

THE STORY OF CHRIST

BY GIOVANNI PAPINI
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OUR FATHER

The apostles asked Jesus for a prayer. He had told them to pray briefly and secretly, but they were not satisfied with any prayers recommended by the Lukewarm, bookish, priests of the Temple.

"Our Father," for we have sprung from Thee and love Thee as sons; from Thee we shall receive no wrong.

"Which art in heaven"—in that which is opposed to the earth, in the opposite sphere from matter, in spirit and in that small but eternal part of the spirit which is our soul.

Hallowed be Thy name; let us not only adore Thee with words, but be worthy of Thee, drawing nearer to Thee with greater love, because Thou art no longer the avenger, the Lord of Battles, but the Father who teaches the joyful-ness of peace.

"Thy Kingdom come"—the Kingdom of Heaven, of the spirit of love, that of the Gospel.

Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven—may Thy law of goodness and of perfection rule both spirit and matter, both the visible and invisible universe.

"Give us this day our daily bread," because our material body, necessary support of the spirit, needs every day a little material food to maintain it. We do not ask of Thee riches, dangerous burden, but only that small amount which permits us to live, to become more worthy of the promised life. Man does not live by bread alone, and yet without a morsel of bread the soul, living in the body, could not nourish itself on other things more precious than bread.

Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Pardon us because we pardon others. Thou art our eternal and infinite creditor. We can never pay our debt to Thee, but remember that because of our weakness, it is more of an effort for us to forgive one single debt of a single one of our debtors than it is for Thee to sweep away the record of all that we owe Thee.

"Lead us not into temptation." We are weak, still snared in fleshliness in this world which at times seems so beautiful and calls us to all the delights of faithfulness. Help us that our struggling trans-formation may not be too difficult, and that our entry into the King- dom may not be too long delayed.

"Deliver us from evil!" Thou who art in Heaven, who art spirit, who hast power over evil, over stubborn and hostile matter which surrounds us everywhere, and from which it is hard to free ourselves, Thou enemy of Satan, negation of matter, help us? Our true great-ness lies in this victory over evil, over evil which springs up con-stantly because it will not be truly conquered until all have conquered it. But this decisive victory will be less distant if Thou helpst us with Thy alliance.

With this appeal for aid, the Lord's Prayer ends. In it are none of the tiresome blandishments of Oriental prayers, rignaroles of adulation and hyperbole which seem invented by a dog, adoring his master with his dog's soul, because his master permits him to exist and to eat. There are none of the querulous, complaining, supplica-tions of the Psalmist who asks God for every variety of aid, more often temporal than spiritual, laments if the harvest has not been good, if his fellow-citizens do not respect him, and calls down wounds and arrows on the enemies whom he cannot conquer himself. In the Lord's Prayer the only word of praise is the word "Father," and that praise is a pledge, a testimony of love. From this father we ask only for a little bread, and we ask in addition the same pardon that we give our enemies; and at the last a valid protection in our fight with evil, the enemy of all, the great wall which hinders our entry into the Kingdom.

He who says "Our Father" is not proud but neither is he humbled; he speaks to his Father with the intimate quiet accent of confidence almost as from one equal to another. He is sure of his love and he knows that his father needs no long speeches to know his desires. "Your Father," says Jesus, "know-eth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him." Thus the most beautiful of all the prayers is a daily calling to mind of all that we need if we are to become like God.

POWERFUL DEEDS

After He had given out the new law of the imitation of God, Jesus came down from the Mount.

One cannot always remain on the heights. The moment we arrive on the summit of a mountain we are fated to descend. Every ascent is a pledge of descent, a promise to come down again. He who has something to say must make him- self heard; if he always speaks on the summits, few will stay with him; it is cold on the summits for those who are not all on fire; and his voice will reach few. He who has come to give, cannot ask men, weak lungs, tired hearts, nerveless legs, to follow him upward, hobbling along to the heights. He must follow them down to the plain, into their houses; he must stoop to them if he is to lift them up.

Jesus knew that exalted teaching on the heights would not suffice to spread the good news to all. He knew that men need less abstract words, picture-making words, than repeated words, words almost as tangible as facts. And He knew that even these words would not be enough.

The simple, rustic, coarse, hum-ble people who followed Jesus were men whose lives were based on material things, men who could only understand spiritual things slowly, with great effort, through material proofs, signs and material symbols. They could not under-stand a spiritual truth without its material incarnation; without evi-dence simple enough for them to weigh, evidence stated in the terms of the everyday world. An illus-trative fable can lead men to moral revelation; a prodigy is to them confirmation of a new truth, of a contested mission. Preaching made up of abstract axioms and aphorisms, left these imaginative Orientals unsatisfied. Jesus had recourse to the marvelous and to poetry: he performed miracles and spoke in parables. For many moderns the miracles recounted by the Evangelists are a compelling reason for turning away from Jesus and the Bible. Their shriveled brains cannot take in the miracu-lous; therefore, they reason the Gospel lies, and if it lies in so many places none of it can be believed. It is out of the question that Jesus can ever have raised the dead; therefore, His words have no value.

The people who reason in this way reason ill. They give to miracles a weight and a meaning much greater than that which Jesus gave them. If they had read the four Gospels they would have seen that Jesus is always reluctant to perform mir-acles, that He does not feel this divine power of His is of supreme importance. Every time that He finds a fair reason for refusing, He refuses; if He yields, it is to reward for turning away from Jesus and the Bible. Their shriveled brains cannot take in the miracu-lous; therefore, they reason the Gospel lies, and if it lies in so many places none of it can be believed.

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to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Thy name and in Thy name cast out devils, and in Thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity." It is not enough to cast out devils, if thou has not cast out the devil in thee, the devil of pride and cupidity.

Even after His death men will see others perform miracles. "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." I have put you on your guard; do not believe in these signs and these wonders until thou shalt see the Son of Man. The miracles of false prophets do not prove the truth of what they say.

For all these reasons, Jesus abstained, as often as possible, from working miracles, but He could not always resist the plead-ings of the sorrowful, and often His pity did not wait for the request. For a miracle is an attribute of faith, and His faith is infinite, and that of the believers very great. But often, as soon as the healing was complete, He asked the ones He had healed to keep it secret. "See thou tell no man; Go thy way." Those who do not listen to the truth of Christ, because they are troubled by the miracles, should remember the profound say- ing which was addressed to Thomas, "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed."

TO BE CONTINUED

GENERAL INTENTION FOR NOVEMBER

RECOMMENDED AND BLESSED BY HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS XI.

FREQUENT COMMUNION FOR CHILDREN

Pope Pius X's decree on Daily Communion, published some twenty years ago, dispelled many false notions then prevalent about the frequent reception of the Blessed Sacrament. The decree mentioned three reasons for receiving Com-munion every day. The first was the desire of the Church, expressed in unmistakable terms at the Council of Trent: "The Holy Synod would desire that at every Mass the faith-ful who are present should commu-nicate not only spiritually by way of internal affection, but sacramen-tally by the actual reception of the Eucharist" (Sess. 22, c. 1). The Church's reason, though mentioned first, depends in reality on another and a deeper reason, the desire of Christ. When our Lord said, "This is the bread that cometh down from heaven; not as your fathers did eat manna and are dead, he that eateth this bread shall live forever." He evidently meant that just as our daily bread feeds the body so the heavenly Bread feeds the soul. Moreover, He taught us in the Lord's Prayer to ask for our "daily bread," and this, as the Fathers of the Church teach, means not so much the material food that nourishes the body as the Divine Manna that strengthens the soul. And at the Last Supper, when our Lord said to His apostles, "Do this in commemoration of Me," He must have intended them to understand that they were to repeat not only the Sacrifice of the Mass, but the sharing in His Body and Blood and the bestowal of It upon others.

The third reason mentioned in the decree is an outcome of the other two. Our Divine Lord and our Holy Mother the Church desire us to receive daily Communion because of the temptations that daily sur-round us. No matter what efforts we may make to be good and to stay good, we can never be free from faults, never safe from the dangers that beset our frail human nature. Of ourselves we can do nothing; with Jesus for the "daily bread" we can walk more securely along the steep and narrow way. St. Paul assures us that "we can do all things in Him who strengtheneth us."

It is important to insist on this reason, for it is the misunderstanding of it that causes most of the erroneous ideas about frequent Communion. Holy Communion is not meant primarily as a reward for the virtuous nor as a safeguard to the honor and reverence due to our Divine Lord in His bodily Presence, but as an antidote to the poison of sin, as a source of strength to all men whereby they may resist their passions and unite themselves to the source of all good and bless-ings. Thus it is expressed in the only prayer of the priest at Mass, just before he commences: "Let not the participation of Thy Body, O Lord Jesus Christ, which I, unworthy, presume to receive, turn to my judgment and condemnation, but through Thy goodness may it be to me a safeguard and remedy of soul and body." And St. Thomas Aquinas, who has written so many beautiful prayers on the Blessed Sacrament, says in one that the Church has recommended for recital before Mass: "May this Holy Communion, I pray Thee, condemn me not to punishment, but be a saving plea for forgiveness. May it be my armor of faith and shield of good-will; may it cleanse me from my sins, destroy my evil passions and lust, fill me with charity and patience, humility and obedience and all the virtues; may

It be a stout wall against the assaults of all my enemies, visible and invisible; may it firmly govern all the actions of my body and soul, be my bond of union with Thee, the one and only God, and finally prove the joyous reward of my life for all eternity.

Holy Communion is not, then, as the Jansenists held it to be, a privilege for the few. It is the fountain of living water to which all who are thirsty are invited. Our Lord said: "Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you." The burden of our sinful nature is reason enough for us to obey His invitation. To hold with the Jansenists that pure love of God without any admixture of defect is the only requisite for those who wish to receive Him, is absolutely wrong and has been condemned by the Church. The exclusion from the holy table of all those occupied in worldly affairs, and the consequent lowering of the number of those who were thought worthy to receive Communion daily, was due to this false idea. And although Jansen-ism was long ago condemned, some of its poisonous doctrines still re-mained in the body of the Church even till recent times. Just previous to the publication of Pope Pius X's decree, disputes again arose as to the qualification necessary for communicating frequently, and not a few theologians of repute held that daily Communion should be allowed rarely, and then only after many precautions. In fact it was due to these disputes that the decree was promulgated.

If the Church does encourage, and even insist somewhat, on daily Communion, she also wants it clearly understood that certain con-ditions must be observed. "Frequent and daily Communion," to quote from the decree, "as a thing most earnestly desired by Christ our Lord and by the Catholic Church, should be open to all the faithful of whatever rank and condition of life; so that no one who is in the state of grace, and who approaches the holy table with a right and devout intention, can lawfully be hindered therefrom." We should be free, then, from mortal sin, and should approach the altar not through routine or human respect or for the empty praises of men, but to please God by uniting our-selves more closely to Him in this act of love, and by seeking His help against our weaknesses and tempta-tions. It is not even necessary that we should be free from mortal venial sin, though it is only normal to expect that the frequent coming of our Lord into our hearts will lessen the hold of venial sin upon them. The Holy Eucharist itself is the best means we have to avoid venial sin in the future, provided we seriously prepare ourselves to receive It, and make a suitable thanksgiving, if we are not sure that we can fulfil these conditions, we should consult our confessor and leave the decision in his hands.

Pope Pius X. was noted for his love of children and his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. It was most natural, then, that in his zeal to spread this devotion he should insist on frequent Communion for children. It was to further this desire that the Children's Euchar-istic Crusade was founded in France in 1915, an offshoot of the Eucharistic Leagues that owed their origin to the Pope's decrees on frequent and early Communion. Its object was to encourage frequent Com-munion among the children of France, in order that their parents, too often careless about their religious duties, might by their children's example be led back to the altar and the sacraments. A somewhat similar organization exists in England, the Knights and Handmaids of the Blessed Sacra-ment.

It may be questioned whether such leagues are necessary in a country like Canada, where our parishes are well organized and our Catholic parents are only too happy to accompany the holy table with their children. But there is no doubt that the principle underlying these Eucharistic Leagues holds as much here as elsewhere. The reasons that make daily Communion for adults so commendable are especially pressing for children. The very fact that they are children means that their minds are more impressionable, and therefore more exposed to the alluring temptations of the day. The delicate flower of their purity and faith needs the special protection of our Lord if it is to be kept fresh and unwith-ered. Objections that children are too young to know what they are doing, that they are naturally innocent and do not need Holy Communion frequently, or that they are thoughtless and therefore profit little from it, are all easily an-swered in the words of Christ Him-self: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God." The results of frequent Commu-nion may not show immediately in the child, but they tell later on when he grows up and meets with temptation. Having tasted from his youth the sweetness of the Lord, he will not easily be carried away by the false glamor of worldly pleasure.

It is for Catholic parents and teachers to show the children by force of example the advantages to be gained by frequent and even daily Communion. Here, as else-where, example speaks louder than words.

F. C. SMITH, S. J.

Heaven or in mercy smites, even when the blow severest is.—Baillie.

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