see Watson's essay in *Studia Biblica*, vol. iv. (Qxf. Univ. Press, 1896), and l'Abbe* Léonard's edition of four treatises of St. Cyprian (Namur, 1887).

years of the third century. At the moment when he first comes before us, he is the recognized foremost professor of rhetoric in the brilliant pagan society of

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the capital of North Africa.¹ His fortune was large, his position conspicuous, his manner of life free and unrestrained. Yet with all the external ministers to enjoyment around him, he felt that “leanness in the soul” to which the nobler pagans invariably, if unconsciously, bear witness. At length he yielded obedience to the inner voice which called him. He entered upon the catechumenate² and was prepared for Baptism, “the laver of healing water,” by his friend the presbyter Caecilianus. He began at once to practise a large-hearted charity, disposing of some of his estates, and distributing the whole of the proceeds to the poor. He was baptized probably on Easter-eve, A.D. 246. He passed his Diaconate in the house of his spiritual father, Caecilian, having sold his own spacious Gardens in addition to his farms. The Gardens were, however, bought by friends, but only to be disposed of again at a later time in the same excellent cause. In a year he was admitted to the Presbyterate [*i.e.*, eldership] by the bishop Donatus,³ A.D. 247; and so marked was his zeal, his devotion, and his splendid capability, that on the death of the Bishop the *vox populi*⁴

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named Cyprian as his successor. “He was the first instance of greater progress being made by faith than by time.” “He had as ripe a faith at first as few perhaps have at last.” “The Chair of the Episcopate received him such as he was, it did not make his character.”⁵

Reluctantly, and not until convinced that it was the will of God,⁶ he consented to the call, and was consecrated by the Bishops of the African Province, sometime after June A.D. 248, though not without the opposition of a clique of five Presbyters, who maintained an organized hostility towards him for many years.

Not many months of vigorous work passed before the thirty-eight years’ peace of the Christians in Africa was rudely broken by the Edict of Decius in January A.D. 249, which visited the Bishops with proscription, imprisonment, banishment, and death.⁷ Thus was the first really systematic method of persecution inaugurated. The object which Decius set before himself was the restoration of the old Roman virtue, discipline, and religion, and the extermination of such persons as the Christians, who obstinately refused to fall in with his desire to maintain in renewed integrity the

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worship of the ancient deities. With true insight he consequently struck first at the Bishops, as the leaders and recognized heads of the organized Christian communities. Among others, Fabian of Rome, Babylas of Antioch, and Alexander of Jerusalem at once glorified God by their deaths. But although the Bishops alone were named, at Carthage, at any rate, everyone who

¹ Hieronym [*i.e.* Jerome]. *Comm. in Jon.* 3, “in tantam gloriam venit eloquentiae ut oratoriam quoque doceret Carthagini.” Cp. *de vir. illustr.* 67. Lactantius speaks to the same effect, *Div. Inst.* v. i; and Augustine of his trumpet-like voice in forensic contests, *Serm.* 312. 4.

² Where a new convert was taught the principles of Christianity by a catechist.

³ *Ad Donat.* 3, 4.

⁴ Voice of the people.

⁵ The above details and some of the phrases are taken from the Life written by his own Deacon Pontius.

⁶ *Epist.* 43; 59.

⁷ *Epist.* 66.

failed to profess Paganism before a certain day stood *ipso facto* a confessed Christian.¹ Tortures were employed to extort a denial of the Faith; many lapsed and many died under the inquisition.

Cyprian himself retired from Carthage in order to maintain the continuity of his episcopal rule.² The place of his concealment was known only to those with whom he corresponded. He left large sums in the hands of trustees for the relief of the sufferers,³ and not only sustained the Church in his own large diocese, but inaugurated that policy towards the lapsed, which henceforth became the rule of the West.

Early in the year 251 Decius left Rome to repel the advance of the Goths and to crush the rebel Priscus. With his departure the persecution waned,

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and finally ceased on his death in November. Cyprian returned to Carthage, and held four Councils, A.D. 251-254, which dealt with matters of great importance, such as the recognition of Cornelius as Bishop of Rome, the schismatic Novatianists, and the treatment of the lapsed. It is not necessary for us to enter into these questions here.

Meanwhile the Great Plague, which had begun in Ethiopia in the year 250, and had ravaged Egypt, Syria, and Greece, swept over Africa. It reached Carthage in 252, under the form of a malignant type of fever; and it raged throughout the civilized world for a period of twenty years. Cyprian took the lead in noble measures of relief. Under his inspiring guidance the Christian body responded to the requirements of its splendid birthright,⁴ and cared for, nursed, and buried the sufferers and victims of the foul pestilence, without making any distinction between Jew, Pagan, or Christian. While the Christian remedies were practical and sanitary, accompanied by earnest prayers to the Most High, the Pagan course was to multiply sacrifices to the deities of Health, and to issue edicts which once more brought the Christians into disfavour with the panic-stricken populaces. Cyprian was again proscribed, and in 257

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“relegated” to Curubis,⁵ a lonely coast town, fifty miles south-east of Carthage — not, however, before he held further and most important Councils on the Baptismal Question. Happily, the points involved in this controversy do not concern us here.

Already in June, when in the East, the Emperor Valerian had placed in the hands of his Chancellor of the Exchequer, Macrianus, an Edict which separated the Bishops from their flocks, and forbade the Christians to assemble for worship or to enter their cemeteries. In July 258 a much severer Edict was published. It condemned all clergy to death; laics⁶ of high rank to degradation and loss of property, or to death if obstinacy were shown; matrons, *i.e.* wives not in the power (*manus*) of their husbands, to confiscation of goods and exile; and Caesarians⁷ to confiscation of goods and labour as chained convicts on the Imperial farms. The Emperor's

¹ *De lapsis* 3.

² He based his action on Christ's command, St. Matt. 10.23; *Epist.* 16; *De lapsis* 10.

³ See an interesting note by Mr. Watson in *J. Theol. Studies*, ii. 433 f.

⁴ “Respondere nos decet natalibus nostris,” were Cyprian's stirring words. *Pont. Vita* 9. [It becomes us to act according to our noble birth.](#)

⁵ Valerian's Edict was dated in July: Cyprian was tried on August 30, and must have left Carthage a little less than a fortnight later, as he reached Curubis on September 14. *Pont. Vita* 12, 13; *Act. Proc.* 3, 6.

⁶ [Characteristic of those who are not members of the clergy – *i.e.*, laymen.](#)

⁷ Caesariani were revenue officers under the Chancellor of the Imperial Exchequer. They were employed in matters of escheat and distraint (*Hoffman, Lex. Univ. s. v.; Codex Justinian, x. I, 5.*)

object evidently was to remove the officials and leading members of the Church, in the hope that thereby the rest would be terrified into

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submission, and thus the whole Christian body be reclaimed for Paganism.

While in exile Cyprian largely relieved the sufferers from his own still considerable property, and this fact shows that his high rank, as *vir honestior*, had procured for him the usual exemptions from the stricter penalties of the Edict. On the arrival of the Edict at Carthage the proconsul, Galerius Maximus, summoned Cyprian to appear before him. The year's exile thus ended — but only to be followed by martyrdom. At first Cyprian was bid to confine himself to his own Gardens at Carthage, for the proconsul lay sick at Utica; but as soon as Galerius came to Carthage, the Archbishop's trial was held. He refused to sacrifice, and the inevitable sentence of death was received by the saint with an exclamation of thanksgiving to God. He was led out to the place of execution, but the headsman's hand was unnerved, and the centurion himself was obliged to deliver the stroke. Such was St. Cyprian's "coronation." The date was September the 14th.¹ He stands forth as the first African Bishop "who dyed his sacerdotal diadems in blood."²

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§ 3. THE DATE OF THE TREATISE.

From internal evidence it is clear that Cyprian was writing at a time when it was necessary to emphasize the duty of unity, brotherhood, and unanimity (Chaps, 8, 9, 24.), subjects which link this treatise very closely with that "On the Unity of the Church," which was written in A.D. 251. Further, he was writing in the midst of persecution, when martyrdom and confessorship might be every-day occurrences, and when there was a danger of arrogance and self-glorification on the part of the sufferers (Chap. 26.). Again, the passages in which he dwells upon the snares of wealth and the duty of dedicating worldly opulence to the cause of God and His saints, gain new force when we remember how freely he had surrendered his own property for the relief of the victims of Decius' Edict. Once again, the manner in which he urges the splendid privileges and corresponding duties of Christians as "sons of God," points to the period of the Plague and of his bracing exhortations to the brethren to rise to the opportunity given them of displaying the character of men "born of God" (Chaps. 11, 17, 23).

All these indications lead us to the year A.D. 252 for the composition of the treatise.

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§ 4. CYPRIAN'S TEXT OF THE PATERNOSTER.

PATER NOSTER QUI ES IN CAELIS, SANCTIFICETUR NOMEN TUUM, ADVENIAT REGNUM TUUM, FIAT VOLUNTAS TUA IN CAELO ET IN TERRA, PANEM NOSTRUM COTTIDIANUM DA NOBIS HODIE, ET DIMITTE NOBIS DEBITA NOSTRA, SICUT ET NOS REMITTIMUS DEBITORIBUS NOSTRIS, ET NE PATIARIS NOS INDUCI IN TEMPTATIONEM, SED LIBERA NOS A MALO.³

¹ On the mistake which transferred the festival of St. Cyprian in the English Calendar to the 26th, see Benson, *u. s.*, pp. 610 f.

² Pont. *Vita* 18.

³ Chap. 7.; compare Tertullian's text, compiled from the detached clauses in his *De Oratione*:

PATER QUI IN CAELIS ES, SANCTIFICETUR NOMEN TUUM, FIAT VOLUNTAS TUA IN CAELIS ET IN TERRA, VENIAT REGNUM TUUM, PANEM NOSTRUM QUOTIDIANUM DA NOBIS HODIE, DIMITTE NOBIS DEBITA NOSTRA, ...NE NOS INDUCAS IN TEMPTATIONEM, SED DEVEHE NOS A MALO. THE OMITTED CLAUSE AFTER NOSTRA SEEMS TO BE IMPLIED BY THE COMMENT, "REMITTERE NOS QUOQUE PROFITEMUR DEBITORIBUS NOSTRIS;" but the reversed order of the third and fourth clauses is peculiar to Tertullian. For a

This form of the text is that which was most familiar, probably from its liturgical and devotional

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use, in the North African Church,¹ and the words naturally flowed from the pen or rose to the lips, much as in our own case the English version of the Lord's Prayer in the Prayer Book is the one which we naturally quote and use. Probably very few persons could cite accurately the Biblical text of the Prayer as given in the Authorized Version of either St. Matthew or St. Luke.

Thus both Tertullian and Cyprian read and interpreted the third petition in the form, YOUR WILL BE DONE IN HEAVEN AND IN EARTH, and Augustine tells us that in his day this form was sometimes preferred; although the other form, AS IN HEAVEN, was more usually used and read in the majority of manuscripts.² This form obviously prevented both commentators from finding a model for earthly obedience to God's will in that of the celestial hierarchy or of Nature. IN HEAVEN AND IN EARTH means, for Tertullian and for Cyprian, either "in the two parts of man's nature, spirit and flesh," or else "in Christians and in unbelievers." Tertullian writes, "By a figurative interpretation

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of flesh and spirit we are heaven and earth; although even if it is understood simply, yet the sense of the petition is the same, namely, that in us God's will may be done in earth so that it may also be done in heaven."³

And Cyprian similarly, "Since we possess a body from earth and a spirit from heaven, we are ourselves earth and heaven, and in both — that is, in body and in spirit — we pray that God's will may be done.... We pray also for those who are still earth and who have not begun to be heavenly, that in their case also, the will of God may be done.... We make intercession for the salvation of all, so that as in heaven — that is, in us — through our faith God's will has been done, whereby we are of heaven, so also in earth — that is, in those others — God's will may be done, on their becoming believers; so that those who are yet earthly by their first birth, may begin to be heavenly when born of water and of the Spirit."⁴

Augustine notices these interpretations of his exegetical predecessors and adds to them in his *Treatise on the Sermon on the Mount*.⁵ By "heaven and earth" he understands the righteous and the sinners. "We pray (he says) for our enemies, as though it were said, As the saints do Your will, so also let sinners, that they may be converted

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to You." And again, following Tertullian's idea, "We understand heaven and earth as spirit and flesh." More boldly he also identifies heaven with Christ, and earth with the Church.⁶

possible explanation of this order see Chase, "The Lord's Prayer in the Early Church," Cambridge *Texts and Studies*, i. 3. 27.

¹ On the "African" text and its close affinity with that of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae (k) see Sanday, *Old Latin Biblical Texts*, i. 67; ii. app. ii.

² Augustin. *De dono persever.* iii. 6: "Tertia petitio est, *Fiat voluntas tua in caelo et in terra*: vel, quod in plerisque codicibus legitur magisque ab orantibus frequentatur, *sicut in caelo et in terra*: quod plerique intellegunt, sicut sancti angeli et nos faciamus voluntatem tuam.

³ *De Oratione* 4.

⁴ Chap. 17., p. 46.

⁵ *De Serm. in Monte*, ii. 21 f.

⁶ "Sicut in Ipso Domino Nostro Jesu Christo ita et in ecclesia."

It will be observed that in the last petition, Cyprian's text differs from Tertullian's, reading ALLOW US NOT TO BE LED INTO TEMPTATION. These words are in fact Tertullian's commentary on the clause, and represent the current devotional exposition of the true text, LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION.¹ Referring to this variation, Augustine agrees that the petition has no other meaning but "Do not permit us to be led into temptation;" and he adds that for this reason, some persons made this their petition, and that it was read this way in a considerable number of manuscripts, and that the blessed Cyprian read it this way — but that he himself had nowhere found that reading in the original Greek.²

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This form of the petition in fact first appears in Cyprian, and it won its way into some manuscripts from current devotional use.

It is the idea of the Divine permission in temptation that is prominent, derived no doubt from the scenes depicted in the opening chapters of the Book of Job, and verbally indebted to St. Paul's words in 1Cor. 10.13. Sometimes this last text is combined with 1Tim. 6.9, as in a fragment of Dionysius of Alexandria, who explains LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, that is, "Do not allow us to fall into temptation."³ Similarly, some of the early Liturgies added in the embolismus⁴ the words, "such as we are not able to bear," from 1Cor. 10.13.⁵ With insertions like these we may compare the liturgical doxology which has wedded itself with the eucharistic employment of the Prayer from very early times.⁶

It may not be out of place to mention here another early variant in the Western text of the Prayer: LET YOUR HOLY SPIRIT COME UPON US AND CLEANSE US.

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This is attested by Tertullian,⁷ and by Gregory Nyssen.⁸ It seems to have replaced the clause HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME, in Tertullian's text, and, YOUR KINGDOM COME, in Gregory's copies of St. Luke's Gospel. No doubt it was a liturgical addition employed in some services, such as Ordination, when the presence of the Holy Spirit was especially invoked.

§ 5. LITURGICAL ALLUSIONS.

Not the least interesting of the many valuable points in the Treatise are the allusions which it contains to the worship of the North African Church.

¹ See below, p. 77. We may add here two other passages to the same effect: — *Defuga in pers.* 2, "Deliver us from the evil one, that is, Do not lead us into temptation by giving us up to the evil one. For then we are delivered from the power of the devil when we are not handed over to him to be tempted." *Adv. Marc.* iv. 26, "Who will not allow us to be led into temptation? He Whom the tempter cannot fear, or He Who from the beginning precondemned the tempter."

² *De dono persever.* vi. 12, "Quod itaque dicimus Deo *Ne nos inferas in tentationem*, quod dicimus nisi ne nos inferri sinas? Unde sic orant nonnulli et legitur in codicibus pluribus, et hoc sic posuit beatissimus Cyprianus: *Ne patiaris nos induct in tentationem*. In evangelio tamen graeco nusquam inveni nisi *Ne nos inferas in tentationem*."

³ Quoted by Chase, *op. cit.*, pp. 68, 140.

⁴ The *embolism* is an expansion of the last clause, asking the Lord to deliver us from all manner of evil. It is given at the end of the Eucharist (Communion) prayer.

⁵ Comp. Liturgy of Alexandria (Brightman, i. 136), Lit. of Syrian Jacobites (*ib.* 100), Lit. of Coptic Jacobites (*ib.* 182).

⁶ See Westcott and Hort, APP., *Notes on Select Readings*, Matt. 6.13; Luke 11.2; and Chase, *u. s.*, pp. 168 f.

⁷ *adv. Marcion.* 26.

⁸ *Prec.* 738.

1. First in importance among these stands the very definite testimony to the Priest's exhortation and the People's response in the Eucharistic Service,¹ which Cyprian quotes in order to illustrate the duty of whole-heartedness in prayer, and of banishing all carnal and worldly thoughts:

SURSUM CORDA:
HABEMUS AD DOMINUM.

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It has been suggested,² that the very ruggedness and abruptness of the Latin, point to a still earlier Greek form, like that given in the Syrian rite:

Ανω τὸν νοῦν

or in Cyril's *Catecheses* (23.4):

Ανω τὰς καρδίας,

UP HEARTS!

Habemus ad Dominum is unquestionably a phrase condensed to the point of obscurity. "We hold ourselves," or "We direct (our hearts), towards the Lord," would be the simplest translation. Our familiar English version is taken either from the Mozarabic missal of A.D. 1500 — *Levamus ad Dominum*, or from the Cologne "Order" of 1543 — "Wir erheben die zum Herren."

2. In the next place we have to note the incidental allusion to standing as the usual attitude in prayer.³ The Christian Church inherited this custom from the Jews; and Christ assumed that this would be the ordinary practice of His followers, even when praying for the pardon of sins.⁴ So the Pharisee and the Tax-gatherer are both depicted in the parable as standing to pray.⁵

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"This posture was made obligatory, by custom, during the festal Easter season, and also on Sunday, as symbolizing the participation of the redeemed in the risen life of their Redeemer, and expressing the erectness, and jubilation, and deathless expectation which were inseparable from the commemoration of His victory over death."⁶ One is tempted to quote Clement of Alexandria:

"Prayer is conversation with God.... In this we raise the head and lift the hands towards heaven, and stand on tiptoe as we join in the closing outburst of prayer, following the eager flight of the spirit into the intelligible world; and while we thus endeavour to detach the body from the earth by uplifting it along with the uttered words, we spurn the fetters of the flesh, and constrain the soul — winged with desire for better things — to ascend into the holy place."⁷

¹ There is a still earlier reference to this formula in the Canons of Hippolytus, which date some thirty years before this Treatise. See Duchesne, *Les Origines du culte chrétien*, p. 506; or in Mrs. McClure's English translation (S.P.C.K.), p. 526.

² Bishop Dowden's *Workmanship of the Prayer-Book*, p. 168.

³ Chap. 31.

⁴ Mar 11.25: chap. 23.

⁵ Luk 18. 10 f.: chap. 6.

⁶ Bright, *Notes on the Canons*, p. 83. Comp. Tertullian's words, *De cor.* 3, "On the Lord's Day we account it unlawful to fast or to worship upon the knees. We enjoy the same freedom from Easter Day to Pentecost"; and, further, *De Oratione* 23.

⁷ *Strom.* vii. 39, 40 (Hort and Mayor ed., p. 69).

3. The third point to notice is Cyprian's clear indication that the Holy Eucharist was received daily.¹ This was a common, but by no means an invariable custom. Tertullian speaks of the fourth

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and sixth days (Wednesdays and Fridays) as "station-days "when the Communion was administered.² But later, in Augustine's time, the daily celebration was observed presumably in the chief church in Hippo, though varying customs prevailed elsewhere.³ The daily reception was encouraged by the practice of allowing communicants to take home with them certain reserved portions of the consecrated elements, to be partaken of on arising in the morning before all other food.⁴

4. On the observance of the Three Hours of Prayer — the third, the sixth, and the ninth — Cyprian offers a mystical explanation, with which we may compare that given by Clement of Alexandria. Clement writes:

"If there are any who assign fixed hours to prayer, such as the third, the sixth, and the ninth... the triple distribution of the hours, and their observance by corresponding prayers, is familiar to those who are acquainted with the blessed Triad of the holy mansions."⁵

But Cyprian evidently had in mind the words of his master Tertullian, who speaks of these Three Hours as "having always been of special solemnity in prayer."⁶ On the other hand, the

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hidden symbolism of the Holy Trinity is entirely Cyprianesque.

* * * * *

We have kept the reader from the text of this beautiful little work too long.

¹ Chap. 18.

² *De Oratione* 14.

³ Augustin., *Epist.* 98. 9: 118 *ad Jan.*

⁴ Tertullian, *Ad uxor.* 5; Cyprian, *De laps.* 26.

⁵ *Strom.* vii. 40.

⁶ *De jejun.* 10; comp. Origen, *De Oratione* 12.

ST. CYPRIAN ON THE LORD'S PRAYER

CHAPTER 1

THE Gospel precepts, dearly beloved brethren, are nothing else than divine commands, foundations on which hope is to be built up, buttresses by which faith is to be strengthened, nourishment from which the heart is to be comforted, helms by which to steer our way, ramparts whereby salvation is to be preserved; and thus, while they instruct the teachable minds of believers on earth, they also lead them on to the heavenly kingdom.

There are many things which God willed should be proclaimed and made known by His servants the Prophets; but how much more important are those which His Son speaks, which the Word of God Who was in the Prophets testifies with His own voice; not now demanding that the way should be prepared for His coming, but coming Himself, opening and showing a way for us, so that we, who were formerly recklessly and blindly wandering *in the darkness of death*,¹ might, when

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illuminated by the light of grace, hold to the way of life with the Lord as our Guide and Ruler.

CHAPTER 2

Among other saving warnings and divine precepts with which He gave counsel for the salvation of His people, the Lord Himself also gave a form of prayer, and Himself taught and instructed us for what we should pray. He Who made us to live, also taught us to pray, moved by that same lovingkindness with which He has deigned to also grant and confer all other things; so that when we speak in the presence of the Father, with the petition and prayer which His Son taught us, we shall be more readily heard.

Already He had foretold that the hour was coming when the *true worshippers* would *worship the Father in spirit and in truth*;² and now He fulfilled what He then promised, in order that we, who have been receivers of spirit and truth through the sanctification which He gives, may worship Him truly and spiritually by using that which He has delivered.

For what prayer can be more spiritual than that

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prayer which has been given us by Christ, by Whom also the Holy Spirit was sent to us? What praying in the presence of the Father can be more true than that praying which was delivered by the lips of the Son Who is *the Truth*?³ Hence, to pray otherwise than as He taught is not merely ignorance, but a fault; for He Himself ruled and said, "You reject the commandment of God in order to observe your own tradition."⁴

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LET us pray therefore, dearly beloved brethren, as our Master, God, has taught us. It is a loving and familiar thing to beseech God with His own petitioning, and to ascend to Him with the prayer of Christ. Let the Father recognize the words of His own Son when we make our requests.

¹ Luk 1.79.

² Joh 4.23.

³ Joh 14.6.

⁴ Mar 7.8.

Let Him Who dwells within our breast also be in our voice; and inasmuch as we have Him as *an Advocate with the Father*¹ for our sins, when as

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sinners we seek pardon for our delinquencies, let us put forward the words of our *Advocate*. For as He says, whatever we ask from the Father in His Name He will give us.² How much more unflinching shall we obtain what we ask in Christ's Name if we ask it in His own words?

CHAPTER 4

BUT let our words of prayer be under strict rule, restrained by quietness and modesty. Let us recollect that we stand in the sight of God. The Divine Eyes must be pleased with the posture of our body and the tone of our voice. For as a shameless man will shout with loud cries, so on the other hand it becomes a reverent man to pray with modest prayers. Moreover, the Lord in His directions bade us pray in secret, in secluded and sequestered places, in our very chambers,³ as best suited to faith — so that we may recognize that God is everywhere present, hearing and seeing every one; and in the plenitude of His Majesty, penetrating even into secluded and hidden places. As it is written: *I am a God near at hand, and not a God afar off. If a man hides himself in secret places, shall I therefore not see him? Do I not fill*

THE LORD'S PRAYER 29

*heaven and earth?*⁴ And again: *In every place the eyes of God behold the good and the wicked.*⁵

And when we come together into one place with the brethren, and celebrate divine sacrifices with God's priest, we ought to be mindful of reverence and order, not tossing our prayers into the air on all sides with ill-assorted words, nor flinging out a petition — which ought to be modestly commended to God — with tumultuous loquacity; because God is the Hearer not of the voice, but of the heart. Nor does He Who sees the thoughts need to be reminded by loud cries. The Lord shows this when He says: *Why do you think evil in your hearts?*⁶ And in another place: *And all the churches shall know that I am a searcher of the minds and hearts.*⁷

CHAPTER 5

Hanna preserves and keeps this rule in the first Book of Kings, signifying a type of the Church, in that she was praying to the Lord not with clamorous petitioning, but silently and modestly within the very recesses of her breast. She was speaking with secret prayer but with manifest faith; she was speaking not with her voice but with her heart, because she knew that

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¹ 1Joh 2.1. Compare Wordsworth's Sonnet, from the Italian of Michael Angelo:

To the SUPREME BEING.
"The prayers I make will then be sweet indeed
If You the spirit give by which I pray."

² Joh 16.23.

³ Mat 6.6.

⁴ Jer 23.23 f.

⁵ Prov. 15.3.

⁶ Luk 5.22.

⁷ Rev. 2.23.

God so hears us; and she gained her petition effectually because she sought it faithfully. Divine Scripture declares this, saying: *She was speaking in her heart, and her lips moved, and her voice was not heard; and God heard her.*¹

Also we read in the Psalms: *Speak in your hearts and on your beds, and be filled with compunction.*²

Also by Jeremiah the Holy Spirit suggests the same, and teaches us, saying: *In the heart, O God, it is due You to be worshipped.*³

CHAPTER 6

MOREOVER, may the worshipper, dearly beloved brethren, not forget the manner in which the tax-gatherer prayed in the temple with the Pharisee. Not with eyes presumptuously raised to heaven; not with hands proudly held aloft; but beating upon his breast and testifying to the sins enclosed in it, he implored help from the Divine mercy. And while the Pharisee was self-contented, it was rather granted to this

THE LORD'S PRAYER 31

other man who prayed thus, to be sanctified inasmuch as he placed his hope of salvation, not in reliance on his own innocence (for no one is innocent), but prayed, humbly confessing his sins. And He Who pardons the humble heard his prayer. This the Lord sets forth in His Gospel, and says:⁴ *Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and one a tax gatherer. The Pharisee, when he had placed himself, prayed thus with himself: "God, I thank You that I am not as other men, unjust, extortioners, adulterers, even as this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess." But the tax-gatherer was standing far away, and was not even willing to lift his eyes to heaven, but kept striking his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." I tell you that this man went down to his house justified, rather than that Pharisee. For every one that exalts himself shall be humbled, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted?*⁵

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CHAPTER 7

THESE things, dearly beloved brethren, we learn from the sacred lection. And now, after we have learned *how* we ought to enter upon prayer, let us learn also *what* we are to pray, the Lord being our Teacher.

¹ 1Sam. 1.13. Originally, 1st and 2nd Samuel were named 1st and 2nd Kings; and our 1st and 2nd Kings were named 3rd and 4th Kings. Hence Cyprian refers to "the first Book of Kings."

² Psa 4.4; *compunction*: a feeling of deep sorrow or regret; here it is for our sins.

³ *Epist. Jerem. apud* Baruch 6.6. In the original context the meaning is quite different. The contrast emphasized by Jeremiah is not that between the heart and the lips, but between the worship of God and the worship of the Babylonian idols.

⁴ Luk 18.10 f.

⁵ One cannot forbear quoting Crashaw's epigram:

"Two went to pray? O rather say
One went to brag, th' other to pray.
One stands up close, and treads on high,
Where th' other dares not lend his eye.
One nearer to the altar trod,
The other to the altar's God."

In this manner, He said,¹ pray:

OUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME, YOUR KINGDOM COME, YOUR WILL BE DONE IN HEAVEN AND IN EARTH. GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD, AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS AS WE ALSO FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS. AND ALLOW US NOT TO BE LED INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM THE EVIL ONE. AMEN.

CHAPTER 8

BEFORE all things, the Teacher of peace and Master of unity is unwilling for prayer to be made singly and individually. He teaches that he who prays is not to pray for himself alone. For we do not say, *My Father Who is in heaven*, nor *Give me this day my bread*, nor does each one ask

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THE LORD'S PRAYER 33

that his *own* debt only be remitted, nor does he request for himself *alone* that he may not be led into temptation, and may be delivered from the evil one. Prayer with us is public and common; and when we pray, we do not pray for one but for the whole people, because we the whole people are one.

The God of peace and Master of concord² Who taught unity, thus wished one to pray for all, as He Himself bore all in One. The Three Children observed this rule of prayer when they were shut up in the fiery furnace, for they were in unison in prayer, and concordant in unanimity of spirit. This fact, the truth of the sacred Scriptures declares; and when it teaches how these persons prayed, it gives us an example which we ought to imitate in our prayers, that we may be like them. *Then those three*, it says,³ *as if from one mouth sang a hymn and blessed the Lord*. They spoke as if from one mouth, although Christ had not yet taught them to pray. And therefore, as they prayed, their words were availing and efficacious, because a quiet, simple, and spiritual prayer pleased the Lord.

We find that the Apostles and disciples prayed this way too, after the Lord's Ascension: *They all continued with one accord in prayer, with*

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*the women, and Mary the Mother of Jesus, and with His brethren.*⁴ They continued with one accord in prayer, clearly showing at once by the constancy of their prayer, and by its unanimity, that God, *Who makes men to be of one mind in a house*,⁵ only admits into the divine and eternal house those among whom prayer is unanimous.

CHAPTER 9

Now see what kind of lessons are to be learned, dearly beloved brethren, from the Lord's Prayer! See how numerous, how important! They are briefly bound together in words, yet spiritually abounding in virtue! And so much so that there is absolutely nothing passed over pertaining to our petitions and prayers which is not included in this compendium of heavenly teaching.

¹ Mat 6.9.

² A harmonious state of things in general.

³ Song of the Three Holy Children, verse 28 [Daniel 3.51].

⁴ Acts 1.14.

⁵ Psa 67.7. [68.6.] *Douay-Rheims* - God who makes men of one manner to dwell in a house:

In this manner, He says, pray:

OUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN.

The new man, born again, and restored to his God by His grace, says first of all FATHER, because he now has begun to be a son.

He came, the Gospel says,¹ to His own home and

THE LORD'S PRAYER 35

*His own people did not receive Him. But to as many as received Him He gave power to become sons of God, namely to those who believe in His Name. Therefore he who has believed in His Name, and has become a son of God, should at once begin to give thanks and to proclaim himself a son of God by declaring that he has a Father in Heaven: God. Let him witness too among the very first words of his new birth, that he has renounced his earthly and fleshly father, and that he recognizes and has begun to have as his Father only Him Who is in heaven. As it is written: *Those who say to father and to mother, I have not known you, and who have not acknowledged their own children, for these have guarded Your precepts and observed Your covenant.*²*

Likewise the Lord in His Gospel forbids us to call anyone "father" on earth, because we have *One Father, Who is in heaven.*³ And to the disciple who mentioned his deceased father He replied: *Let the dead bury their dead.*⁴ For the man had spoken of his father as dead when the Father of all believers is living.

CHAPTER 10

NOR should we, dearly beloved brethren, merely consider and understand that we call Him

36 ST. CYPRIAN ON

FATHER, Who is in heaven, but we join together and say OUR FATHER; the Father, that is, of those who believe, of those who, sanctified by Him and renewed by the birth of spiritual grace, have begun to be sons of God.

This word also censures and lashes the Jews who, in their unbelief, not only despised the Christ Who had been foretold to them by the Prophets, and who was sent first to them, but also cruelly put Him to death; and they cannot now call God their Father because the Lord confounds and refutes them, saying: *You were born of your father the devil, and you are willing to do the lusts of your father. For he was a murderer from the beginning, and did not stand in the truth, because truth is not in him.*⁵ Also by Isaiah the Prophet, God cries in wrath: *I have begotten and brought up sons, but they have despised Me. The ox knows his owner and the ass his master's crib; but Israel has not known Me, and My people have not understood Me. Ah! sinful nation, a people full of sins, a worthless seed, abominable sons. You have forsaken the Lord and provoked to indignation the Holy One of Israel.*⁶

¹ Joh 1.11.

² Deu 33.9.

³ Mat 23.9

⁴ Mat 8.22.

⁵ Joh 8.44.

⁶ Isa 1.2-4.

In reprobation of these Jews, we Christians when we pray, say OUR FATHER because He has begun to be ours, and has ceased to be the Father of the Jews who have forsaken Him. Nor can a sinful

THE LORD'S PRAYER 37

people be a son; it is those to whom remission of sins is granted that the name of *sons* is ascribed, and it is to them that eternity is promised; the Lord Himself saying: *Whoever commits sin is the slave of sin. Now a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.*¹

CHAPTER 11

Now how great the Lord's tenderness is, how great the exceeding abundance of His condescension and goodness towards us is, seeing that He wished us to pray to God in such a manner as to call Him FATHER; and since Christ is Son of God, so may we call ourselves sons of God. For not one of us would have dared to aspire to this title in prayer, had not He Himself permitted us so to pray. We should then, dearly beloved brethren, remember and realize that when we call God FATHER, we ought to act as sons of God, in order that, as we are pleased at God being our Father, so He too may be pleased with us. Let us behave as temples of God, so that it may appear that God dwells in us. Let our conduct not fall away from the Spirit, but let us who have begun to be heavenly and spiritual,

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ponder and perform nothing but heavenly and spiritual things; for the Lord God Himself has said: *Those who honour Me I will honour, and he that despises Me shall be despised.*²

The blessed Apostle likewise in his Epistle has ruled: *You are not your own. For you have been bought with a great price. Honour and bear about God in your body.*³

CHAPTER 12

AFTER this we say HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME. We do not ask that God may be hallowed in our prayers, but we beseech Him that His Name may be hallowed in us. By whom indeed could God be hallowed Who is Himself the Hallower? Yet because He Himself has said, *Be holy, for I also am holy,*⁴ this is what we ask and request: namely, that we who have been hallowed in Baptism, may be constant in that which we have begun to be. And we make daily supplication for this. For we need a daily sanctification by which we, who daily commit faults, may purge away our

THE LORD'S PRAYER 39

offences by a continual sanctification.⁵ Now what that sanctification is, which is conferred upon us by the lovingkindness of God, the Apostle declares when he says: *Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor seekers after males, nor thieves, nor cheats, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall attain to the kingdom of God. And these,*

¹ Joh 8.34-35.

² 1Sam. 2.30.

³ 1Cor. 6.20 (see Douay-Rheims).

⁴ Lev 19.2. Comp. 1Pet. 1.16.

⁵ On the efficacy of the Lord's Prayer as a daily absolution, see Augustine, *De civ. Dei [City of God]*, xxi.27: "The daily prayer which the Lord Himself taught, obliterates the sins of the day, when day by day we say, Forgive us our debts." And again, *Serm. ad Catech.* xv., "Semel abluimus baptismate, cottidie abluimus oratione."

*indeed, were you; but you were washed, you were justified, you were sanctified in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*¹

He says that we were sanctified in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. It is this sanctification that we pray may abide in us. And because our Lord and Judge warns the one who had been healed by Him and granted a new life to *sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon him*,² we ask with continual prayers that the sanctification and renewed life which is received by God's grace, may be preserved by His protecting care.

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CHAPTER 13

IT follows in the Prayer, YOUR KINGDOM COME. We ask that God's kingdom may be made present to us, in the same way that we entreat that His Name may be hallowed in us. For when does God not reign? Or when does anything begin with Him that ever was and ever will be?

We ask for our kingdom to come which has been promised to us by God, and won by Christ's Blood and Passion; so that we who have already served Him in the world may hereafter reign with Christ the Lord; He Himself promises this when He says: *Come, you blessed of My Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.*³

The kingdom of God, dearly beloved brethren, may also be interpreted of Christ Himself Whom we daily desire to come, and for Whose Advent we pray, that it may quickly be made present to us. For just as He is the Resurrection because we rise in Him, so also He may be regarded as the Kingdom of God because we are destined to reign in Him.

Now it is well for us to pray for God's kingdom, that is, a heavenly kingdom, because there is also an earthly kingdom. But he who has already renounced the world is superior both to its honours

THE LORDS PRAYER 41

and to its kingdom. And so he who dedicates himself to God and Christ longs not for earthly kingdoms, but heavenly. But there is need for continual supplication and prayer lest we fall from that heavenly kingdom, as the Jews fell to whom it had first been promised — as the Lord showed and taught: *Many, He says, shall come from the east and from the west and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom shall be expelled into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*⁴ He points out that the Jews were originally the sons of the kingdom when they persevered in being such. But after the Paternal Name ceased among them, the kingdom ceased likewise. And hence we Christians, who begin in prayer to call God FATHER, also pray that His kingdom may come to us.

CHAPTER 14

WE also proceed to say, YOUR WILL BE DONE IN HEAVEN AND IN EARTH; not meaning that God may do His own will, but that we may be able to do what God wills. For who opposes God

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¹ 1Cor 6.9-11.

² Joh 5.14.

³ Mat 25.34.

⁴ Mat 8.11-12.

so as to prevent Him from doing as He wills? But since we are opposed by the devil, and our own mind and actions are hindered in every way from being in submission to God, we ask and beseech that God's will may be done in us. And that it may be done in us, there is need of God's will — that is, of His aid and protecting care — because no one is strong by his own strength, but is secure only by the kindness and mercy of God.

Accordingly, even the Lord, manifesting the weakness of that human nature which He bore, says: *Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me.* And then, affording an example to His disciples not to do their own will but God's, He added: *Nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.*¹ And in another place He says: *I came down from heaven not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me.*² Now if the Son was obedient to do His Father's will, how much more should the servant be obedient to do his Lord's will? John in his Epistle exhorts us to do the will of God; and he instructs us, saying: *Do not love the world, nor the things that are in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world is lust of the flesh, and lust of the eyes, and pride of life, which is not from the Father, but of the world. And the world will*

THE LORD'S PRAYER 43

*pass away and the lust of it; but he who has done the will of God abides forever, even as God also abides forever.*³

We who wish to abide forever ought to do the will of God Who is forever.

CHAPTER 15

Now the will of God is that which Christ did and taught. It is humility in conduct, stability in faith, modesty in words, justice in deeds, mercy in works, strictness in morals, unwillingness to do wrong, and willingness to endure wrong: it is to preserve peace with our brethren, to love God with our whole heart, to have affection for Him as our Father, to fear Him as our God, to prefer nothing before Christ because He preferred nothing before us, to cling inseparably to His love, to stand bravely and faithfully by His Cross; and when the contest comes for His Name and Honour, it is to display in speech a constancy whereby we become confessors, in torture a fidelity whereby we defy the foe, and in death a patience for which we receive the crown. *This* is to endeavour to be co-heir with Christ; *this* is to do the will of God; *this* is to fulfil the will of the Father.

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CHAPTER 16

MOREOVER we pray that the will of God may be done both in heaven and in earth, because each pertains to the consummation of our safety and salvation. For since we possess a body from earth and a spirit from heaven, we are ourselves earth and heaven; and in both — that is, in body and in spirit — we pray that God's will may be done. For there is a strife between flesh and spirit, a daily contest as they mutually disagree, so that we do not do the things that we would; because while the spirit seeks what is heavenly and divine, the flesh desires what is earthly and worldly. And therefore we pray that by the assistance and help of God there may be agreement between these two; so that when the will of God is done, both in the spirit and in the flesh, the soul which has been reborn through Him may be preserved. This is what the Apostle Paul openly and

¹ Mat 26.39.

² Joh 6.38.

³ 1Joh 2.15-17.

plainly declares in his words: *The flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, for these are contrary to one another, so that we do not do the things that we would. Now the works of the flesh are manifest: namely, adulteries, fornications, uncleannesses, filthinesses, idolatries, poisonings, murders,*

THE LORD'S PRAYER 45

*enmities, strifes, rivalries, hatreds, provocations, jealousies, dissensions, parties, envyings, drunkennesses, revelries, and the like: and those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, magnanimity, goodness, faith, gentleness, continence, chastity.*¹ And therefore we pray with daily supplication, no with incessant supplication, that both in heaven and in earth God's will may be done concerning us; because this is the will of God: that the earthly should yield to the heavenly, that the spiritual and divine should prevail.

CHAPTER 17

AGAIN, it may be understood this way also, dearly beloved brethren, that as the Lord commanded and admonished us to love even our enemies, and to pray likewise for those who persecute us,² so we pray also for those who are still earthly, and who have not begun to be heavenly, that concerning them also, the will of God may be done which Christ fulfilled by saving and renewing human nature. For as the disciples called by Him are no longer earth,³ but *the salt of the earth,*⁴ and the Apostle says that *the first man is from the dust of*

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*the earth, but the Second Man is from heaven,*⁵ we ought to be like God our Father, Who makes *His sun to rise on the good and on the evil, and sends rain upon the just and the unjust.*⁶ Rightly do we also pray according to Christ's admonition, and make intercession of all; to the end that, as in heaven — that is, in us (God's will has been done through our faith, whereby we are of heaven) — so also in earth — that is, in those others — God's will may be done, by their becoming believers. So that those who are still earthly by their first birth, may begin to be heavenly, *born of water and of the Spirit.*⁷

CHAPTER 18

PROCEEDING with the Prayer we make the request: GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD.

This may be understood both spiritually and literally, since each interpretation by its divine usefulness conduces to our salvation. For Christ is *the Bread of Life;*⁸ and this Bread is not everyone's, but it is ours. And as we say OUR FATHER, because He is the Father of those who know Him and believe, so also we call it OUR BREAD, because Christ is the Bread of those who partake of His

THE LORD'S PRAYER 47

¹ Gal. 5.17-23.

² Mat 5.44.

³ Adam means "earth;" hence the sons of Adam are the sons of the earth.

⁴ Mat 5.13.

⁵ 1Cor 15.47.

⁶ Mat 5.45.

⁷ Joh 3.5.

⁸ John 6.48.

Body. Now we request that this Bread be given to us daily lest we, who are in Christ, and who daily receive His Eucharist for our food of salvation, should be withheld from communion by the interposition of some heinous crime, and forbidden the heavenly food, and so be separated from the Body of Christ. He Himself taught this, saying: *I am the Bread of Life which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of My Bread, he shall live forever. Now the Bread which I will give is My Flesh for the life of the world.*¹ Since therefore He says that if anyone eats of His Bread he shall live forever, and as it is manifest that there are those living who are part of His Body, and receive the Eucharist by right of communion, so on the other hand we are bound to fear and pray lest anyone, being withheld from communion and separated from Christ's Body, remain far from salvation according to His warning: *Unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood you will not have life in you.*²

Consequently we pray that OUR BREAD, that is Christ, may be given to us DAILY, so that we who abide and live in Christ may not fall away from His sanctification and His Body.

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CHAPTER 19

AGAIN, the petition may also be understood in this way, namely, that we who have renounced the world and rejected its riches and pomps through the faith of a spiritual grace, should ask for ourselves only food and sustenance, as the Lord instructed us: *He who does not renounce everything that is his, cannot be My disciple.*³ Now he who has begun to be a disciple of Christ, renouncing everything according to his Master's words, ought to ask only for his daily food, and not extend the desires expressed in his prayers into the future, as once again the Lord Himself prescribes: *Take no thought for tomorrow, for tomorrow will take thought for itself. Sufficient to the day is the evil of it.*⁴ Very properly, therefore, Christ's disciple asks for sustenance for himself from day to day, since he is forbidden to take thought for tomorrow.

Further, it would be inconsistent and contradictory for us, who pray for God's kingdom to come quickly, to ask to live long in the world. Thus the blessed Apostle also admonishes us, substantiating and strengthening the steadfastness of our hope and faith: *We brought nothing into this*

THE LORD'S PRAYER 49

*world, he says, and it is certain that we can carry nothing away. Therefore, having food and clothing, we are content with it. But those who wish to become rich fall into temptation and snares, and many and hurtful desires which drown men in perdition and ruin. For a root of all evils is cupidity,⁵ which some, assiduously seeking it, have suffered shipwreck from the faith, and have involved themselves in many sorrows.*⁶

CHAPTER 20

HE teaches us that riches are not merely despicable but dangerous, that in this lies the root of seductive evils which deceive the blindness of the human heart by their hidden falsity. This is why God found the rich fool guilty as he was meditating upon his worldly opulence, and

¹ Joh 6.51.

² Joh 6.53.

³ Luk 14.33.

⁴ Mat 6.34.

⁵ [Extreme greed for material wealth.](#)

⁶ 1Tim. 6.7-10.

boasting of the profusion of his abundant harvests, saying: *You fool, this night your soul is required of you. Whose then will be the things which you have provided?*¹ The fool was rejoicing over his harvests on the very night that he was about to die, and he to whom life was now wanting, was thinking of the abundance of his provisions. In opposition to this,

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the Lord teaches us that he becomes perfect and complete who, by selling all that he has and distributing it for the use of the poor, lays up for himself *treasure in heaven*.² He says that that man is able to follow Him and to imitate the glory of the Lord's Passion, who unimpeded and closely tied,³ is not involved in any snare of property, but being unrestricted and free, he accompanies his own possessions which he has already sent before him to God. In order that each one of us may prepare himself for this, he thus learns to pray; and from the terms of the prayer, he knows what manner of man he ought to be.

CHAPTER 21

FOR the just man cannot fail of his daily food, since it is written: *The Lord will not slay the just soul by hunger*.⁴ And again: *I have been young and now I am old, yet have I not seen the just forsaken, nor his seed begging for their bread*.⁵ Likewise the Lord promises: *Take no thought saying, What shall we eat or what shall we drink, or with what shall we be clothed? For the nations seek after these things*.

THE LORD'S PRAYER 51

But your Father knows that you need all these things. Seek first the kingdom and righteousness of God, and all these things shall be added unto you.⁶ He promises that all things shall be added to those who seek God's kingdom and righteousness. For since all things are of God, to one who has God, nothing will be lacking, if he himself is not lacking towards God.

It was thus that Daniel, when he was shut up in the lions' den by the king's command, was divinely provided with a meal; and the man of God was fed in the midst of hungry yet abstaining wild beasts. Thus Elijah was sustained in his flight, and nourished during persecution by ravens ministering to him in his solitude, and by birds bringing him food.⁷ And — O the detestable cruelty of human malice! — though wild beasts spare, and birds bring food, yet men lay snares and savagely attack!

CHAPTER 22

AFTER this we proceed to make request regarding our sins, saying: AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS AS WE ALSO FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS.

After the supply of food, pardon of sin is asked for in order that he who is fed by God may live in

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¹ Luke 12.20.

² Mat 19.21.

³ Orig. "close-girt," as a runner who ties up all loose ends of clothing so as not to trip on them during the race.

⁴ Prov 10.3.

⁵ Psa 37.25.

⁶ Mat 6.31-33.

⁷ 1Kng 17.4-6.

God. And that provision is made not only for the present and temporal life, but also for the eternal, to which we may come if our sins are pardoned — sins which the Lord calls OUR DEBTS. As He says in His Gospel, *I forgave you all your debt because you desired Me.*¹

How necessarily, how prudently, and how salutarily² we are admonished that we are sinners, by being compelled to make petition for our sins; so that while forgiveness is asked of God, the mind is recalled to a sense of its guilt! Lest anyone should be self-satisfied as though innocent, and by extolling himself should meet with the worse doom, he is instructed and taught that he sins daily, so long as he is bid daily to entreat for his sins. Thus for instance, John in his Epistle also warns us, saying: *If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us; but if we have made confession of our sins, the Lord is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.*³

In his Epistle he has embraced both parts: namely, that we ought to make request for our sins, and that we shall obtain pardon when we ask. Hence he said that the Lord was faithful to forgive our sins, maintaining the fidelity of His promise; because He Who has taught us to pray for our debts and sins, has promised that the Father's mercy and pardon shall follow.

THE LORD'S PRAYER 53

CHAPTER 23

HE plainly added and laid down the rule, binding us by a definite condition and stipulation, that we should so entreat for our debts, as to be forgiven according to how we ourselves forgive our debtors; knowing that what we ask on behalf of our sins cannot be obtained unless we ourselves have acted in a similar way towards those who have sinned against us. Therefore He says in another place: *With what manner you shall have measured, it shall be measured out to you again.*⁴ And so the servant who, having been forgiven by his lord of all that he owed, refused to forgive his fellow-servant, is cast into prison.⁵ Because he would not extend forbearance to his fellow-servant, he forfeited the forbearance with which he had been treated by his lord. Christ sets forth this truth still more strongly in His injunctions, and it is deepened in force by His judicial strictness: *When you stand at prayer, He says, forgive if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father Who is in heaven may also forgive your sins. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father Who is in heaven forgive your sins.*⁶ No excuse will remain for you in the Day of Judgment, when you will be judged according to your sentence; whatever you have done, that also you

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will suffer yourself. For God commanded us to be peace-makers, and at concord and of one mind in His house; that which He makes us by our second birth, He wishes us to continue when re-born — so that we who are sons of God may remain in the peace of God; and having *One Spirit*,⁷ we may have also have one mind and heart. Thus God does not receive the sacrifice of one in enmity, but bids him to return from the altar and first be reconciled to his brother, so that

¹ Mat 18.32.

² [Tending to promote physical well-being, and beneficial to our spiritual health.](#)

³ 1John 1.8-9.

⁴ Mat 7.2.

⁵ Mat 18.34.

⁶ Mar 11.25-26.

⁷ Eph. 4.4.

God may be appeased by the prayers of a peace-maker.¹ This is the greater sacrifice before God: our peace and brotherly concord, a people joined together through the unity of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER 24

FOR even in the case of the sacrifices which Cain and Abel were the first to offer, God did not regard their gifts, but their hearts; so that the one was accepted in his gift, who was acceptable in his heart. Abel, peaceable and just, sacrificing to God in his innocence, taught others also that when they offer their gifts at the altar, to come with the fear of God, with simplicity of heart, with the principle

THE LORD'S PRAYER 55

of justice, and with the peace of concord. Deservedly, he who bore that character in his sacrifice to God, himself afterwards became a sacrifice to God; so that he who had the Lord's righteousness and peace, should be the first to show the example of martyrdom, and begin the Lord's Passion by the glory of his blood. Such men are accordingly crowned by the Lord, and such will be *avenged*² in the Day of Judgment with the Lord.

But the one who is quarrelsome, and he that is at enmity and not at peace with the brethren, as the blessed Apostle and Holy Scripture testify, will not be able to escape from the charge of fraternal dissension, even if he should be slain for the Name (of Christ); because as it is written, *He that hates his brother is a murderer*;³ nor does a murderer attain to the kingdom of heaven or live with God.⁴ He that has preferred to imitate Judas rather than Christ, cannot be with Christ. How heinous is the sin which not even the Baptism of blood⁵ can wash out! How deep the offence which not even martyrdom can expiate!

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CHAPTER 25

FURTHERMORE, the Lord needfully admonishes us to say in the Prayer, AND ALLOW US NOT TO BE LED INTO TEMPTATION. Hereby it is shown that the adversary can avail nothing against us unless God previously gives him permission; so all our fear and devotion and mindfulness should be turned towards God, since in our temptations no power is allowed to the evil one save that which is derived from God. Scripture proves this when it records that *Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came against Jerusalem and stormed it, and the Lord delivered it into his hand*.⁶ Now power is given to the evil one against us according to our sins; as it is written: *Who gave Jacob for a spoil and Israel to those that plundered him? Did not the Lord, against Whom they sinned, and refused to walk in His ways and hear His law? And He has poured upon them the fury of His anger*.⁷ And again, when Solomon sinned and fell away

¹ Mat 5.24; Mat 5.9.

² *Vindicabuntur*: compare Rev 6.10; but another reading is *judicabunt*, "will judge."

³ 1Joh 3.15.

⁴ Gal 5.21.

⁵ On the efficacy of Martyrdom for the pardon of sins, see Tertullian, *Apol.* 50, *de pat.* 13, *de bapt.* 16. He terms it "a second Baptism."

⁶ 2Kng 24.11; Ezr 5.12.

⁷ Isa 42.24-25.

from the commandments and ways of the Lord, it is recorded: *And the Lord stirred up Satan against Solomon.*¹

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CHAPTER 26

IN truth, power is given to be used against us for a twofold purpose: for punishment when we sin, and for glory when we are proved, as we see in the case of Job. For God makes this clear, saying: *Behold, all that he has I give into your hands; but beware that you do not touch the man himself.*² And the Lord in the Gospel speaks in the hour of His Passion: *You would have no power against Me unless it had been given to you from above.*³

Now when we entreat that we may not come into temptation, we are warned of our own infirmity and weakness by these words, lest anyone should insolently exalt himself, proudly and arrogantly assuming anything to himself, counting the glory of confession or of suffering as his own. By contrast, the Lord Himself taught humility in the injunction, *Watch and pray, lest you come into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*⁴ Thus, a humble and submissive confession comes first, and everything is referred to God, so that whatever we as supplicants ask in the fear and reverence of God, may be supplied by His Fatherly kindness.

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CHAPTER 27

AFTER all these petitions, there comes at the end of the Prayer a short clause which in condensed brevity comprises the sum total of our requests and prayers. For we place at the very end these words: **BUT DELIVER US FROM THE EVIL ONE**, including everything that the enemy contrives against us in this world — a sure and safe security from which may be had, if God delivers us and affords His aid when we entreat and implore.

Now having said **DELIVER US FROM THE EVIL ONE**, nothing remains beyond this for which we ought to make request, once we have asked for God's protection against the evil one. For when that is granted, we stand secure and safe against all that the devil and the world can do. For what fear can he have of the world, who has God for his protector in the world? ⁵

CHAPTER 28

WHAT wonder, dearly beloved brethren, if such is the Prayer which God taught, seeing that He condensed in His instruction all our petitioning in one saving phrase. This had already been foretold by the Prophet Isaiah when, full of the Holy

THE LORD'S PRAYER 59

¹ 1Kng 11.14. But the Hebrew word for Satan, which is merely transliterated by the LXX and old Latin, is not used in this passage as a proper name to denote the personal devil, but simply for an adversary.

² Job 1.12.

³ Joh 19.11.

⁴ Mat 26.41.

⁵ Rom 8.31, If God is for us, who can be against us? Psa 27:1, The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?

Spirit, he spoke of the majesty and Fatherly kindness of God: *Summing up and cutting short His word in righteousness; because the Lord will make a short word in all the earth.*¹ For when the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, came to all and gathered together the learned and unlearned alike, and published to every sex and age the precepts of salvation, He made a sublime abridgment of His precepts, so that the memory of His disciples might, without being over-tasked in the heavenly rule, remember with readiness whatever was necessary for a simple faith. Thus, when He taught what is life eternal, He embraced the mysterious doctrine of life within a splendid and divine brevity, saying: *Now this is life eternal, that they may know You, the only and true God, and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent.*² Likewise when He gathered from the Law and the Prophets the first and greater commandments, He said: *Hear, O Israel, the Lord Your God is One God; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength. This is the first commandment; and the second is like it: You shall love your neighbour*

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*as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets.*³ And again: *Whatever good you would have men do to you, do also to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets.*⁴

CHAPTER 29

NOR was it in words only, but also by His actions that the Lord taught us to pray. He Himself prayed often, beseeching, thus showing what we ought to do by the testimony of His own example. As it is written: *He Himself departed into a solitary place and prayed.*⁵ And again, *He went away into the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.*⁶ But if He Who was without sin used to pray, how much more should sinners pray! And if He, keeping continual watch throughout the whole night, was offering unceasing prayer, how much more should we watch by night in oft-repeated prayer!

CHAPTER 30

Now the Lord was praying and beseeching, not for Himself — for what should He, innocent as He was,

THE LORD'S PRAYER 61

ask for Himself? — but for our sins; as He makes clear when He says to Peter: *Behold, Satan was earnestly asking that he might sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith not fail.*⁷ And later on He entreats for all, saying: *I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who shall believe on Me through their word, that all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in us.*⁸ Great is the lovingkindness of God and equally

¹ Isa 10.22-23. The old Latin version followed the LXX translators in their misunderstanding of the Hebrew. Contrast St. Paul's use of the text in Rom 9.28, ^{NKJ} *For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth.*"

² Joh 17.3.

³ Mar 12.29-31 (Deu 6.4-5); Mat 22.37-40 (Lev 19.18).

⁴ Mat 7.12.

⁵ Luk 5.16.

⁶ Luk 6.12.

⁷ Luk 22.31-32.

⁸ Joh 17.20.

great is His Fatherly pity regarding our salvation. Not content to redeem us with His Blood, He thus prayed so fully for us as well. See now what the desire of His prayer was: namely, that like the Father and Son are One, so also may we abide in oneness. From this may be understood how greatly he sins who rends unity and peace, because the Lord actually prayed for this unity; He desired that His people should have life, inasmuch as He knew that discord does not enter into the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER 31

NOW when we stand at prayer, dearly beloved brethren, it behoves us to be watchful and to enter

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into our prayers with our whole heart. Let every carnal and worldly thought be put away; nor let the mind dwell upon anything else than the prayer it is offering. This is why the priest before prayer utters a prefatory injunction, and prepares the minds of the brethren by saying

Lift up your hearts:

in order that, as the people respond,

We lift them up to the Lord,

they may be warned that they ought to think of nothing but the Lord. Let the breast be closed against the adversary and open to *the only God*; let it not allow God's enemy to approach it in the time of prayer. For he creeps in often and insinuates himself, and by subtle deceit he calls away our prayers from God, so that we have one thing in our heart and another on our lips; to the contrary, it is not the sound of the voice, but the mind and heart that ought to pray to the Lord with sincerity of intention.

What sluggishness it is to be led astray and captivated by unbecoming and profane thoughts when you supplicate the Lord, as if there were anything else that it behoved you to think about except that you are speaking with God! How can you ask to be heard by God when you do not even hear yourself? Do you expect the Lord to be mindful

THE LORD'S PRAYER 63

of you in your entreaties, when you are not even mindful of yourself? This is to be entirely off your guard against the enemy; this is to offend the majesty of God by negligence in the prayers which you offer; this is to be awake with the eyes and to be asleep with the heart; to the contrary, the Christian even when asleep with the eyes, ought to be awake with the heart. As it is written in the Song of Songs, in the character of the Church speaking: *I sleep, and my heart wakes.*¹ This is why the Apostle warns us solicitously and anxiously, saying, *Continue in prayer, and watch in it;*² that is, teaching and showing that those who are able to obtain what they ask from God, are those whom He sees are watchful in prayer.

CHAPTER 32

Moreover, let not those who pray come to God with unfruitful or barren prayers. Prayer is ineffectual when the petition offered to God is sterile; for as *every tree which does not bear fruit is cut down and cast into the fire,*³ most certainly the utterance that has no fruit cannot be well-

¹ Song 5.2.

² Col 4.2.

³ Mat 7.19.

pleasing to God either, because it is not abounding in any works. Hence Divine Scripture instructs us, saying:

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*Prayer is good with fasting and alms.*¹ For He Who in the Day of Judgment will render a reward for works and alms, is now also a gracious Hearer of one who comes to Him in prayer associated with works. Thus, for instance, Cornelius the centurion, when he prayed, deserved to be heard. For he was in the habit of doing many alms-deeds towards the people, and of constantly praying to God. And when he was praying about the ninth hour, an angel stood by him, testifying to his works, and saying, *Cornelius, your prayers and your alms have ascended for a memorial before God.*²

CHAPTER 33

Those prayers QUICKLY ascend to God which the merits of our works urge upon Him. And thus the angel Raphael assisted Tobias in his unceasing prayer and works, saying: *It is honourable to reveal and make known the works of God. For when you were praying, you and Sarah, I brought the memorial of your prayer before the holiness of God; and when you buried the dead as a simple duty, and because you did not delay to rise up and leave your breakfast, but departed to cover the dead, I was also sent to prove you; and now*

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*again God has sent me to heal you and Sarah, your daughter-in-law. For I am Raphael, one of the seven righteous angels who stand by and wait before the holiness of God.*³

Through Isaiah also, the Lord admonishes and teaches us likewise, attesting: *Loosen every knot of unrighteousness: cancel the oppressions of invalid contracts. Send away the enfeebled in peace, and annul every unjust agreement. Break your bread for the hungry, and bring in the homeless poor to your house. When you see the naked, clothe him, and so not despise the household of your own seed. Then shall your light break forth in season, and your raiment shall spring forth speedily, and justice shall go before you, and the glory of the Lord shall surround you. Then shall you call and God will hear you: as soon as you speak, He says, Behold, here I am.*⁴ He promises to be present, and says that He hears and protects those who loosen the knots of unrighteousness from their heart, and do alms-deeds to God's household according to His precepts. Because they hear what God commands to be done, they themselves deserve to be heard by God.

The blessed Apostle Paul, when aided by the brethren in stress of persecution, said that the works which they did were sacrifices to God. *I am filled*, he says, *having received from Epaphroditus*

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*the things which were sent by you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.*⁵ For since *he that has pity upon the poor has lent to God,*⁶ and he who gives to the little ones¹ gives to God, he sacrifices spiritually to God *an aroma of a sweet smell.*

¹ Tob 12.8; **alms: Money or goods contributed to the poor; alms-deeds would be acts of kindness to the needy.**

² Act 10.2, 4.

³ Tob 12.11-15.

⁴ Isa 58.6-9.

⁵ Phil 4.18.

⁶ Prov 19.17.

CHAPTER 34

Now in the offering of prayer we find that the Three Children with Daniel, being strong in faith and victors even in captivity, observed the third, sixth, and ninth hours,² in as it were a symbol of the Trinity which would be revealed in these last times. For the progress of the first hour to the third shows the perfected number of the Trinity; likewise from the fourth to the sixth declares another Trinity; and when the period from the seventh to the ninth is completed, the perfect Trinity is numbered through a triad of hours each.

These spaces of hours were long ago fixed upon by the worshippers of God, who observed them as the appointed and lawful times for prayer. After-events have made it manifest that from of old these

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were types, inasmuch as righteous men formerly prayed thus. For at the third hour, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples and fulfilled the gracious promise of the Lord.³ Likewise at the sixth hour Peter,⁴ going up to the house-top, was instructed by the sign as well as by the voice of God bidding him to admit all to the grace of salvation, when previously he was doubtful whether Gentiles ought to be cleansed. And from the sixth to the ninth hour⁵ the Lord, being crucified, washed away our sins in His own Blood; and that He might redeem and quicken us, He then perfected His victory by His Passion.

CHAPTER 35

BUT for us, dearly beloved brethren, in addition to the hours anciently observed, both the times and the rules of prayer have now increased in number. For we must pray also in the morning, in order that the Resurrection of the Lord may be celebrated by morning prayer. And this the Holy Spirit formerly pointed out in the Psalms, saying, *My King and my God! For to You I will pray, O Lord, in the morning, and You shall hear my voice: in the morning I will stand to You, and I*

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*shall see You.*⁶ And again, the Lord speaks by the Prophet: *Early in the morning they shall watch for Me, saying, Let us go and return to the Lord our God.*⁷

Likewise at sunset and the decline of day we must pray again. For since Christ is the true Sun and true Day, when we pray at the decline of the world's sun and day, and entreat that the light may again come upon us, we are asking for the Advent of Christ, which will bestow on us the grace of eternal light. The Holy Spirit declares in the Psalms that Christ is called the Day. *The stone, He says, which the builders refused is become the head of the corner. This has been done by the Lord, and it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the Day which the Lord has made: let us rejoice and feast in it.*⁸ Also that He is called the Sun, the Prophet Malachi testifies, saying: *But to you that fear the Name of the Lord, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise, and in His wings*

¹ Mat 10.42.

² Compare Dan 6.10.

³ Act 2.15.

⁴ Act 10.9.

⁵ Mat 27.45-50; Luk 23,44-46.

⁶ Psa 5.3.

⁷ Hos 6.1.

⁸ Psa 118.22-26; Luk 1.78 the Dayspring from on high has visited us;

*is Healing.*¹ But if in the Holy Scriptures Christ is the true Sun and true Day, there is no hour excepted when Christians should not constantly and continually worship God; so that we who are in Christ — that is, in the true Sun and Day — may all day long be instant in entreaties and prayers; and when by the world's law the revolving night, recurring in its

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alternate changes, succeeds, there can be no loss to us from its nocturnal shades; because to the sons of light, it is day even in the night. For when can he be without light, who has the Light in his heart? Or when is the sun and the day not his to whom Christ is both Sun and Day?

CHAPTER 36

LET us then, who are ever in Christ — that is, in the Light — not cease from prayer even by night. Thus the widow Anna without ceasing persevered with constant prayer and watching in being well-pleasing to God; as it is written in the Gospel: *She did not depart from the temple, serving with fastings and prayers night and day.*²

It is no relief to us that there are Gentiles who have not yet been enlightened, or Jews who have deserted the light and abide in darkness. Let us, dearly beloved brethren, who are ever in the light of the Lord, and who remember and hold fast what we have begun to be by grace given, reckon for "day." Let us deem ourselves to be ever walking in the light; let us not be hindered by the darkness from which we have escaped; let there be no loss of prayers in the night hours, no idle and

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slothful time-losing in opportunities for prayer. Let us, spiritually recreated and born again by the tender mercy of God, imitate that which we are destined to be. For since in the Kingdom we shall have only day without intervention of night, let us so watch by night as if we are in the light; and since we are to pray and give thanks to God forever, let us not cease here also to offer prayers and thanksgivings.

¹ Mal. 4.2.

² Luk 2.37.

APPENDIX - Tertullian

Containing some passages from the Treatise of Tertullian
“On Prayer” (De Oratione).

In view of the fact that St. Cyprian’s work was partly modelled on Tertullian’s, it seemed well to add in this Appendix some of the most striking of Tertullian’s passages in illustration of St. Cyprian’s treatise.

The translation is a free one, based upon the Oxford “Library of the Fathers” vol. i.

1

JESUS CHRIST, Spirit and Word and Reason of God, gave to the disciples of the New Covenant a new form of Prayer. It was needed as new wine in new skins.... The old things having been either changed (such as circumcision), or fulfilled (such as the Law), or accomplished (such as prophecy), or perfected (such as faith); the new grace of God fashioned anew all things, and brought in the Gospel as the expunger of the past.... John also taught his disciples to pray, but John’s work was to prepare

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the way for Christ — he was himself to decrease and Christ to increase; and so the forerunner’s work passed to the Lord. Hence John’s form of Prayer has not been preserved, because the earthly has given way to the heavenly. Let us note three things: *first*, Christ’s heavenly wisdom in the command to pray in secret, believing that the eye and the ear of Almighty God are present under coverings and in secret places; *secondly*, His requiring a modesty of faith whereby religious service is offered to Him alone Who hears and sees everywhere; *thirdly*, His forbidding us to think that God must be approached with a multitude of words. This brevity of the Prayer only accentuates the breadth of interpretation possible to its words. The Prayer is indeed as much expanded in meaning as it is condensed in expression. It embraces not only the proper functions of prayer — worship of God, and petitioning of man — but almost every teaching of the Lord, every reminder of the Christian rule of life, so that it comprises a breviary¹ of the whole Gospel.

2

THE Prayer begins with a testimony to God and a reward of faith, for we say, OUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN. In this we both pray to God and commend the faith whose reward it is thus to entitle Him. It is written: *To those who believed on Him, He gave power to be called the sons of God.*

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Although indeed the Lord has very frequently proclaimed God to us as a Father, and has moreover taught us to call no man Father upon earth, save only Him Whom we have in heaven — so that in thus praying we obey a commandment — yet in calling Him FATHER we also recognize Him as God. “FATHER” implies affectionate care as well as authority. Besides, in the Father the Son also is invoked; for He says, *I and the Father are One.* Nor is even the Mother

¹ A brief statement or summary.

Church omitted; if indeed in the Father and the Son, the Mother is also recognized, from whom the Name of Father and Son comes into being.¹

3

THE Name of God the Father had been disclosed to no one. ... To us it has been revealed in the Son. For “Son” is now a new Name of the Father. *I have come*, He says, *in My Father’s Name*. We ask therefore that this NAME may BE HALLOWED.... We pray that it may be hallowed in us who are in Him, and at the same time in all others whom the grace of God yet awaits. In this, we obey a commandment in praying for all, even for our enemies.

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4

WE add, YOUR WILL BE DONE IN HEAVEN AND IN EARTH. Not that anyone can hinder the doing of God’s will, but we ask that His will may be done in all men. For by a figurative interpretation of flesh and spirit, we are heaven and earth. Although even if it is to be understood simply, the sense of the petition is the same; namely, that in us the will of God may be done in earth, so that it may be done in heaven also. Now what does God will, save that we should walk according to His rule? We ask Him therefore to supply us with the substance and power of His will, that we may be saved both in heaven and in earth, seeing that the sum of His will is the salvation of those whom He has adopted. That also is the will of God which the Lord performed in preaching, in working, and in enduring. For so He declared Himself, that He did not do His own will, but the will of the Father....

Likewise when we say YOUR WILL BE DONE, we wish well to ourselves, because there is nothing of evil in the will of God — even if according to the deserts of each, something contrariwise is inflicted. In so saying then, we exhort ourselves to patience....

5

THY KINGDOM COME has the same reference as YOUR WILL BE DONE: namely, in ourselves.

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For when does God not reign, in Whose hand is the heart of all things? But whatever we wish for ourselves, we divine to be His, and we attribute to Him what we await from Him. It is inconsistent to pray, as some do, for the prolongation of the world, when the Coming of the Kingdom means the consummation of the world. We desire to reign sooner, not to serve longer. ...The avenging of the martyrs, too, is regulated by the end of the world.... Speedily let YOUR KINGDOM COME, O Lord! — the Christian’s prayer, the nations’ confusion, the Angel’s joy, for which we are persecuted — and for which we rather pray!

6

How beautifully Divine Wisdom has arranged the order of the Prayer, so that after celestial things — the Name of God, the Will of God, and the Kingdom of God — a place should now be given to earthly wants. This is as the Lord had commanded: *Seek first the Kingdom and then these things shall be added unto you*.

Yet we may rather understand this spiritually: GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD. For Christ is our Bread, because Christ is Life, and bread is life. I am the Bread of Life, He said; and

¹ The thought is obscurely expressed. Tertullian appears to mean that the Name of Father on its divine side implies the Son, and on its earthly side it implies a mother, the Church. So St. Cyprian does not hesitate to say, “He cannot have God as his Father who does not have the Church as his Mother” (*De eccl unit.* 6).

just before, *The Bread is the Word of the Living God which comes down from heaven*. Then again, because His Body is understood to be in the Bread, He said, *This is My Body*.

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Thus, in praying for DAILY BREAD, we pray to be perpetually in Christ, and inseparable from His Body.

Yet because the word has also a physical meaning, we have this command to pray for bread only as a religious rule. Bread alone is necessary for the faithful; *the rest, the Gentiles seek after*.

GIVE US THIS DAY is inserted because He had previously taught, *Take no thought for tomorrow what you shall eat*; and illustrated the point by the parable of the rich fool.

7

HAVING observed the bounty of God, we now pray for His mercy.... The Lord knew that He alone was without sin. He therefore teaches us to pray, FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS. Prayer for forgiveness is a confession of sin ... and thus repentance is shown, acceptable to God, because He wills this rather than the death of a sinner.¹ Now in Scripture a debt is a metaphor for a sin. The parable of the unforgiving servant illustrates this, and with this agrees our profession that we FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS. Moreover, in another place He says on this aspect of the Prayer, *Forgive, and it shall be forgiven you*.

8

FOR completing this wondrously compendious Prayer, in order that we should pray

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not only for forgiveness, but for the entire turning away from sins, He added, LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION: that is, Allow us not to be led — of course, by him that tempts. Far be it that the Lord should be thought to tempt².... When He was tempted by the devil³ He showed who was the head and contriver of temptation.... And thus the clause corresponds — BUT DELIVER US FROM THE EVIL ONE.

9

IN this brief epitome how many sayings of the Prophets, Gospels, Apostles, discourses of the Lord, examples, precepts are touched upon! How many duties are at once discharged! The honouring of God in the Father, the testimony of faith in the Name, the offering of obedience in the will, the remembrance of hope in the kingdom, the petition for life in the bread, the confession of debts in the deprecation, the solicitude concerning temptations in the demand for defence. What wonder? God alone could teach how He wished to be prayed to. This Prayer then, offered as a duty, ordained by Himself and animated by His own spirit since it emanated from the Divine lips, ascends by its own right into heaven, commending to the Father what the Son taught.

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¹ Eze 18:32 "For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord GOD. "Therefore turn and live!"

² Jas 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

³ Mat 4.1.

10

YET the Lord, foreseeing human needs, after delivering the rule of Prayer, added, *Ask and you shall receive*,¹ meaning that it is allowable to add on the foundation additional desires, yet always mindful of the Commandments.

11

THE remembrance of the Commandments paves the way for prayers to heaven; the chief of these is that we do not approach the altar of God before we have reconciled all quarrels or enmity with our brethren. For what kind of action is it to approach *the peace of God* without peace, for the remission of debts while retaining them?

.....

17

WE shall commend our prayers before God, if we pray with modesty and humility, not even our hands being lifted up too high, but with moderation and seemliness, nor our face being raised with boldness. For the Tax-gatherer who prayed humbled and abased, not only in his prayer but in his countenance, went away justified, rather than the impudent Pharisee. We should also subdue the tone of our voice; for it is not of the voice but of the heart that God is likewise the hearer and the seer. . . What more

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will they gain who pray more loudly than others, save that they stun their neighbours?

.....

[*Tertullian concludes with one of the noblest of perorations* ²]

28

WE are the true worshippers and the true priests who, praying in spirit, would offer up in spirit the Prayer of God, His own and acceptable, as that which He has required and provided. This prayer, dedicated from the whole heart, nourished by faith, adorned by truth, whole in innocence, pure in chastity, crowned by love, we ought to lead up to the altar of God with a procession of good works, amid psalms and hymns, as destined to obtain all things for us from God.

For what has God Who requires it, denied to the prayer that comes of spirit and of truth? We read and hear and believe how great are the proofs of its efficacy. From of old, prayer used to deliver from fires and beasts and famine; and yet it had not then received its form from Christ. How much more copiously then, will Christian prayer prevail! It furnishes with patience those who suffer and feel and grieve, it supplements grace with valour. It is prayer alone that conquers God. Consequently, it avails to recall the souls of the departed from the pathway of death,

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to recover the weak, to heal the sick, to exorcize the demoniacs, to open the gates of the prison, to loose the bonds of the innocent. This it what washes away sins, repels temptations, quenches persecutions, consoles the weak-hearted, delights the great-hearted, brings back travellers, stills the waves, stupifies brigands, nourishes the poor, rules the rich, directs the sick, raises the lapsed, upholds the falling, sustains the standing.

¹ [Mat 21.22.](#)

² [A poetic conclusion to an oration.](#)

Prayer is the wall of faith, our armour and our weapons against the enemy who watches us on every side. Therefore let us never walk unarmed. By day let us be mindful of our station, by night of our vigil. Under the arms of prayer, let us guard the standard of our Captain; in prayer let us await the trumpet of the angel. Even the angels all pray. Every creature prays. The cattle and wild beasts pray and bend their knees, and as they go forth from their stalls and caves, they look up to heaven, not with silent mouth, making their breath vibrate in their own manner. Even the birds as they soar from their nest, strain towards heaven, stretching out the cross of their wings for hands, and utter what may well be a prayer.

What more, then, of the duty of prayer? The Lord Himself prayed — to Whom be honour and power forever and ever.

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