



St Marylebone
Parish Church

11 am Choral Eucharist 6th Sunday after Trinity

‘Our **Father**’. We’re so used to those words that their power and radical nature can escape us. Jesus invites us to call the Lord of the universe, the one who sits upon the eternal throne: Abba, daddy, father.

That is enough, I should probably sit down and we could spend all week unpacking and reflecting upon that enormous truth. But, I’m afraid to say I will trot on.

Our Father. As Christians we never pray on our own. We never do anything on our own. We are always knit together in the one Body of Christ by Baptism. When we pray, like when we come to the Eucharist, we always do so with and for and on behalf of Christians everywhere, and in the company of the Saints. **True** prayer can’t be selfish, because for one person to grow closer to God is for all humanity and the whole cosmos to be drawn closer.

‘Who art in heaven’. We are reminded that God is God, this Father of ours is still the Eternal and Almighty One.

And then we pray that His Name may be held holy. That our words and actions and lives would show the world God’s holiness. We pray that through us all people will come to adore the name of God. Names have great power in the Old and New Testaments. They are not simply labels, but the presence of the one whose name it is. ‘Hallowed by thy name’ – *may all people come to fall down in worship before You.*

‘Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’. You only need to open your eyes, let alone a newspaper to realise that the world is not as it was meant to be. In fact you don’t even need to open your eyes or leave this church. Just look into yourself, and let’s be honest imperfection and shortcoming abound...

May your heavenly perfection come soon. Lord Jesus, come soon and bring in your kingdom where pain and death and sadness (great and small) will be no more. When all things shall be as they are destined to be.

‘Give us this day our daily bread’ is a simple petition for our daily needs – food, an income, clothing, water. But it is also in a wonderful ambiguity in the Greek original text a request not just for daily bread, but also super-substantial, (*epi ousia*) super-natural bread. *Give us the bread of heaven, Father, by which we continue our pilgrimage through life, Eucharist by Eucharist. Give us our daily needs, food and water and the grace we find here, which is just as essential for true, full life.*

We continue with Jesus: 'Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who trespass against us.' A key teaching that Jesus unpacks in St Matthew's telling. Re-emphasising that we cannot ask or expect God's forgiveness if we do not do likewise. To pray this prayer every day (morning, noon and night is a good pattern) is a truly transformative thing. A wise priest once told me that if there is someone you are really struggling to love, or struggling to forgive, or just struggling not to strangle with your bare hands(!) every day pray the whole of the Lord's Prayer for that person. Picture him or her in your mind's eye and for their good, for them, pray the Our Father. Do it every day, perhaps for weeks or months or years. It can bring immense healing.

'Lead us not into temptation' has been made even more famous recently by Pope Francis quite rightly reasserting that God does not tempt us. We are asking Him to help keep us safe from temptation. St Paul says I know what it is that I should and shouldn't do, and then I go and do the thing I shouldn't (Rom 7.15). We've all danced to that tune I suspect. I certainly have. But be careful, our faith is not about shackles, but freedom. Not the *fake*-freedom of sin, but *real* freedom: the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom 8.21). *Holy Spirit, help us to know the difference.* 'Lead us not into temptation' – *free us from all that is not true life.*

'But deliver us from evil'. Is very similar, in a way. *Free us from all that is not of you, Father.* Because what you want is always and only our best. By definition, anything apart from your will for us, will only be worse for us.

And then follows the doxology that isn't in the New Testament, it comes from the Didache or another first century Liturgical text of the Church. It is a truly fitting reminder that even if we spent every moment of every day here on earth praising God, not a moment would be wasted, not a moment unwarranted: 'For thine (yours Father, Son and Spirit) is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, forever, and ever. Amen.' Yes, it is so.

And this final doxology sentence teaches us a great truth at the heart of all prayer. True prayer, real prayer is not talking to God, it isn't even **listening** to God (although they are both important ways of praying), it is simply to be one in God – his heart and ours, God's being and ours. True prayer is to begin now, amidst distractions and imperfections aplenty, what we will do perfectly and eternally on the other side of death. Simply being in God.

True prayer is beginning that perfect union now. It is both very simple and very hard – but I won't launch into another sermon now, you'll be pleased to know. There is so much more to say, and I and Fr Stephen will be delighted to talk about prayer with you. But for now, we had better get on and pray.