

## "Papa"

Homily of July 25, 2004

by Father Michael Dibble

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Today, Our Lord teaches them, His apostles. how to pray and He teaches them the Our Father. So, that is what I would like to think about today, the different phrases of the Our Father, that you have been saying and I have been saying for years. And the acronym that occurred to me about praying is "KISS." K ... I ... S ... S ... Keep It Simple, Sceptic! Because I think any of us who have reached the age of reason, when we pray (well, many of us) have this kind of vestigial sceptic inside. "Are you listening? ... Will you answer? ... In time? ... Will I get what I am asking for? ... How long will I have to wait?" Keep it simple, Sceptic. (A little doubter, sceptic inside.) That's just part of intelligence.

To do some research on this talk about the Our Father, taking the different phrases that Our Lord taught, and that you and I will say in a little while, I went to two sources. The first source was six Bible scholar books, six prestigious, Biblical scholars, Catholic, solid scholars. And the next one was a guy named "Eugene." He is a member of this parish. He is in his mid-twenties. He comes to Mass every week. And I occasionally ask him to drive me to visit my brother who is about forty-five minutes away. (I pay him a small fee to drive me there.) A couple of weeks ago, I was in the car with Eugene (I called him yesterday and said, "Can I use your name?" He said, "Not the last name. You can say "Eugene.") ... So I had a big pad and the Bible and a pen. I said "Eugene, I want to ask you the first thing that occurs to you when I say different phrases from the Our Father." He said, "OK." So, here are the Bible scholars, and then Eugene.

Our Father: Now, you and I know by now that the word that Our Lord used in Aramaic (His dialect) for Father was "Abba." And the best American translation for "Abba" is "Papa" or "Dad." The reaction of Our Lord's Jewish listeners was something like this.... "Uuh!!" We are so used to it, we forget. You see, they had such reverence for God's name that, when they wrote it, they would only write the consonants. They wouldn't write the vowels of the word "Yahweh." And here is this Jewish carpenter, telling them to call the Creator of the Universe "Papa." But that is Christ talking. "I want you to pray. Call Him 'papa.'" Full of affection and trust, like a smart, loving kid. "Papa."

Now, Eugene had already heard that. So, he knew that. Now, here is a scripture scholar: "The reason Christ introduces this particular word "Papa" is to oppose the Oriental paradigm of parental oppression and introduce the gentle ingenuousness of the new believer." Aha! Now, it is easy for me to mock these super-brains. I respect them. But sometimes, reading them, you can become a sceptic. What? Eugene said, "I think Our Lord is telling his people, 'Relax when you talk to Him. Don't be so rigid and scared and ducking... Relax!' This is Christ's method, worth

listening to.”

Who art in heaven: Now, Our Lord uses that phrase twice in this prayer. So, it is not just some illusion we kind of feed to little kids to keep them in line. Well, it's better than the opposite. It's a real wonderful state that we are all going to be ushered into, heaven. The scripture scholars: “Christ is introducing beyond the space-time dimensionality the radical existential difference” (I love that! “The radical existential difference!”) “between creator and creature.” OK, it's true, absolutely true.

Eugene said, “What Our Lord is saying is ‘God is God. I’m not. Good!’ “ That’s not bad. Keep it simple. “Simple” doesn’t mean “shallow” and it doesn’t mean “superficial.” It means sublime simplicity. “God is God. I’m not. That’s all right.”

Hallowed be Thy name: Well, we know that means His name is reverent. But it doesn't just mean don't cuss when you stub your toe against the furniture. “Hallowed be Thy name” is just simple, ordinary praise. The scholars: “The praise of God must necessarily precede the petition as a prelude to the colloquy with the Creator.”

And Eugene said, “You know what? It's a smart idea to butter Him up before you ask.” Now that sounds a little facile and maybe faintly shocking. But it's Our Lord's prayer and it's perfectly human and understandable when you are going to somebody that you respect, you say something, not flattery, but a genuine complement, a genuine truth. In Eugene's words “Butter Him up.” It's a little crude, but it is beautiful psychology and it is genuine praise. It's not just phony flattery.

Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done: Thy Kingdom come, God's kingdom, God's will be done, down here. The scholars: “Christ is adverting to the end-of-time event we know as the ‘Parousia,’ which must be insisted on as the prophecy of ontological necessity.” I'm not making this up. I wrote it down very carefully.

Eugene: “His will, ‘Thy will be done.’ “ Eugene talked about prayers he had said, a few years ago, that he is glad weren't answered the way he wanted them to be.... as you and I must remember some. And the idea that God's kingdom is God's kingdom. It'll come. It'll come when His will is done. It will take a long time.

I'm seventy years old, and I love reading history, and all through history there has been the declaration, “The kingdom will come!” You know, peace and joy, and cocktails for dinner. Politics will do it! Monarchy will do it! Communism will do it! Socialism will do it! Democracy will do it! I have a colleague who left New York and came out here to California, years ago, to a place called “Esalin,” and he sat on a rock in the nude, and he wrote me a letter and said, “If we could just shed our clothes and all the inhibitions that come with clothes we would introduce a peaceful, uninhibited kingdom.” All I could think of was goosebumps. Well, Science will do it,

new inventions! We have so many inventions now we can blow each other up in twenty seconds. Listen to Mozart! Great music! Art! Politics! Education! Educate everybody!..... No. We are old enough now to know that it goes beyond all those things. His kingdom comes by our doing His will which is taught us by Jesus. And it is going to take a long time.

Give us this day our daily bread: That seems simple enough. However, and I groaned when I read this, personally I did. "Christ is speaking not merely of human nutrition, but he is referring to the eschatology epitome in the foretaste of the messianic banquet which will come at Armageddon." It's a long time for a sandwich! Forgive my flip stuff. But the messianic banquet, of course, Our Lord meant that. This is solid theology but He also surely meant "food."

And Eugene said, "You know, when Our Lord was talking, even the poorest peasants listening to Jesus made their own bread. They didn't go to a store and buy it. And the smell of fresh sweet, newly made morning bread! What a great image He gave those people, and us! Daily bread! I know you know it means more than food. It means daily courage, daily carrying of the cross, daily praying. And incidentally, as Eugene mentioned, we mustn't, you and I, in this part of the United States, California, we must not (And I know you do not.) take for granted the food we are going to go home to.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us: That's a great contract. It's scary in a way, but it is great! "Forgiving other people" doesn't mean you want to have lunch with them. But it does mean, at some level, you will forgive, even pray for them. The scholars: "It is an ineluctable covenanted connection between the mutual forbearance with the faults of the community."

And Eugene said, "Wait a minute. That's a very smart prayer. You say to God, 'OK. I'll start forgiving people as best I can if you will do me two more favors,'" because there are two more requests coming up, which I had forgotten. But Eugene remembered.

Now, speaking of forgiving, I have told some of you a couple of times, in the five years I have been here, there was a girl in the eighth grade for whom I nourished a crush. Her name was Patsy Collins, and in 1948, before graduation, I prayed fervently, "Please God, let Patsy Collins respond to my ardor." I don't know if I said "ardor," but, you know..... She never did, but, this past week, I got an e-mail from Patsy Collins!! Now, it took a while, but, you know, it is true, and God has given me so many good things, so many, instead. OK, and finally,

Lead us not into temptation: Now, that's a bad translation. It really is. All the scholars agree "lead us not into temptation" is not what it means. It's a very bad translation. When I was fifteen, I was in the seminary and I was at Jones Beach, and a beautiful creature walked by, clad just about only in a smile. And I said "Lead me not into temptation!" That's not what it means!! It means "Don't let us fall into a terrible persecution or trial that will keep us away from God and trusting him." That's exactly what it means, not avoiding beautiful creatures clad only in

smiles.

And finally, all six Biblical scholarly books agree on this. Now, I have been a priest for forty-four years, and I have had so many people say to me, "I'm kind of ashamed of my prayer because all I ever do is ask, ask, ask. It's the only prayer I ever pray, to ask for something." All of these super-brainy scholars say, "That is the best prayer of all according to Christ." They take all the things that Jesus said. Petitionary prayer (ask) is prayer par excellence! It's the one that Christ esteems the highest. "Ask Papa!" So don't be ashamed if, like me, you are always asking.

Speaking of asking, I checked my schedule, and the next time we are together I have to talk about Christ's discussion of carrying the cross. So, a couple of weeks before, I am going to call Eugene and say, "Eugene, I got to visit my brother. Would you drive me?" (And I pay him a little stipend. He always says yes.) Then, when I get in the car, I will have the clipboard, a pad of paper, a pen, and a Bible. But, what I am scared of is that Gene may say, "Hey, wait a minute. Wait a minute!! Since you are using a lot of my material, I expect a small cut.... I resolve, in front of all of you, to give him ten percent!!