

Our Father

By R. H. J. Steuart, S.J.
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NOTE.

The conferences contained in this book were reported in shorthand by Marjorie Muir, an old friend of Fr Steuart's, during a weekend retreat at the Cenacle Convent, Grayshott, in December 1943. Mrs. Muir is also responsible for the suggestion that they should be made available to a wider circle of readers, and this is now possible through the kindness of the Dominican Fathers who, having brought them out in *The Life of the Spirit*, have consented to publish them in book form.

Since Fr Steuart gave his retreat on the "Our Father" on more than one occasion, I have been able to collate some records of my own with those which Mrs. Muir placed at my disposal. Beyond this, it has only been necessary, in preparing them for publication, to eliminate repetition, and some few passages which in print might appear obscure.

KATHARINE KENDALL.

PREFACE.

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.

The substance of this retreat on the "Our Father" was given by Fr Steuart several times during the war period, and it was partly due to the difficulties of publishers in those days and partly due to Fr Steuart's increasing age that the conferences have not hitherto been published. Those who were fortunate enough to hear them often urged him to bring them out in book form and he was prepared to do so had he found the opportunity. As editor of *The Life of the Spirit*, the writer was approached by some of those who had made the retreat to urge Fr Steuart to publish the conferences in the review; but Fr Steuart declined on the grounds that he had no time to revise his notes and prepare them for the press. It was only after his death that it became possible to publish the conferences, as taken down by Mrs. Muir and collated with other listeners' notes, in serial form in *The Life of the Spirit*. It is from that series that the present book is compiled, as the editor was encouraged by the reception given to them in the review. He was assured of the accuracy of the reproduction of Fr Steuart's word, but this was scarcely necessary for the style and the doctrine of these pages are characteristic of the author.

Fr Steuart had a rare gift of putting sound, essential teaching in a manner that was witty and lively, so that it became easily intelligible to all his hearers. His written works show that he had studied his theology deeply, but they always avoid technicalities or the unreal approach of those theologians who derive all their knowledge from the study of books. Fr Steuart had the advantage of Scots wit, which he trained not only by serious study but also by a profound life of prayer and by an ever-increasing experience of others' needs. It was this awareness of the reality of Christ's life in the concrete as found here and now in the members of the Mystical Body that gave his words so much

power and enabled each one of his hearers to find in them help and encouragement. His approach was always positive and objective; he was not concerned with sin and evil but rather with God and the gift of grace, which draws the sinner from the fetters of his wilfulness and leads him to live the divine life in Christ.

There are some who consider that approach to be too optimistic and so to lead to a laxity, which covers the ingrained habits of pride and selfishness with a disguise of piety or mysticism. They argue that the Christian must first become alive to the evil of his ways before he dare think of the love and goodness of God. Such was not Fr Steuart's view. For him the love of God was the light which revealed the evil in oneself at the same time as it gave the strength and the desire to overcome the obstacles in the way of love. Fr Steuart offered a beacon to lighten the path of those who really intended to approach God closely in prayer. Directing Christians in the life of prayer may be said to have been his specialty, and he gained such success and renown in this work precisely because of his positive instruction and encouragement based on confidence in the divine gift of grace by which a man may be raised eventually to the heights of prayer.

It is fortunate therefore that his conferences on the central Christian prayer, the "Our Father", were preserved so that posterity may continue to be assisted by their simple and direct teaching on the meaning of our Lord's words in the prayer that he set upon our lips. May it help many readers as it helped so much, those who were lucky enough to hear him.

OUR FATHER.

In the Our Father, we have not merely a plan for addressing God, a formula of prayer, but a command: 'Thus shall you pray'. Prayer is the expression of our attitude towards God. Our Lord says, 'This is the way you've got to ask God for things — this is the way you've got to think of God and address him; the way I wish you to approach him.'

Take the Lord's Prayer in that sense. 'What is God to you?' says our Lord; and he begins 'Father'.

Saint Thomas says that we are entitled to take as intended for us every meaning of our Lord's words and actions which they will legitimately bear. Therefore, we must take God as an ideal father. 'I am your Father; I want you to think of me as your Father; and not merely to think of me but to know that I am your Father.' Look at a little child and his father; he receives all he has and is from his parents, but quite soon goes on independently of them. But that is not the way between me and God. At no instant of my existence am I independent of God. My existence is the result of God's will that I should exist. I could not be thinking about it if God wasn't thinking of me at this very moment. I'm never out of his sight, will, thought. I am utterly dependent on him for every single thing I can give a name to in myself. God goes on giving all the time. He does not cast out gifts as you throw grain to chickens, for some to get a lot and some to get none. Although his gifts pass into my hands, they never leave his hands. Any good thing we can say of creatures we can say in an infinite degree of God.

As a child thinks there is no one more beautiful than his mother or more magnificent than his father, so that is the way we have got to think about God. Who feeds the birds of the air, paints the flowers, gives them their lovely form? God your Father! And if God clothes the fields like this and cares for the little sparrow, what about you? God is my Father to whom, with complete, utter, and absolute confidence I turn, because I know that he has nothing but my happiness in his heart. Like a child, I

shed tears because I have not got what I want, and even stamp my foot, but I know this is only a passing thing. I am going to rely on God, never mind what anybody says. ‘They say.’ — Who say? Let them say!

The concept of a father, parent, one from whom we receive things, is multiplied infinitely in God. So I want to be thanking God for everything, as if it were happening at this very instant: my very being — not long ago, but now, he is keeping me in existence. I should have an attitude of thankfulness — inexhaustible — for everything. What have we that we have not received — are not receiving? So the first idea of the Lord’s Prayer is the thought of God giving and giving and going on giving.

We call it the ‘Our Father’, and it seems to bring it closer to us than the title, ‘The Lord’s Prayer’, although that is good, as it reminds us that God has given it to us. But it is ‘Our Father’ which should create the atmosphere of the immeasurable closeness of God to us. Think what you owe to God: your very existence he is giving you at every moment.

Many people go through life thinking of God as a benevolent being, like a Constitutional Sovereign. No, that is completely off the line. I am as much to God as if I were his only creature. The dependence of the creature on the Creator has no parallel in this life, and you can never understand a thing unless you have something to compare it with. Nothing in this world is dependent as we are dependent on God. Some people are terrified by that and say they feel suffocated! But Saint John said, ‘God is love’.

So I must not think of God as an ‘All’ producing these little creatures and going on producing them, but as One who is love. All his acts are love; and it is out of his love for me that he designed me and goes on creating me.

God is simple. In Him, everything is one in some mysterious way we cannot understand, and therefore everything is involved in that love of his for me. You may say that is reading a lot into God’s title of Father. Our Lord invites us to think of God as Father, in whom we have our being. We have a word for it — Creator: Creation does not mean forming something out of something else, but out of the will of God, and the will of God is the love of God. I am, and everything else is or does because at this instant God wills it to be so. And when I say ‘why?’ the answer is love. Fatherhood implies love; it is the utterance of love, the starting point, the aim of love.

Love has a host of different degrees. It is an expression of will: ‘I wish this, I prefer that, I love this more than the other’. All these different words we use are degrees of love, meaning that love is the expression of the will.

I only exist from instant to instant because from instant to instant, (though there is no time with God) God loves me. Since the Incarnation, there is specially a bond of love tending towards identification. ‘With an everlasting love I have loved you.’

‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.’ But fear must not be taken to mean fear in the craven sense. We are inclined to think we must be afraid of offending God — that God sees our faults and weaknesses more than our good, and that therefore our attitude must be one of always asking forgiveness. But what is the attitude of a really good father and mother? Are they always looking out for faults? ‘What is he up to now?’ No: they think of the good things in their child, take pleasure in him. So God takes pleasure in us. I am an object of delight to God, and he looks on me with a smile, as it were. I know I am dirty, that I have torn my clothes, and my hands are grubby,

but God does not look out for that. 'My delight is to be with the children of men.' That is what gives me the sort of liberty with God that the saints had.

We know there are bad parents who are always metaphorically slapping their children, who are always correcting them and so on, but we all know too how children can be injured by that sort of nagging. The really good parent does not nag, but gives the most loving explanation of what the child does. The reaction is that they obey their parents more. I am happy in the knowledge that God judges me so lovingly.

'Perfect love castes out fear'; and therefore, God, representing himself as a father, says: 'Don't be afraid of me but trust me to the very limit'. Our Lord says: 'Think of him, talk to him as a father; I who am one with the Father tell you that is the right attitude.'

I am giving something to God that he would not have without me. I am giving him his Fatherhood of me. I can say, 'You are my Father, therefore I am your child'. I don't like those prayer books that ask us to look upon ourselves as grains of dust or worms! I cannot at the same time call myself a beloved child of God and a worm. I want to imbue myself with the conviction that God is my loving Father.

People setting out on the spiritual life think what it is going to involve: a long frightening vista of mortification, self-denial, humility, charity. What a labour in the saints! What marvellous perseverance and courage and faith and hope had to be brought into play every instant of their lives; and I am discouraged and say 'It can't be!' One has heard of people saying they wished they did not believe in God because it was a torment to think how perfect they ought to be, and how frightfully difficult it was.

And so, looking forward to growth in holiness, getting closer to God, I always have the idea that the growth is on my part, that I have got to labour for it, and that God is there but I have got to shorten the distance between us. Well, if (instead) I get this idea of God eagerly getting to me, if I think of Christ's idea of the Father, I know that God is labouring to get to me; and why he has to labour is because it is I who make the obstacles.

'If only you'd "be still" and let me come to you!' one can imagine God saying.

No one ever suggested that the Christian life was an easy one — that sanctity was easy to attain. The 'Our Father' shows us the closeness and immeasurable love between us and God — God who loves us as a Father loves his children; who will not let us go; up to the limit of our free wills drawing us. There we have the establishment between God and ourselves of an intimacy such as is feebly paralleled by the relationship between a child and its parents.

Anyhow, our Lord says 'Father', and without any further comment leaves it to us.

WHO ART IN HEAVEN.

'Who art in Heaven.' This is a puzzling expression. Where is Heaven, and how can God be fixed in Heaven or any-where at all? In old days, people really did think that there was a hard-and-fast place in the universe above us. They thought that the sky was a solid dome, a firmament, and that there was water above and below, and that the water poised above the dome of the sky was allowed to descend. They used the expressions of their day. It is the natural instinct in man to look up to God as if he were poised actually, physically above us.

When we talk of Heaven, the Church does not mean us to believe that God is enthroned in one particular place above. God is everywhere in a sense that cannot be described in terms of our experience. Some writer has said that the existence of God is like a circle: the centre is everywhere, the circumference nowhere. Or take Christ in the Host: he is in it all, in each part; even if it is broken, you don't break Christ. He is not 'in' things in the sense that we are in them — 'in' the chapel, for instance.

God is everywhere, but men cannot be everywhere. Our being is a totally different being from God's being. We cannot imagine that state of being; we are not furnished with anything that enables us to understand it. Therefore, the words 'in Heaven' refer to our relation with God. They imply that he is above; not locally, in measurement, but above us in his nature. Heaven is a state of existence where we shall see God, as he is, where we shall be when 'the dawn breaks and the shadows flee away'.

So we think of God as above us, one who has to be looked up to: 'the raising of the mind and heart to God'. What is this raising up?

The Church teaches as of faith that God made this race of man with a double nature so that we can be raised up to know and see him, without, as it were, arguing from the senses. Our first parents had that, but they lost it. Man could never be simply pure human being again. He's had it and lost it and there's a defect in him.

God having once raised the human race to that state when man could see and commune with him, there was left a yearning towards him. We should all find, looking back, periods when we were utterly emptied; an almost physical void, which was our un fallen nature striving to get back to God. Can we then see God directly? Not of our own effort, no; when man lost the high level he lost that which went with it. But it is deep within us now that we are restored to the supernatural life. The faculty was there but it could not be used, it was like an engine without water in the boiler. And then, when through Christ the supernatural level was restored, it began to work again. In saints, contemplatives, the faculty of our first parents began to recover itself. Contemplation is really part of our equipment, so that anyone who achieves sanctity, a heroic level of life, must have this faculty of contemplation.

My point is, however humble and commonplace I may be, there is within me a yearning restlessness — a faculty for this contemplation. God, who has made me for himself, and endowed me, as head of created things, with free will, is trying to raise me up to it with every means short of compelling that free-will. This faculty of entering into direct contact with God is buried within me, not extinct. There is within us, even if we don't know it, an urge towards God.

Supposing I am beginning to be dimly aware of that? What is my reaction? Prayer, the 'lifting up'. The inevitable result is to move me on. In life one finds interests, preoccupations, engrossments — but not for long. We find it all temporary, we can hold on to nothing. Our intellect tells us that, and it is part of my urge to prayer. So when our Lord said, 'Our Father who art in heaven', it was an indication that we should raise ourselves above all that. The whole content of Christ's teaching is directed to that one object, to teach us how to pray: to bring us into direct relationship with God.

That is what the Apostles meant when they said, 'Teach us to pray'. So people who look at prayer as one of the details of the spiritual life are missing the whole point. Rather, spiritual life is one of the details of prayer. That immense apparatus of truth, spiritual aid, the Church, exists in order to put us

into contact with God, to bring us to reality. We have to become sick of appearances and want reality, truth.

Children are so direct with God. They have an unspoiled uncorrupted way of speaking to God. Our Lord was, for that reason, so furious at the thought of someone cutting that short, checking it, corrupting or bringing sin into the life of a child. ‘It would be far better for him that a millstone were hung about his neck.’ Why? — Because children are so direct with God. Theirs is a sure, unperverted thrust towards the real, which they accept quite naturally. Shades of the prison house begin to close in on the child, new interests, new ways of looking at things, instead of this beautiful unconscious urge towards God. Here were these children going straight to God and somebody has turned them aside.

So we want to speak to God in quite a simple way, and we must let that grow; it must be nourished. The first infantile expression won’t suit us as we develop. Either we must improve upon that or it will die away, and there will be no chance of growth ever. That is why religious education is so necessary. We want to know more about God; there is no knowledge worth anything in comparison with him. However much you want to know other things, by comparison with him they are worthless. Didn’t our Lord say we have got to be as little children, and that God seemed to hide himself from learned people? But all he meant, I think, was a method of approach. The children’s knowledge added to the natural turning towards God has got to be developed according to our human nature, and that brings us to the other form of prayer we call meditation, which is the spiritual method of advancing in my knowledge of God by the use of my intellect.

His goodness — that he loves me — that I ought to, can, love him — what he demands of me: these are things which I must think out for myself. I need this knowledge of God but I don’t know that I need it.

The action of evil spirits is to get us to be satisfied with other things. If we are, you come across withered, unsanctified lives, waiting for — what?

Prayer is the satisfaction of the most urgent instinct we have even though we don’t know it. ‘You have made us for Yourself and our hearts are restless till they rest in You.’ I suppose the saints used to wonder how it is that anyone could not realise it.

Prayer is not a luxury. Prayer is not a pious practice. Prayer is not just one of the tools on our bench, so to speak. It is the expression of a right relationship with God. And the fact that very few are conscious of it is our fault. There is in our power this tremendous force of prayer.

The Holy Spirit prays within us. The Patron of prayer is the Holy Spirit. You can’t say that prayer is out of your reach, not your line of country, because you’ve got the Holy Ghost within you.

Therefore, when our Lord said, ‘Our Father who art in Heaven’, it was that we should raise our minds to him, upwards from the material world in which we are immersed.

HALLOWED BE THY NAME —

THY KINGDOM COME —

THY WILL BE DONE.

Hallowed be thy name. Hallowed — a Saxon word meaning ‘Blessed, honourable, held holy’. May Your name then be blessed: may it be held holy: may it be adored. Our prayer should not be all

prayer of petition, all self-regarding; we should have some prayer of adoration, prayer just about God. The book of the Apocalypse gives us a description of this kind of prayer where it says, 'And there was silence in heaven for about the space of half-an-hour'. Is there enough of this prayer in my life? This is the one thing necessary.

'Be still and know that I am God.'

God commands Mary because she had chosen the better part — silent adoration at her Master's feet, with her mind full of him. We must realise that the prayer which brings us closest to God is that in which we forget, for the time being, all except God. I should season my prayer every now and again with this, the best form of prayer, just silent adoration; hallowing his holy name, his holiness.

'Adoro te devote, latens deitas.' ('I adore You devoutly, O hidden God.' 'Godhead here in hiding, Whom I do adore.')

We know God most when we know it least. I want God not for something that I want, but for something that he wants, that is, for himself. I want to aim at so adoring him; to ask nothing for self, but just to know that I am adoring him. God is supremely adorable; God is supremely to be admired, appreciated.

It is so simple to say, 'Hallowed be thy name'. Repeat it often. Thus therefore shall you pray — thus think of God; just simple adoration. Try it. Think, then stop for a moment. Hold yourself in adoration before God. Say:

'I know that God is my God', and then stay adoring him. So I pray that God's will should be done; and his will is that his name should be hallowed.

'Thy kingdom come' — that the law of God should be triumphant.

I am to pray for this? — But it is here already, whether I pray for it or not. God is the autocrat, the absolute monarch, our King. God is in every sense absolute, so absolute that we have no words with which to express it.

'Thy will be done' — it is done; and yet I am to ask that it may be done. 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.' Nothing in the 'Our Father' so accentuates God's attitude towards us, and ours to him. We pray that he may be recognised as King by us and by all men; we pray that his kingdom may be established, that he should triumph, that he should reign.

Our Lord wants me in this petition to state my desire for the extension of his kingdom; thus, I pray that God will make me more and more his real subject. It means that I want God's will to be done more and more; I want this over and above everything else, no matter what it costs. To live the Christian scheme of life the attitude needed demands heroism. We must keep the ideal before us and work steadily to it; the ideal is that God may reign in your heart. 'Not everyone that says unto me "Lord, Lord", shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is fit for the kingdom of heaven.'

'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' What is his will? There is no sign, no indication. When I say I want God's will to be done, I mean I want to know for myself what God's will is for me. Silence! Utter silence! And yet, I have to ask for the grace always to do God's will. What is his will?

Is there anything in Christ's life that will enlighten us?

When God became man, what sort of man did he become? Had we been asked beforehand what sort of man he would be, we should have made some magnificent sort of concoction. But God does the infinitely perfect thing: and what did he do? He became an ordinary average man. There is nothing in the Gospels to say that the Holy Family were very poor. I think the whole point is lost if we try to represent Nazareth in that way. Jesus could not be everything. He belonged to one particular class, an artisan. God became man and remained so for fully thirty years, making no sort of mark or trace on human history. He was God upon earth, living as a man, really man but really God, for thirty years, and no one did anything about it, nothing happened. True God of true God, for thirty years! At the end of thirty years, God the Father spoke from heaven at the baptism by John the Baptist and said, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased'.

What was he pleased with? What had God the Son done to satisfy God in this life of his, which was just like every-body else's life? Well, what did our Lord say? 'My meat — that by which I live — is to do the will of him who sent me.' And again, 'I do always the things that please him'. It means that nothing in itself is of any value, but all the value of anything and everything is that degree of our will to do his will that it contains. My accomplishments may be distinguished or not; it doesn't matter, if only I mean to do God's will.

Christ has shown us that he did the ordinary things of life and did them in that light. There was not a thing that Christ did that did not collate with God's will, and he was truly man as he was truly God, and therefore it was a real man who was doing it. He was our model.

So here we are, in the Lord's Prayer, instructed, advised, induced by Christ to aim at and ask from God one thing, namely, devotion to his will, even now in this life, as perfect as it will be in heaven. How am I going to do that? It is so easy to talk! Is there a catch somewhere? It seems to me that that is the real significance of 'Thy will be done' — that God should give us grace to want to do his will. If an angel asked you if you wanted God's will to be done, you would say, 'Of course I do!' But do you want it as an artist wants success in his art? Is it a sort of passion with you? That is what our Lord puts before us, to put it above all things. How are we going to arrive at that?

Supposing you want something — say a watch; you have plenty of money and you ask how much it is, but you find it is twice as much as you intended to pay. You don't want it all that much. You go to a certain length in pursuit of some object, but no further because you don't want it as much as that. Now, what we pray is that God will give us such a desire to do his will that we will submit to anything for it. 'As it is in heaven.' We ought to ask of God as the first thing, before all things, that he will give us grace, that he will inspire us to want what he wants just because he wants it and for no other reason. The difficulty is that we have all sorts of wants and desires, all good ones, maybe, none of them opposed to God. 'Holy' comes from the same root as 'whole-ly'. A holy person is a complete person, and that is what a saint is, one who is 'wholly' given to God. Not that everybody is bound to reach heroic sanctity; but everyone is equipped to be a saint. There is all the apparatus ready.

Behind will is love. Will is the extent of love. I want to go for a walk because I love going for a walk; I want to read or play because I love it. Therefore, this adherence of my will to God's will is simply another way of putting my love of God. I shall never bring myself to an overmastering desire that God's will should be done by meditating about his omnipotence, power, authority; I can't attain it that way. Will is a function of love, as sight is to the eyes, and therefore we must begin by

loving God. Our Lord gives us as the first and greatest commandment: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, mind, soul and strength’ — with the whole of yourself. That is why you are made as you are made, with all the faculties you have. The end of them all is that you may love God.

So Saint Paul on charity — ‘caritas’ — love of God. ‘Though I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And if I should have prophecy, and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profits me nothing.’ I’m making a noise, a blare, a jangle, but that is all, just like someone banging a tin can about. There we are brought up standing with the downright declaration of Saint Paul, that no matter what you do, nothing is any use to God unless it is the expression of our love of him. We have got to face that fact; there is no getting away from it. So far from being exceptional, it is the first step which is going to give any meaning, value, significance to what we do.

Only through love of God are we going to reach that desire which will overwhelm us, to the exclusion of every-thing else, that God’s will shall be done. It is within, the reach of us all. If it were not, God would not be just to us.

How is it possible for us to love God before all things? How can I honestly say I am going to? I say, ‘I love God’, but do I mean it? Perhaps it does not mean ‘love’ in the ordinary sense of the word, but just putting his interests first, and not an emotional love, giving out from the heart? Is there any escape that way? No, because when our Lord said, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart’, et cetera, he added, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’. So it is the same love, and therefore all of us are created for it, and therefore it must be possible for us.

But how am I going to say I love God as well as I love my friends? It is not a fair question, because I mustn’t bring God down to earth and compare him with creatures.

What is quite certain is that the more I love God the more I love everything else. God is not another person competing for my love. We’ve all got to love God, and I will add that we all can love God, and we all do love God — more than we know.

We all can. In baptism, the three theological virtues are infused into our souls: Faith, Hope, Charity. So because I am baptised I am able, at will, to make an act of love of God which in God’s eyes is really an act of love, even though to me it is accompanied by no emotional reaction.

Saint Paul said, whatever you do, however noble, is nothing, nothing, nothing, and less than nothing, if the love of God does not lie in you. And he meant the absolute necessity of the love of God.

But then I want to know the love of God — not merely as speculative fact. I don’t believe I shall be able to live a Christian life, to keep that going, merely on the intellectual assurance that I love God. But if I keep on making acts of love — a habit of it — doesn’t it seem reasonably likely that I shall grow to a real sensible love of God?

People pick up things by constant repetition; so shall we. ‘I love you.’ It begins to react and I begin to feel it is more than a few words and I recognise it as a thing essentially my own. I think that we all love God vastly more than we dare to give ourselves credit for. Are you going to tell me that we submit to the discipline of our religion, that we give ourselves endless labour to do things we don’t

like — are you going to tell me that you do that simply because of the fear of hell? I think it would be an impossibility. Then why do you do it? If I have the love of God, the desire that his will shall be done, then all things flow from it. It must be a sort of passion.

We have the experience of the saints — the furnace of the love of God. If only I will have faith and trust and persevere in acts of love, it must turn back to myself, flow back into my soul as a warmth, reflecting God's love into my own consciousness, filling the whole of me, giving me a closer union, a sort of identification with the One loved. This act of the love of God is in the hands of everybody. It is not a sort of museum piece as so many people think. It is in the hands of every little child. If we want to give all we can give, he will make it possible for us to do so.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD.

Don't let us make any mistake: we are ordered to make this prayer of petition. Go to God as to your absolute All — your father, brother, creator. I must turn to him as the lover of souls — as one who loves me beyond the dreams of imagination; who has only one care for me, that the best may be mine; who longs for me. 'As the hart pants' (I am not afraid to put that the other way round) so does God long for me. People complain 'I can't meditate, I can't pray'. That is often another way of saying 'I'm not interested enough'. Is it possible that I have not got enough interest in it? Am I sure that I really want it enough?

I have always maintained that it is a mistake to divide prayer up too sharply into ordinary and extraordinary. Prayer is a continuous thing like a tree — branches, leaves, flowers, fruit; quite different in its different states but all one thing; from the 'Hail Mary' to the tremendous heights of which the great saints have been able to show us just a glimpse. The prayer of the mystic is hidden because it belongs to God's plane of existence, and the words we use about it are like mathematics in ordinary words: it is like using 'double basic English'.

God has planted in our hearts a desire for him as he really is and in this life, we shall never attain to that. We ought to be content to know that heaven is at last attaining to that which we have been striving after all our lives through, and prayer is the utterance of that growth upwards. I don't know if I am going too far if I draw the resemblance to trees like this. Just as there are some trees of red wood, that grow to the height of 300 feet, higher than the tower of Westminster Cathedral, others attain their full growth at 20 feet, and they are perfect trees. The redwood tree is not more a tree, nor the others less. So, looking back, we find persons who have risen to perfect heights, and others who have attained nothing like that and yet who have used all the powers in them.

'Thus therefore shall ye pray.' The main thing in this clause is to ask; God wants us to ask him for everything. Daily bread means all the things I want, big and little, material and spiritual. Every time I make a prayer of petition, it is an act of adoration of God; it is an act of faith that he is answering it even though this does not appear to be so. 'Give us this day our daily bread.' The implication is that by saying that to God, I make an act of faith that all my daily bread, everything I need, all come from God; not as if God were a department handing things out, but because each of us is to him as if there were no other.

So the first meaning of that clause is that you are to look upon everything as coming from God. Life will go on according to fixed lines, but I must try to see that everything is handed to me by the very hand of God himself. So when I pray the prayer of petition, I am implicitly making an act of faith that everything, whatever it is, comes from God. And another act of faith, more difficult perhaps, that everything that comes from him is good. He could not give us anything that was not good.

Many people find it difficult to believe that everything that comes from him is good — they even seem able to prove that it is not good!

Our Lord said in ordinary language, ‘Ask and ye shall receive; knock and it shall be opened to you’. You often find you ask for things and don’t receive them and say, ‘I could be quite prepared for “No” if I asked for frivolous things, but many of the things I have asked for appeared to be very good, and still “No” was the answer. Perhaps I could bear up if it were only myself that was concerned, but so often I pray for others, make intercession, and they don’t get it, so far as one sees’. When I ask for a material object, I am exercising faith in God, hope and trust, because I believe that he can and I believe that he will, which means that I believe there is a bond of love between us. Every time I pray for an object, I exercise those three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. What more do you want? You may say, ‘Yes, but I want a little on account! I have prayed for these things.’ What things? ‘This, that and the other.’ But I ask you — life is too serious to be encumbered with these frivolities. I have prayed for more money, good weather, and so on, but add them all together and what did they add up to?

There is only one thing necessary. There was Martha in and out of the kitchen; all very good; Martha getting that dinner ready. Eventually she asked what Mary was doing beside our Lord, and Martha said, ‘Look what I have to do, and there is Mary, my own sister who usually helps me, letting me get on with it’. But He said, ‘Martha, you are busy about many things; Mary has chosen the better part’. The better part: adoration of Christ, love of Christ, love of God. So I think the greater part of our petitions we shall find were trivialities and we should perhaps have thought less of God had he granted them. Things that seemed so urgent to us at the time.

We are taken out of our depth when we are involved in something which demands knowledge of God. Our hesitation and doubt and unhappiness about unanswered prayer is due to our trying to express something in terms of every-day things which is really something known to God alone. ‘My just man lives by faith.’ ‘Without faith it is impossible to serve God.’ You cannot live up to what he demands of you except purely upon faith.

So often, the things we think are good are not good, or not good at that particular time, or someone else has stronger claims to them. Our Lord said, ‘Give us this day our daily bread’, after he had said, ‘Thy will be done’. Therefore in all prayer, certainly in the prayer of petition, that is the keystone of it, that ultimately my prayer in essence should be, ‘Thy will be done’. Very often, I don’t think of that at all. I want it, or someone else wants it. I should try to accustom myself to ask myself whether my petition, whatever form it takes, really is ‘Thy will be done as it is in heaven’. Whatever else there may be to make my prayer an exceptionally good one, it may be that it does not square with that fundamental ‘Thy will be done’.

Then again, perhaps we have not enough faith. If you had as much as a pinhead of real faith, God would be in your hands, so to speak: you could move mountains.

One of our Lord’s statements was: ‘Whatever you ask for in my name shall be granted’. The Church takes up this word of our Lord and ends all her liturgical prayers with ‘per Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum’ ‘through our Lord Jesus Christ’. When our Lord says ‘in my name’, he means us to understand ‘in my context’, that is, ‘live your lives as I lived mine’. Just in the proportion that you are Christ-like, so shall you receive, for then your prayer is real, and you have a claim on God.

Is your life like Christ’s? — In other words, does your life run on Christ’s principles? Take Christ’s example in the agony in the garden. Remember, he made a petition, he asked for a thing. Now, he

could not ask for anything except what was best: there was nothing selfish or narrow in his request. ‘Father, let this chalice pass from me; nevertheless, not my will, but yours.’ Well, his request was not granted, so I am in good company. ‘Thy will be done.’ It does not make it easy. Sometimes it makes it more difficult. All that matters is that in my heart of hearts I want God’s will, and God’s will only, to be done.

I know a lot of people will say, ‘I am still worried’. I know you are, because you are trying to explain in terms of earthly experience something that belongs to the divine region. Every time I make a petition to God, every time I turn to God, on that very account, whether my prayer has been granted or not, what has really been granted is that on account of that prayer I am nearer to God, dearer to God, and holier, because I have done that thing that was laid down.

Christianity is a heroic religion. It is not a religion of the world; it is purely supernatural, and therefore we shall be called on as routine to do things that involve heroism to a certain extent. We ought to be much happier on the subject of granted or not granted prayer of petition, as that is not the real gist of the matter. Petition that I want God’s will to be done more and more is the real gist of the matter. Our asking is a token that that is what we feel.

‘Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?’... ‘Bid me come to You upon the waters.’ Our Lord says, ‘Come!’ We must learn the tremendous degree of faith he wants of us, for we have not yet that complete faith which sticks at nothing at all.

God binds himself, he pledges himself to us by his own divine word, that he won’t let us starve for grace. He will give us all that is necessary; for the spiritual life is, like the natural life, a growth. We don’t get fruit from the root, but from the grown branches. Saints are not ready-made. Turn to God, our Lord tells us; turn to him for everything that is necessary for your spiritual life, for your natural life. You cannot ask too much. Recall M. Dupont’s query to a petitioner who was making long phrases to God in her prayer. ‘Do you want to be cured? Then say, “Cure me!” God is your father, so be more child-like in your approach to him.’ If you don’t ask, you won’t receive. If what you ask is good for you, if it is right for you to have it, then God will give it when you ask him; you will get it. He is a loving father. But if I ask for things that seem best to me and I do not get them, then I have just to say, ‘I am mistaken; God sees it is not good for me’. God sees and knows: trust him.

So it is not very long, I think, before anybody, to whom God is a reality, uses prayer of petition; we are told to.

Even the highest contemplatives and mystics used it, though their form might be different from other people’s. True, my prayer will tend to become less and less self-regarding and more and more something for God. ‘My delight is to be with the children of men.’ God made us for himself. I am only truly fulfilling the object of my creation when I am trying to achieve, even in this life, some degree of that complete surrender to God of which the next life will consist.

FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES.

‘By this shall all men know you are my disciples, if you have love, one for another.’ Such was our Lord’s last exhortation to his disciples. He insists on mutual charity, love; because when we put that into practice it brings all the rest in its train. Charity is patient, kind, charity envies not; it calls for forgiveness of trespasses, offences, debts. ‘Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us’ gives the ‘Our Father’ a touch of meaning quite different from our ordinary language. To what do I commit myself when I say this? I acknowledge that I am a sinner: ‘All we

like sheep have gone astray'; like silly sheep. The gates are open, but do we go through them? No! We are stupid, silly sheep gone astray, just following our own way. In God's eyes, we are all like sheep, more stupid than fierce; we are silly, selfish, naughty. The Lord is, however, my Shepherd, so I shall not want; I am always needing forgiveness, and I am getting it, but in the proportion in which I forgive others. How can I ask God to be kind and good to me, not to hold things against me, if I am not this to others?

'If you have love, one for another.' This was our Lord's bidding, which was to be the distinguishing mark of his followers. If one does not follow it, or at least try to, one has no title beyond the mere mechanical one to call oneself the follower of Christ, and we know that without Christ we cannot be saved, let alone sanctified; he himself called it the New Commandment, namely, that we love our neighbour as ourself. Christ might have said 'by this shall all men know you are my disciples, if you are bold, intrepid, ready to attack error, living at a high level of prayer', and the rest of it; but he didn't. He said 'if ye have love, one for another'. Christ gave a new authority, a new conception, to the law of charity. We judge the world of his day by that which was most representative of it, the Roman civilization; outside that men were lumped together as barbarians and they did not count. Saint Paul uses strong language on the unnamable vices of the Romans, and he accuses them of being without affection, without mirth, without loyalty. Roman society was utterly devoid of the idea of human charity: because of the way they regarded human relationships, universal charity was quite impossible in their scheme. So this charity is a purely Christian thing — a new thing. When Christianity is neglected men become less kind, less forgiving to each other.

Well, then, every time I acknowledge I am a sinner before God I say, 'Forgive me, I am an offender, I have piled up a debt, I can only rely on your great mercy and ask you to forgive me, but I don't expect any more mercy from you than I have for other people in their sins against me.' Is not that almost a blasphemous thing to say when I think of this person and that and the other I dislike? I have said unkind things about them, or they are nothing to me, as zero; and then I wipe my lips and trudge off and say, 'Father, forgive me my trespasses as I forgive them'. I think one of the reasons why our prayers are not answered is that unless our prayers are in accord with the Lord's Prayer they are not heard. Well, if I say 'Forgive us our trespasses', I have torpedoed it unless I am trying to forgive others.

Our Lord preached the Sermon on the Mount. If only that sermon could be broadcast all day — published in every weekly; instead of which we call it the Sermon on the Mount and leave it there. Well, among other things he talked about prayer and worship generally, and he said, 'You people, when you go to offer your sacrifice, if you remember there is somebody you hate, despise, are contemptuous of, at enmity with, don't offer that sacrifice — I shall forget you are there. Cast out from your heart all those feelings. Cast out hatred, contempt, dislike, hardness to everybody.' That is what our Lord said, and he was not talking to a lot of monks, nuns, or dons, but to the ordinary people. 'Don't pray if there is anything against charity in your heart, because your prayer will not be heard, your petitions will not be granted, your worship will not be accepted.' We are not machines, but human beings with feelings, so it is not always possible to change the feelings, but at least we can will the good. The effort to try to maintain a high degree of charity to everybody is very pleasing to God.

Again, our Lord was describing the Judgment. He pictured it as a great Assize, and he said to the blessed, 'You are welcome in heaven because you were kind to people, charitable to people'. For when they said, 'When did we do it to you?' he said, 'When you did it to anybody you did it to me'.

Then there is his picture of heaven and the lost. The Curé d'Ars used to work himself almost into a state of unconsciousness in horror at the thought of being cursed by God; by God, who is infinite love, who loves me. 'Depart from me, ye cursed' — our Lord used those words. Why? What had they done? It was what they had not done. 'I was hungry and you did not give me to eat; I was naked and you did not give me an old cast-off piece of clothing. If you had heard my word you would have known where to look for me, in my brethren.' Notice the distinction: people were rewarded for doing good works — damned for not doing positive kind things. Our Lord did not accuse them of being positively cruel, or of harshness, but of not doing positively kind things. Could anything be more emphatic? There is no getting round it; those are the words of one who was able to say: 'I and the Father are one' — 'Who sees me, sees the Father'.

Charity — the effort to maintain a high standard of kindness in thought, word and deed. Towards whom? Towards everybody; that is the crux. How can I have love for everybody? How can I love the enemies of my country? Does Christ impose such an impossible burden? Yes, that is the ideal — of loving our enemies who oppose us, do harm to us, take violent action against us. We must maintain this ideal; and we must be sorry that sometimes it cannot be literally carried out. If you are emptying a Tommy-gun into someone in a just war, you don't say 'You don't know how I love you!' Is the law of love, then, under certain circumstances, suspended? No; for while I must do everything I can to defeat my enemy, I can pray for him. Whatever course of action we have to take against our enemies, however we have to oppose, defeat, even punish them, there always remains at least this, that we should pray for their good.

Saint Paul says, 'He that loves his brother fulfills the law'. Our Lord didn't come to give us a doctrine that would make us all nice and happy materially; but he said, 'Seek first the Kingdom of God and his justice and all these things shall be added unto you' — all these things will fall into place. Yes, but the condition is, 'If you will follow me', and we haven't followed him, and we are not following him.

Wherever there is love there is God. The expression of love is the most important thing among us; wherever there is kindness, a giving of ourselves, an affectionate service, there is love, and wherever there is love in us, there is God in us and we are showing God. It's my belief that no one can be in hell who, at the moment of his death, whatsoever sort of creature he had been, had in his heart love for somebody, because there is no love outside God.

The name of the devil is 'he in whom there is no love'. To be incapable of love — awful! That is why the devils hate God. They swoop down on us when we don't love one another, for then we are their disciples. There is no love outside God. It may even be a distorted love, but so far as it is genuine love it is a divine thing, and that was not recognized until Christ came to reveal it. It was only a disciple of Christ, looking through Christ's eyes, who was able to say, 'God is love'.

Practice of other virtues gives us a great deal of trouble; it is very difficult to be humble; so with all the other virtues. But the genuine effort to be charitable has a peculiar attraction and sweetness of its own. Why? Because you are behaving in God's manner. The practice of charity gives us a clear vision, a sort of understanding of divine things.

Nothing facilitates prayer and puts it on the right lines and gives one strength to pursue it all the way, like the deliberate cultivation in our lives of universal charity; the effort to be charitable, to see something lovable in every-body — which there is. We are portrait painters, and we often see other people as we paint them, not as they are. The effort to love people is its own reward.

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION —

BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL.

The next clause in the ‘Our Father’ that presents itself is ‘Lead us not into temptation’. The beginning of the ‘Our Father’ is a prayer, not so much that his will might be done directly as that we may really and truly wish it to be done. I ask to be enlightened, that my will may be strengthened, that I may always want to do ‘Your will’; I want it as perfectly as I know I shall want it in heaven.

From ‘Give us this day our daily bread’ onwards, we pray for protection from sin, from the danger of falling away from God. We are so liable to be drawn away by the fascination of trivialities. I ought to want even to deprive myself of perfectly innocent pleasures in this world if thereby God’s will be better done. And I want, too, to be protected from falling into sin. Why is it that we ask, ‘Forgive us our trespasses’? Why is it that we make that petition? Because we are aware that since sin came into the world it has spread itself all over the world. As God saw the world, he saw that it was good; it is an utterance of himself, and any man not seeing this is absolutely inexcusable. The world was good and was meant to be good, but through that thing which you would think was impossible, sin, the goodness of the world has been perverted, distorted; just as a razor or knife may be perfect, and may yet on account of its keenness be misused, so all the beauties, marvels of the world may be lethal weapons if misused. Sin is, in a way, the misuse of what is good.

Saint John says: ‘If any man thinks he is without sin the same deceives himself and the truth is not in him’. The sense of sin is one of the greatest forces of sanctification. Why are we sceptical about saints who said they were sinners when they had attained a heroic degree of sanctity? Was it a pose, a mistake, that made them say: ‘If only the world knew what I am really it would stamp me in the mud’? The saints knew that even the highest human perfection is tainted with sin, just because we are in a world filled with sin.

What is sin? Sin is idolatry — the substitution as the object of my will of something which is not God. ‘Why did you do that?’ — Because it appealed to me. ‘Did you know that doing it meant thrusting the will of God aside — at least for the time being?’ That is the main difference between mortal sin and venial sin. In mortal sin, I deliberately turn aside from God altogether, for the sake of the gratification of the thing I want to do. In venial sin it is not so much that I substitute something for God as that I want it with him. The average man will say: ‘I will not do anything that will make me lose God, but I do want a lot of things besides God so long as I don’t lose him’. But the saint says: ‘I don’t want anything at all besides God’. ‘What have I in heaven and besides You what do I desire upon earth?’ Every time I sin, to the extent to which it was a deliberate sin, the whole world is the worse for it; moreover, it is a matter which has been proved over and over again, that constant giving way to sin produces a general deterioration in one’s will towards God. That is why reasonably frequent confession is such a healthy thing, because it is a sort of divine check on that deterioration.

Our Lord’s dealing with the Syro-Phoenician woman teaches us that we are to go to him with our petitions, as a child to a father. Ask what you like, but always ask with submission to God’s Will. Let it be a childlike appeal to a Father: ‘Don’t let me do things that displease and hurt you — don’t let me get into bad ways — don’t let me be led into temptation’. The time comes in the life of a sinner when self-indulgence is so great that he cannot stop; ‘Don’t let me get like that, Father’.

This last part of the ‘Our Father’ ought to come very close home to us. We are prone to choose sin; we are prone to choose evil; silly, nasty things even, instead of God. But I don’t want to do anything

which is evil before God. I am sorry for all those things that have been done; that even in a small detail I have preferred something to God: ‘Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall’ (1 Corinth 10:12). And I pray (as he wants me to pray) that God in his mercy will not allow too great a strain to come upon my will, and that he will protect me from evil and the Evil One. ‘Ne permittas me separari a te’ (‘Never permit me to be separated from You’).

So I implore God not to put too great a strain on me: not to let me get into too difficult a situation. I know that God is merciful and loving; he won’t let the situation be too much for me. That is why I say: ‘Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil’, or, as some translations have it, ‘from the Evil One’.

However modern we are, it won’t do to forget there is an Evil One. It is not as if two gods, a good and an evil, were contesting for me. No, the devil is a creature as I am, but one entirely perverted to evil, and moreover with powers of expressing himself and various activities in comparison with which ours are like the physical strength of a baby as against a boxer. What chance has a man got against a tiger?

Yet I don’t want you to think of the devil as a gigantic monster prowling round, but as a personal force directed to my harm and nothing else. On the other hand, don’t let us attribute omnipotence to the devil. The devil cannot read our minds; but still he is an extremely dangerous adversary, more dangerous than our own concupiscence. A subtle, entirely spiritual enemy, almost, it seems to us, unlimited in power, a force directed to my destruction. Well, now, is not that ‘deliver us from evil’ absolutely necessary? What can I do about it? O God, protect me from this army directed against me. From this thing that ‘walks in darkness, and the horror of the night and the arrow that flies by day’. And the answer? ‘He has given his angels charge over you lest you dash your foot against a stone.’

PRAYER OF PETITION AND AFTER.

Isn’t it pleasing to God that my prayer should be just simply ‘Thy Will be done’? But our Lord did not only tell us to treat God like a father who will change his mind; he emphasized it by the story of a woman who asked for bread and was refused, and went on asking, and at last, because she went on asking, she got it. Of course, God does not change his mind; but there is something in us that corresponds to that. Every time you pray to God for something, you are equivalently asking him to change his mind.

Ask yourselves, would it really be pleasing to a father or mother if their children never asked them for anything? They want to be asked! Otherwise, it would seem their children were lacking in affection for them. I expect it is the perpetual burden of mothers’ and fathers’ lives to be asked again and again. Well! God, your Father, wants to be asked.

It is implied in the name ‘Father’ that we ought to go on asking. ‘Be instant in prayer.’ The prayer of petition is not the only kind of vocal prayer. The Church encourages a great deal of praise and adoration, as for example in the “Gloria in Excelsis” (‘Glory to God in the Highest’).

We shall never make any spiritual advance, or grow in harmony with God, except in proportion as we get to know God. Our Lord told us it was for that purpose we were given our minds. The human mind, which deals with universals and abstractions, is used on all sorts of objects; but first and foremost, it is to be used on God, and it is common sense that we must know more about God if we are to have closer dealings with him. How am I going to know more about God? I have got to work

for it and apply my mind to it. It sounds rather grim, but actually, you can't help doing it. That perfectly wonderful instrument, the mind, is to be used first of all in getting to know God. We have got the duty of using our minds to get to know him.

Now, thinking, comparing, hearing, reading, applying our intellects — that is meditation. Meditation, strictly speaking, is not prayer at all, it is simply thinking, even though we are thinking about God. I must introduce the will into it or I might go on speculating forever without getting any nearer to God. Saint James said, 'The devils believe and tremble'; they get no good out of believing, they advance no nearer to God. Merely working out is nothing without the heart. So we come across that prayer we call Mental Prayer. Mental Prayer is praying with the mind with the help of the will. It means thinking about God in order that I may know more about God and find the means of getting closer and closer to him.

This prayer has almost as many forms as people who practise it. It will bear much analysis, and it is the application of the intellect to something whence information about God may be drawn: the Gospel particularly. The Gospel is the life of our life. It is upon that that the whole of our faith is built. It is the inexhaustible source. But it is not there to pick up like a piece of paper; you have got to masticate it and digest it. And that is done with your mind. 'Why did he say that? To what sort of persons? For what reason? In what kind of circumstances?' Every word our Lord said was as if he had his eyes on me and nobody else. I invoke the Holy Ghost! I turn my will on; I want to know what he is saying there. I want to know what God means me to get from it. I make acts: 'Give me grace; give me light, to know what you mean, what you want of me.' That will be the skeleton of my prayer, and it has to have flesh. Memory and imagination can influence my sensitive will.

Eventually I come to a point when I don't want any more intellectual knowledge about God. My own capacity, though it might be only a thimbleful — my capacity is full. I feel no further urge to know any more about God, but I do feel, now, an urge to know God. I don't want to have any more information about him: I want him. It is like the desire of the moth for the flame. So that often when I try to think about God, I cannot. This does not necessarily refer to someone who is very far advanced; that would be the devil's temptation to make us think it is out of our reach. He puts us off attempting things that are well within our power. Be bold! If you dare nothing, you'll do nothing. You don't need to be a great saint to want this something immeasurably bigger. There is a darkness over everything. I cannot get any nearer to God. All I have is a great desire to get nearer. My sensitive will does not work; so that I feel as if I did not even want God. My imagination will not figure God to me; my mind won't make anything out of the strange figures it produces. I feel I have lost all taste for God, but what really happens is that I have lost all taste for the substitute for God. Then follow the advice of God given to the Psalmist: 'Be still and know that I am your God.' No imagination is necessary, no activity.

It is quite simple; what happens really is this: I have lost my ability to get hold of pictures with my imagination; I have lost the appetite for what used to satisfy me. Somehow or other God gives me grace to recognize my powerlessness, and it is in that stillness that God begins to communicate himself. If I have used my faculties to the extent I can, I will be silent. It is as if God said: 'You can never get any further, but there will be movement on my part if there is stillness on yours.' What happens then? Darkness. All my life I could think about God, imagine God, move towards God, and now I can do nothing; yet my desire is greater than ever. He is giving himself to me, only I do not know it. What way is God giving himself to me? In his own way. That is double-Dutch to me, and until I become restless under it I am in abject darkness, because my faculties are useless now; they

have got to the limit of their powers, and what is happening in my soul is God's method of approach to me; and I do not know anything about God's method any more than a dog knows about the integral calculus.

I have to wait to learn it, and the interval is darkness — like some person brought to the front door of a house; inside it is pitch darkness and he is told to go in, and to go on in the darkness, knowing nothing. Then God gives me a slight release, and I am able to make a little act, of praise, an ejaculation. But mostly it is a thoughtless, wordless, almost aimless waiting. This does not mean I am never to make vocal prayers or meditation, say the Office, the Rosary, read a spiritual book. No, it is only in pure prayer that I have got to be silent, wait for God. I have to be really submissive, in a condition when all faith, hope, and charity seem to be blotted out. But people tell us there is a tiny something left. Something that will not let us go, that is effected within us so that when at the end of our prayer we go about our business, instead of looking back on that half-hour as awfulness, we look back at it with a kind of nostalgia as if something remarkable had happened. What it is we don't know, because we are not sufficiently harmonized with God to know his way of acting. But we have been drawn a little millimetre nearer. No parent would ever increase or allow suffering in a child longer than needful. So neither does God.

There will always in this life be something which my own human nature will find difficult, costly, but that Prayer of Quiet is God's first beginning — God letting us have him and not merely knowledge about him. And then, Saint John of the Cross warns us, at the cost of I don't know what, we may go further. But so few people pay the price.

In that Prayer of Quiet, there is matter for great thankfulness. For think how you are seeing things — not as you see them but as God sees them. And this is a thing we ought to look for, to expect. No ambition: that punctures it at once; I start wanting only God and He is offering Himself to me. It needs tremendous practice in self-abnegation on the part of the lower nature. But it is not as if God bargains with you: 'You do so much penance and I'll give you this union.' Not at all. It is inherent in the nature of things.

Let us concentrate on doing the utmost we can, never thinking 'that is all', but knowing that nothing less than the utmost we can do will suffice; and God will do the rest.

That is the way to our Father — or rather, our Father's way to us.

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