

JULY 24, 2016

HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH

“THE LORD’S PRAYER---PART 4, ‘OUR DAILY BREAD”

Back in the 1800s the famous English scientist Charles Darwin had an obsession as a very young man---an obsession with bugs. In particular, beetles. He and some of his friends tried to collect every species of beetle they could find---and there are thousands upon thousands of different beetle species. He and some of his friends had a friendly competition going on to see who could add the highest number of different beetles to his collection---and maybe even find a “new” species so far undiscovered. So they would roam the countryside with nets and bottles and other containers searching for the little six-leggers.

Once Darwin was on a very short stroll from somewhere back to his home. He hadn’t planned on catching beetles on this little jaunt so he didn’t have along a net or a bottle or envelope or any kind of container at all. But as he strolled down the path he happened to see a beetle sitting on a leaf---and he was sure he didn’t have that species yet. What to do? Nothing to put the beetle in so as to carry it home... He thought fast and simply grabbed the beetle and kept it in his closed fist. And off he strolled back towards home.... Then he soon saw a second unusual beetle. What to do? Simple! He used his other hand to grab and hold that beetle...and resumed his stroll back home. Then, very soon, he saw a third beetle that he didn’t have. He didn’t know what to do----he had to get that beetle but he had nothing to put it in. If he tried to cram it in his hand, the beetle already there might sneak out. Then, he had a great idea. He managed to pop the third beetle in his mouth! And so, pleased with his ingenuity, he headed for home with one beetle in each hand and one beetle in his mouth. But the beetle in the mouth wasn’t happy---and it squirted out some kind of fluid that immediately began to burn the inside of Darwin’s mouth. The pain was too strong to bear, so in panic he spit out the beetle---and in the commotion he opened up his hands and the other beetles escaped, too. And so the crestfallen Charles Darwin walked home with no beetles at all and a very sore mouth. (Janet Browne, Charles Darwin Voyaging, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 101)

There’s a lesson to be learned here: sometimes if we grab for too much it has bad results. Darwin grabbed for one beetle too many and ended up with none.

Jesus gave us a similar message in the Lord’s Prayer when he told us to pray to God, “Give us this day our daily bread”. Not to ask for filet mignon forever or for caviar every day, but just to ask for daily bread.

This summer I am taking some Sundays to give a series of homilies on the Lord’s Prayer. It is the greatest prayer, the perfect prayer, because the Lord Himself composed it...and asked us to pray it. And so we do pray it and we pray it a lot. We pray it in all our church services and every day in our own personal prayers. Because we pray it so much, it’s important we know what the words mean so we don’t end up just rattling it off without thinking about what we’re praying.

We are looking at the prayer line by line, Sunday by Sunday. Today we are up to the

fourth part of the prayer---“Give us this day our daily bread.”

All good things ultimately come from God. That includes a really important good thing—food! If you don’t have it for a few days, you’re in big trouble. But God provides it for us daily.

Of course, we have to do our part for our daily bread---planting, harvesting, processing, baking. Or do other work so as to have money to pay someone else to do all that. But, ultimately, our bread comes from God. He created the soil, He made the sun, He sends the rain. Bread comes from God.

And so, in this line of the Lord’s Prayer----“Give us this day our daily bread”—we are, to begin with, doing 2 specific things:

---We are acknowledging that bread comes from God.

----And we are asking Him to keep on supplying us with it.

But let’s notice some other things about this line of the prayer.....

As I mentioned earlier, we pray for bread, not for caviar or filet mignon or pizza with everything on it. And we pray for *daily* bread, not a lifetime supply of food. “Daily bread” means enough to live on and be healthy on, not necessarily all that we might desire.

And this gives us guidance when it comes to praying for material things. First of all, notice that in the Lord’s Prayer, we don’t pray much for material things----just 7 words in the prayer. And if you look closely through the liturgy sometime, you’ll see that there are some lines of prayer for material things in the many liturgy prayers, but not much.... I guess about 2% or so. So if material things are the main subjects of your *own* prayers, you’re off-track.

But there is no doubt that, even if material things shouldn’t be most of what we pray about, still...it’s okay to pray about them. That’s why Jesus said we should pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” But when we do pray concerning our material needs.....

Should we pray for a large, expensive, palatial home? No, just pray for somewhere to live. Not that it’s evil to have a big house, but just pray for basic shelter.

Should we pray for a fancy, high end car? No, just pray that you’ll have transportation to get you from point A to point B.

Should we pray for expensive clothing? No, just for enough to be covered....

Should we pray for caviar and filet mignon? No, just for daily bread.

To pray for wealth and luxury is not good. It’s excessive grabbing (like old Charles Darwin with a beetle in his mouth). Jesus Christ Himself warns us that wealth is dangerous. As the Lord said in the Sermon on the Mount, “It is harder for a rich man to enter heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.” As the British writer C. S. Lewis said, “Maybe it *is* possible for a camel to get through through the eye of a needle, but it would be very rough on the camel.” (Pastor, William Willimon, Abingdon Press, 2002,p. 297)

Our Lord loves us and doesn’t want things to be unnecessarily rough for us---so why pray for wealth & luxury that puts our souls in danger?

I’m not saying it’s sinful to be wealthy. It’s not. But it is wrong to make wealth your priority in life. Our priority as Christians should not at all be wealth, but being good servants of God. And it is wrong to pray to be wealthy. And if we have wealth, then we should use it for God’s glory, not to pamper ourselves or to feed our egos.

This is obvious from what St. Paul wrote in I Timothy 6: 9-10, where he says clearly that it is very dangerous to desire riches----“Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs.”

God is a good Father. And He wants only good for us. So it's silly and wrong to ask Him to make us rich, being that He says it is spiritually dangerous.

So don't pray for wealth and luxury. Do as Christ said to do---pray for your daily bread. And when He gives it to us, we should be thankful and content. Quoting again from that same epistle by St. Paul, but a few verses earlier---I Timothy 6:6-8—“There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these shall we be content.”

Thank God that He answers our prayer and gives daily bread. Let us thank Him every day and be content with His gift to us.

In closing, one more thing..... Many Church Fathers say there is another meaning, actually a deeper meaning to this part of the Lord's Prayer. They say “daily bread” means more than just physical food and other physical needs being met by God.

They say the deeper and more important meaning is that “daily bread” refers to the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ Himself. And many say that it gets more specific—Christ's giving of Himself, the Bread of Life, in the Holy Eucharist, Holy Communion.

So when we pray for daily bread, we're not just praying for God to meet our physical needs. We are also praying that God will continue to feed us with Christ Himself, the Bread of Life, in particular with His Holy Body in the Eucharist.

Is physical food important? Of course, very much so. But the Bread of Life, the Lord, is even more important. Christ used such terminology about Himself in John 6:51---“I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.”

May Christ always feed us with Himself so that indeed we may live forever!

