

**“ABBA”**



**THE PRAYER JESUS TAUGHT**

**DR. MICHAEL KARIMATTAM**



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## The Prayer Jesus Taught

Dr. Michael Karimattam

*“He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him. “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples” (Lk 11, 1).*

Since it is the prayer Jesus taught it is called “The Lord's Prayer”. This is the most popular prayer among Christians. Mathew and Luke have recorded this prayer. Both evangelists introduce the prayer with the preface “Pray like this”. The Lord's Prayer is a model for praying.

Though learned by heart and repeated many times a day, it can happen that one does not understand its depth or pay attention to the truth the prayer contains and the message it conveys.

This prayer, in fact, contains the sum total of Christ's teaching about faith and morality, as in a nutshell. After addressing God “Our Father”, the prayer places seven requests before Him. All these eight points are studied in detail in this book.

Regardless of cast and creed, all those who believe in God could find a model for prayer, inspiration and source of strength in the Lord's Prayer. When we call God “Abba” we become aware that none of us are orphans. We have a common Father, and as His children all are brothers/sisters to one another. The Lord's Prayer could help create such a conviction and develop universal brotherhood.

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Scripture

# **ABBA**

THE PRAYER JESUS TAUGHT

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# CONTENTS

Introduction	07
1. Prayer in the Bible	11
2. Jesus and Prayer	27
3. Context – Structure	40
4. Our Father in Heaven	47
5. Name – Hallowed – Holy	56
6. Kingdom and Will of God	71
7. Your Holy Will	121
8. Bread	162
9. Forgiveness	183
10. Temptation	204
11. Protection	211
Conclusion	221





## INTRODUCTION

*“He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples” (Luke 11, 1).*

All those who believe in God would pray because prayer is essential for the soul just as food and air are for the body. Everyone prays according to one’s faith and in accordance with the training received. It might be a request, a song of praise, a prayer of thanksgiving or asking for forgiveness. It could also be reciting prayers one has learned by heart or a spontaneous prayer, inspired at the very moment.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that people do not know how to pray or what to pray for. And sadly, this is not an uncommon phenomenon. *“Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” (Rom 8, 26).*

The deep sighs are indeed a form of prayer. When the deep sighs rise from our hearts, our minds turn empty, not knowing what to say or how to say it, just like a child who does not know what to say or how to express his desires, but who laughs when joyful and cries when hurt. This is

also prayer though it may not be adequate or complete. What to say and to whom to say – such basic questions do arise with regard to prayer.

The prayer of Jesus was an inspiration and a model to His disciples. They longed to learn to pray as Jesus did. John the Baptist had taught his disciples to pray. It was against this backdrop that Luke has recorded the prayer Jesus taught His disciples.

The prayer is popularly called “*The Lord’s Prayer*” as it was taught by Jesus Himself. All Christians recite this prayer more than any other. St. Mathew has also recorded the Lord’s Prayer. “*Pray in this manner*”. Such is the introduction used by both the Evangelists. It is a model for all other prayers. Possibly because this prayer is learned by heart and repeated many times, serious attention is not paid to the truths contained in the prayer, its message and the attitude required. People do not generally reflect on the words they recite. But if they do, they will recognize several issues.

First of all, a different version of this prayer is used during the Holy Mass. Even in the Holy Mass, this Prayer is recited differently in different Rites. What is more, the Prayer is not recorded in the same way by Luke and Mathew. Consequently, a detailed study becomes a necessity.

Jesus, who taught the Prayer and the disciples who requested Him to teach them to pray, were Jews, whom God had chosen to be His own people and to be a light to the world. They used to pray at home and in the Synagogues on Sabbath days. Personal prayer was part

and parcel of their lives. Understanding their views and attitudes towards prayer will help us to grasp the depths of the Prayer Jesus taught His disciples. Accordingly, the First Chapter dwells on the prevailing view of prayer found in the Bible. Subsequently, prayer life of Jesus and His teachings about prayer are explored.

Explanation is provided about the structure and the circumstances of the Prayer documented in both the Gospels. Importance given to prayer in each of the two Gospels is compared and similarities and differences are highlighted. The remaining eight chapters focus on the way God is addressed and the petitions made to Him. All the subjects are discussed in detail and their relevance to our own life and times are also emphasized.

We recite the Lord's Prayer many times a day without giving much thought to its meaning. It is our earnest hope and fervent desire that this book would inspire the readers and influence their prayer life.

Regardless of caste and creed, everyone who believes in God can find meaning in the Lord's Prayer. This Prayer can be a model, an inspiration and a source of strength for all. When we invoke God as "Abba, Father", we proclaim that we are brothers and sisters to one another. We are all indeed children of God and members of one great family. It is our fond hope that the reflections that follow would help promote a feeling of brotherhood and oneness among us all.

The English translation of this book was prepared by Sr. Glorista SABS. Mr. Joseph Raj, Management

Consultant based in Mumbai, has carefully gone through the translation and suggested necessary corrections. The Atma Books, Calicut, has done a great job in printing and publishing this book. I am grateful to Fr. Jinoy OFM Cap, the press manager, his coworkers and all those who helped in preparing and publishing this book in English.

# 1

## Prayer in the Bible

*“But Hannah answered, “No, my lord, I am a woman sorely troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. Do not regard your maidservant as a base woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation” (1 Sam 1, 15-16).*

Hanna, one of the wives of Elkana, has shown us a beautiful model of prayer. Peninna had children and so she always insulted Hanna for being barren. Barrenness was regarded as a curse. People at that time did not have any knowledge about resurrection or life after death. They believed that their lives would continue through their children. After death, the person would be buried in the tomb of parents. Thus, generations would rest together while their life would go on through their children. This was the prevailing belief of the day.

The cause of Hanna’s sorrow was her barrenness. Being constantly taunted with insults by her companion Peninna about her barrenness made her frustrated. The tender love and comforting words of Elkana could not console her. The annual pilgrimage to Shiloh where the Ark of the Covenant was kept brought her more sorrows and her flowing tears were signs of her inner torments. After the meal, she hastened to the Ark of the Covenant where the Tablets of the Commandments were kept, and poured out all her

sorrows before the Lord. The Ark symbolized the presence of the Lord. *“She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly” (1 Sam 1, 10).*

The Priest Eli, who was sitting at the door step, thought mistakenly that Hanna was drunk and was speaking nonsense. *“Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard; therefore, Eli took her to be a drunken woman” (1 Sam 1, 13).* As a result, Eli scolded her which only added to her sorrow. However, later on when he came to know the real situation and the reason for her sadness, he blessed her. *“Then Eli answered, “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have made to him” (1 Sam 1, 17).*

Profound lessons are contained in this prayer, the most important being the true meaning of prayer itself. *“But Hannah answered, “No, my lord, I am a woman sorely troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD” (1 Sam 1, 15).* This is real prayer, opening one’s heart to God without any reservations.

Prayer is not reciting what one has learned by heart or delivering a speech full of beautiful words. Rather, prayer is pouring out one’s heart to God, regardless of joy or sorrow, hope or despair. It can be thanking God for blessings received or crying out loud expressing one’s sorrows. By doing so, we would instantly experience peace at heart and recognize the boundless love of God. The joy one feels about being chosen by God and being protected by Him gets expressed as prayer. Offerings and promises we make to God are also regarded as prayers. All these, in fact, are different forms of prayer.

Intensity of prayers may vary from person to person. Hanna, who cried out to the Lord, made a courageous promise. *“And she vowed a vow and said, “O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy maidservant, and remember me, and not forget thy maidservant, but wilt give to thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head” (1 Sam 1, 11).* Hanna’s promise was that if she were to beget a son, she would offer him to the Lord to live and observe the vow of a Nazirite.

God answered her prayers. She gave birth to a son whom she named *“Samuel”* which means *“God heard”*. When he was three years old, she brought him to the shrine and offered him to the Lord. Hanna’s prayer was a song of thanksgiving (1 Sam 2, 1-10). Hers was another form of prayer, expressing joy for being blessed with a son. The great things God did in her life were made known to the public. Later on, the Mother of the Savior of the world would proclaim a song of praise in the house of Zachariah, echoing the sentiments of the song of Hanna (Lk 1, 46-55).

## **Various Types of Prayers**

Prayer is nothing but opening one’s heart to God. The first words recorded in the Bible, the first words of Adam, is a prayer. When God formed the woman from the rib of man and brought her to him who was until then alone, there was a spontaneous outburst of joy and delight. *“Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Gen 2, 23).* We might doubt whether we could regard this as a prayer. After all, it was God who brought her to him. However, Adam expressed his joy and

wonder before God from the bottom of his heart and so his proclamation can certainly be regarded as a prayer.

The last words in the Bible, presented as uttered by the people, are also a form of prayer. *“He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon”. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen” (Rev 22, 20-21)*. It can therefore be said that the entire Bible is filled with prayers, of different types, recited by various people in different situations. We shall discuss them briefly.

### **The People Who offer Prayers**

We have seen the prayers of Hanna and Adam. Several other people in the Bible have offered similar prayers. Cain and Abel offered sacrifices to God without using a word. However, after Cain killed his brother Abel, God confronted him with the question exposing his crime and pronounced the judgment. Cain could not take it. *“Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground; and from thy face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me” (Gen 4, 13-14)*. This lamentation to the Lord is yet another form of prayer. The prayers offered by Abraham (Gen 18, 22-23) and Isaac (Gen 25, 21) are intercessory in nature. Jacob too offered intercessory prayers for the blessings showered on his children (Gen 49,1-27).

We find many people in the Bible engaged in prayer: Moses (Ex 15, 1-16), Miriam (Ex 15, 21), Joshua (Josh 7, 6-9), David (2 Sam 1, 17-27; 7, 18-29; 12, 13, 15-22); Solomon (1 Kgs 8, 22-61) and Elijah (1 Kgs 17, 20-21; 18, 36-37, 19,4). The intercessory prayer of Amos (Am



7, 1-6), the fear of Isaiah (Is 6,5), the lamentations (Jer 4, 19-23; 8,18-9,2) and complaints of Jeremiah (Jer 20, 7-18), the song of the three youth who were thrown into the furnace (the 68 verses included in between Dan 3, 23-24) are examples of prayer. The songs of Praise of Tobit who became blind and Sarah who lost seven husbands until Tobias married her (Tob 3, 1-16; 11-15; 8, 5-17; 13, 1-15) are also forms of prayer.

After their return from exile, people of Israel were in difficulties and Ezra prayed to God seeking forgiveness for their sins (Ezra 9, 5-15; Neh 9, 6-37). Esther prayed to God for the people set apart for death (Esther 14, 1-19). Mordecai prayed (Esther 13, 8-18). Judith prayed to God for the salvation of her people. She thanked God and praised Him after they were saved (Jud 9, 1-14; 16, 2-17). All these forms of prayers are found in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament too, we find many people presented as models of prayer. The Gospel of St. Luke begins with the account of Zachariah offering incense to God and people praying outside (Lk 1, 9-10). He portrays the community as a community immersed in prayer (Lk 24, 53). The Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles and the Book of Revelation, in short, all the 27 books of the New Testament, report about people who are engaged in prayers. One is left with the impression that the entire Bible is a book of prayers. The contents of these prayers will be discussed briefly.

## **Prayers in the Bible**

Bible contains a record of many prayers. The biggest book in the Bible, the Psalms, is nothing but a collection of prayers. The content of the Psalms can be used for various

purposes. The Book of Lamentations is yet another book containing solely prayers. In addition, we find various other kinds of prayers offered by different personalities in the Bible. Keeping all this in mind, we shall analyze the nature of prayer.

## **Personal Prayer and Social/Community Prayer**

When we study the prayers in the Bible closely, we can observe two things: on the one hand people pray alone, but then, they also pray together as a community. This implies growing in personal relationship with God, both as individuals and as a community of believers. Both are important. The significant models of prayer are sacrifice, adoration and celebration of festivals. Holy Mass, Adoration and Divine Office or Liturgy of the Hours are all parts of official prayers of the Church. Persons set apart for a life of prayer cannot limit their prayers to their official duties alone.

## **Aim and Subject of Prayers**

The subject and the mode of prayer will obviously be different depending on the purpose of the prayers. When we hear the word prayer, the first thing which comes to our mind is a request of some kind. People do tend to use the word prayer as a synonym for request. But prayer includes several things other than request. The diverse nature of prayers can be seen in the Psalms. An analysis of the Psalms and other prayers in the Bible shows that prayers fall into five categories:

- a) Praise and Worship (Hymns);
- b) Thanksgiving (an attitude of Gratitude);
- c) Professing Faith (Confidence);

d) Lamentations;

e) Petitions.

These five categories can further be divided into sub-categories. We shall, however, limit our discussion to the main categories only.

**a) *Praise and Worship (Hymns)***

*“The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims His handiwork” (Ps 19,1).*

People, who grow in the awareness of the presence of God, tend to forget themselves as their hearts overflow with joy and happiness. The person who stands before the all-knowing God, who sees everything, who is the Creator and Protector of all things and the ultimate aim of our life, would praise Him with all his might and heart. “Oh God, how great You are! Your unlimited mercy envelops me! How wonderful is Your care and concern!” The human being would spontaneously express his feelings of gratitude to God.

There are many examples of songs of praise in the Bible. *“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Lk 1, 46-47).* The Magnificat of the Blessed Mother is the greatest example. Psalms such as 8,19; 33, 100; 103; 104; 117; 135 and 136 are great hymns of praise. All these Psalms praise God for His wonderful deeds in various circumstances. Book of Psalms is a collection of 150 prayers. The last five Psalms (145-150) are Psalms of praise.

**b) *Thanks giving***

Thanking God for the blessings received is an essential aspect of all prayers. Holy Mass is known as the Eucharist, which means an expression of gratitude. The term Eucharist

is derived from the Greek word, “*Eucharistein*” a verb that means to give thanks. Expressing gratitude to God is the best prayer one can offer to God.

Holy Mass serves several purposes. First and foremost, it is an expression of gratitude. It is also a lamentation, seeking forgiveness for sins. Holy Mass is again a hymn of praise to God, calling to mind the salvific events. It is also an occasion to present our petitions and to express our needs. Lastly, Holy Mass brings us blessings in the name of the Lord. Thus, several forms of prayer are contained in the Holy Mass. It is also a prayer which contains all the elements of prayer.

Everything we possess is a gift from God. Prayer of gratitude is an expression of thanksgiving for all the gratuitous gifts of God. From our birth till death, we are required to express our gratitude to God for all the blessings received. Examples of prayer of thanksgiving abound in the Bible. Psalms 30, 32, 40, 92, 107, 115, and 138 are expressions of gratitude for the blessings received individually while Psalms 65-68 are for the blessings received as a community. Here is a verse from the Psalm which conveys thanksgiving: “*The LORD has been mindful of us; he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron*” (Ps 115, 12-13).

St. Paul has time and again emphasized the importance of expressing our gratitude to God. “*Always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father*” (Eph 5, 20). “*Pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*” (1Thes 5, 17). “*Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving*” (Col 4,2).

In his letter to the Philippians, St Paul enumerates various aspects of prayer. *“Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God”* (Phil 4, 6). All of our supplications, petitions, thanksgivings and praises are different forms of prayer.

### **c) Psalm of Confidence**

*“A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want”* (Ps 23,1). Persons who appreciate the love and care of the Lord are filled with faith. The knowledge that the Lord would protect us gives assurance and courage. Professing our faith in God and the confidence it gives, is yet another form of prayer. Psalms 3, 4, 11, 16, 23, 27, 121 and 131 affirm confidence in God as individuals while Psalms 125, 128 and 129 profess confidence as a community and the courage we receive as a result.

Here more than in the prayer of petition, one expresses the confidence, as an individual as well as a community, that God will never abandon them. This may also be regarded as a way of praising God. Here are a few assertions which indicate people’s unshakeable confidence in the Lord.

*“I lie down and sleep; I wake again, for the LORD sustains me”* (Ps 3,5). *“But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its mother’s breast; like a child that is quieted is my soul”* (131, 2). Even if my parents leave me, my God will not abandon me. *“For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me up”* (Ps 27,10).

Many such prayers are contained in the epistles of St. Paul. They might not appear to be prayers, but on close examination, we can recognize elements of prayer in them.

They convey deep faith, eternal love and undying hope.

*“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2, 20). “As it is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death” (Phil 1, 20). “I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want” (Phil 4, 12). All these proclamations express his faith and confidence in God. The ideal of prayer stands out clearly even when he enumerates the sufferings he had to endure for the sake of Christ (2 Cor 4, 5-7; 11, 16-30).*

#### **d) Laments**

*“David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD”. And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die” (2 Sam 12, 13).*

David committed adultery and, on top of it, committed murder to cover up his crime. God chastised him severely and declared the punishment. David was filled with remorse. He confessed that he had sinned against the Lord. David’s repentance, confessing his sin against the Lord, is another form of prayer.

Of the 150 Psalms, 52 Psalms belong to the category of lamentations. In fact, one third of all the Psalms belong to this category. Of the 52 Psalms, 38 Psalms are laments of the individual whereas 14 Psalms are laments of the community. Psalms 6,32,38,51,102,130 and 143 are called Penitential Psalms

Lamentations generally arise from the awareness of the presence of God, His love, mercy and protection. By breaking the commandment, one moves away from God, causing hurt to the loving Lord, which leads to the feelings of repentance. Not only that. By violating God's commandments, individuals as well as the community suffer a great deal. This can also form the subject matter of lamentations.

In the presence of God, we grow acutely aware of the holiness of God on the one side and of our own sinful state on the other. Isaiah echoes these sentiments in a moving manner. *“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”* (Is 6, 5).

Most of the prayers of Jeremiah were lamentations. He had a premonition of the great disaster that was to go to befall his people. Feeling scared at the weight of the responsibility placed on him, he cried out loud to the Lord in utter desperation, acknowledging his weaknesses. *“Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth”* (Jer 1, 6). His lamentations continued as he faced dreadful situations in his own life and in the life of the People of Israel.

*“My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent; for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Disaster follows hard on disaster; the whole land is laid waste. Suddenly my tents are destroyed, my curtains in a moment”* (Jer 4, 19-20).

*“My grief is beyond healing; my heart is sick within*

me. Hark, the cry of the daughter of my people from the length and breadth of the land: “Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not in her?” “Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images, and with their foreign idols?” (Jer 8, 18-19).

“O that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!” (Jer 9, 1).

People ignored his warnings about the impending disaster. They failed to repent which brought sadness and grief to Jeremiah. His prayers turned into complaints, accusations and curses.

“O LORD, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; thou art stronger than I, and thou hast prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; every one mocks me” (Jer 20, 7).

Jeremiah’s prayer sounds like the lamentation of a girl cheated by her lover who had held out hopes of a great life. This caused him immense pain and sorrow and gave rise to the next lamentation.

“Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father; “A son is born to you,” making him very glad” (Jer 20, 14-15).

Though all this might sound like an expression of disappointment and despair, they are actually a form of prayer, which flows from one’s heart with love and faith. Jeremiah hides nothing from God. He does not take recourse to any polished words. Instead, he makes plain his sadness, fear, awareness of his sinful state and repentance, by placing them all before the Lord.



Lamentations are great models of prayers. They give us the confidence that there is someone to hear us and who is capable to solve our problems. The message contained in the lamentations is that God loved Jeremiah and his people. Rays of hope are found in these lamentations, just as in the cry of Jesus from the Cross: *“And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mk 15,34; Ps 22, 1).*

### **e) *Petitions***

The first thing the word prayer brings to mind is the issue of petitions. We present all our needs before our Creator and Saviour. They may be spiritual, material, physical, emotional, personal or social. They are submitted to the Lord for His assistance. Even in the most hopeless situations, we can approach God with faith and hope. Our petitions would rise as prayers. This might give the impression that the one who prays to the Lord appears as a beggar.

Begging is not an honourable activity because a beggar puts out his hand to receive help from others and he has an unrecognised place in the society. However, the truth we cannot ignore is that we are all beggars before God. We have nothing which has not been given to us as a gratuitous gift. Our life and all that we have and are gifts from God. This truth is highlighted by the prayers of petitions. Hence, we can ask God, without hesitation, whatever we need. He would certainly give us what we deserve and we have to be satisfied with what we receive. It is for this grace that we pray to God.

Petitions can mean seeking favours for oneself or for others. When we pray for others, it is called intercessory

prayer. Just as a merchant argues for a high price, Abraham bargained with God for Sodom and has given us a beautiful example of intercessory prayer (Gen 18, 22-23). St. Paul too provides several examples such as: *“Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness”* (Eph 6, 14).

## **Models of Prayers**

Besides these five types of prayers, there are other forms of prayers as well. Just as praising God is a prayer, blessing someone in the name of God is also a prayer.

*“The LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron and his sons, thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The LORD bless you and keep you: The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. “So, shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them”* (Num 6, 22-27).

These words were addressed to the priests who were directed to bless the people. This will be an intercessory prayer. All forms of blessings are intercessory prayers offered to God. Promises and vows, like blessings, can also be regarded as prayers. There are numerous examples of such prayers.

*“And she vowed a vow and said, “O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy maidservant, and remember me, and not forget thy maidservant, but wilt give to thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head”* (1 Sam 1, 11). This prayer of Hanna is an example of a vow. The last chapter of Leviticus explains various types of offerings, objects, persons and activities.

Teachings about God and His Will are all prayers of some kind. There is a category of Psalms called Wisdom Psalms. There are 12 such Psalms. The first Psalm, belonging to this category, which presents two ways of life and asks the devotee to choose the one he wants, is a clear example. Psalm 119, the longest Psalm, is also a Wisdom Psalm, presented as exhortation, describing the value and purpose the Law.

Psalm 15, which belongs to the category of Wisdom as well as Liturgical Psalm, presented as a dialogue, is another example: *“O LORD, who shall sojourn in thy tent? Who shall dwell on thy holy hill? He who walks blamelessly, and does what is right, and speaks truth from his heart; who does not slander with his tongue, and does no evil to his friend, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbour; in whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honours those who fear the LORD; who swears to his own hurt and does not change; who does not put out his money at interest, and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved”* (Ps 15, 1-5). Psalms 78,105,135, and 136 that narrate the obstacles people of Israel faced and the blessings and protection they received from God are known as Historical Psalms. Praising God for the blessings received is also viewed as a form of prayer.

## **Summary**

What we have so far found from the search through the Bible about prayer can be summed up as follows. Prayer is opening one’s heart before God and a sincere conversation with Him. All the thoughts and feelings, desires and hopes, fears and frustrations, pains and sorrows one pours out before God without any restraints or restriction. Prayer rises

from the deep conviction that I am standing before God who is my source and my goal, my Father and my Mother, my Brother and my Friend, who protects and guides me, providing everything I need, never leaving me alone.

There are Prayers of the individual that each one makes for himself. There are also community prayers where people come together and pray. Interceding before God for others as well as blessing and wishing well in God's name are also prayers.

Praising and thanking God by proclaiming His love and compassion, His power and protection one has personally experienced, is another form of prayer. Lamentations that confess one's sins, the anxieties and miseries one experiences as well as the expressions of conviction and confidence that God will not abandon are also prayers. The decisions and promises, offerings and vows before God are different forms of prayer.

Thus, various subjects form the contents of prayer. The most important element is becoming aware of God's unlimited love and mercy. The emotions welling up in one's heart because of this awareness become prayer as well. Like a baby sitting in the lap of its mother, one opens one's heart to God. The prayer may consist of simple words, or deep sighs or pure lamentations. At times, without any of these expressions, forgetting oneself and just being in His presence can also be a prayer. Faith and attitude are more important than the words one uses.

## 2

### Jesus and Prayer

*“And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed” (Mk 1, 35).*

Life of Jesus was, from the beginning to the end, a ceaseless prayer. The Gospels portray Jesus as someone deeply engaged in constant prayer during His public ministry. Before analysing the Lord’s Prayer, it might be helpful to look at the model of prayer that Jesus has presented to us. Three things are discussed here: *a) Jesus who prays b) The prayer of Jesus, and c) The teaching of Jesus about prayer.*

#### **a) Jesus who prays**

All the four Gospels present a picture of Jesus as someone who maintained a deep relationship with the Father through prayer. The Gospel of Luke in particular, portrays Jesus as being engaged in constant prayer. Jesus is shown praying fervently to the Father all through His public life. The Gospels also emphasize that Jesus prayed all night before making crucial decisions.

The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove when He received Baptism from John the Baptist. It was the anointing of Jesus for the public ministry. However, it is not Baptism which brought the Holy Spirit to Jesus; it was the occasion for the event, as recorded by St. Luke. It

has to be noted that only Luke speaks about Jesus' prayer in this context.

*“Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, “Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased” (Lk 3, 21-22).*

Jesus, after having received the Holy Spirit, went into the desert to fast and to pray for forty days. It was a lone, long battle with the power of evil who kept man as a slave of sin. Satan was like the guard of a palace whom a more powerful enemy defeated. Jesus had defeated the power of evil (Lk 11, 21-22). Talking about the Holy Spirit, both in the beginning and at the end of the battle, the evangelist presents the Holy Spirit as the source of inspiration and guiding power. *“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit” (Lk 4,1). “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and a report concerning him went out through all the surrounding country” (Lk 4, 14).*

Choice of the twelve Apostles was an important event in the life of Jesus. When the Jewish leadership rejected Him and decided to murder Him (Mk 3, 6) Jesus chose the twelve Apostles, in line with the twelve tribes of Israel. This was a turning point in the history of salvation; in place of the Old Israel, a New Israel, or the Church. Before choosing the twelve Apostles, Jesus had spent the entire night in prayer. *“In these days he went out to the mountain to pray; and all night he continued in prayer to God” (Lk 6, 12).*

Peter's profession of faith, and the subsequent passion prediction marked was a turning point in the public life of Jesus. Here also Jesus is preparing himself through prayer: "*Now it happened that as he was praying alone the disciples were with him; and he asked them, "Who do the people say that I am?" (Lk 9, 16).*" The confession of Peter and the prediction of Jesus were confirmed by the Father through a voice that resounded from heaven. In this context also, Jesus was praying: "*Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying ... a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" (Lk 9,28-35)*"

According to the Synoptic Gospels, before the beginning of the Passion Jesus prayed in agony to know the Will of God so as to surrender Himself fully to that Will. "*And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, "Abba, Father; all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt." (Mk 14,35-36; see also Mt 26, 36-46; Lk 23, 39-46).*" Even when He was hanging on the Cross Jesus prayed (Mt27, 46; Mk 15 34; Lk 24, 34.46; Jn19, 28-30). His Death itself was a prayer. Thus, the whole life of Jesus is a model of prayer, a model that teaches us to keep intimate relationship with the Father by the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

## **b) Prayer of Jesus**

Various forms of prayer can be seen in the prayer of Jesus: Hymns that are sung when one's heart is filled with joy, lamentation when in sorrow, petitions when needs are

communicated, profession of faith when feeling confident, feeling safe about being in the hands of the Father and an attitude of surrender when submitting to the will of the Father. All these forms of prayer are found in the life of Jesus as reported by the evangelists.

When His disciples returned joyful after carrying out their evangelization mission successfully, Jesus was happy. *“In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him”. Then turning to the disciples, he said privately, “Blessed are the eyes which see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear” (Lk 10, 21- 24; Mt 13, 16-17).*

The emotions Jesus felt when confronted with the opposition and rejection from the part of the Jewish leadership were different. He felt sad when they rejected His last call for conversion. With deep pain in the heart, He lamented over Jerusalem that was a symbol of Jewish leadership. *“And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave*



*one stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation” (Lk 19, 41-44).*

These words of Jesus may sound like a curse against Jewish leadership because He prefaces His comment with the phrase “Woe to you”. They are in fact not curses but lamentations rising from a heart broken with pain. *“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in... “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘If any one swears by the temple, it is nothing; but if any one swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath” (Mt 23, 13-16).*

Jesus’ sadness on foreseeing the disaster that would befall the people because of the unfaithfulness and selfishness of the Jewish leadership, turned into a lamentation. “*Ouai*” is a Greek word and is translated as “Woe to you”. It is not a curse but a lamentation arising out of deep pain. The Hebrew word “*Hoi*” has the same meaning. Rendering it as “Alas” would be more appropriate to capture the original meaning of the word.

The longest prayer of Jesus can be found in the Gospel of John. In fact, the prayer of Jesus fills up the entire Chapter 17. This prayer is positioned at the end of the long exhortation of Jesus after celebrating the “Last Supper” with the disciples. The prayer serves as a summary of the Gospel. After the exhortation, Jesus looked up to heaven and prayed.

*“When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee” (Jn 17, 1).* Jesus

first prayed for himself (Jn 17, 1-5), then for the disciples (Jn 17, 6-19) and then for all those who would, on hearing the words of the Apostles, believe in Him, (Jn 17, 20-26). Through Jesus all would know the love of the Father. Unity among the disciples would become a witness to Jesus in the world. They would be saved from the temptations of the world. In this way the entire world would come to know God and they would be saved. This is the priestly prayer through which Jesus placed His petitions before the Father.

According to the Gospels, Jesus placed His petitions before the Father so as to discern the will of the Father and to submit to it totally. Jesus prayed so fervently that He sweated blood. *“Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done”* (Lk 22, 42).

Jesus’ prayer is a model of intercessory prayer. Though found innocent, He was still condemned to die on the Cross. He also suffered insults while hanging on the Cross. But Jesus prayed for all those who had wronged Him. *“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do”* (Lk 23, 34). The entire prayer in John 17 is an intercessory prayer

Jesus’ prayer while hanging on the Cross is shown as a lamentation by Mathew and Mark. Jesus was praying quoting, as it were, the words of Psalm 22. *“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”* (Mt 27,46; Mk 27, 34).

Jesus offered Himself as a holocaust to the Father for the sins of the world. He took upon himself the sin of the world and offered himself as the scape goat, suffering severe pain and anguish even as He harboured hope in

God. This lament from the cross is an expression of that pain and hope.

The last words of Jesus in this world were also a prayer: *“Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this, he breathed his last” (Lk 23,46)*. Despite the severe pain, Jesus never despaired because He knew that He was fulfilling to the last detail, the mission His Father had entrusted to Him. He literally drank the bitter cup of His suffering to the last drop. The Gospel of St John presents this as a matter of great satisfaction to Jesus. *“When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, “It is finished”; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (Jn 19, 30)*. The Prayers of Jesus contains hymns of praise, lamentations and petitions and can serve as an example for all those who might desire to follow Him.

### **c) Call to Pray and Directions**

Jesus not only prayed but exhorted His disciples to pray. He told them to pray unceasingly, without succumbing to fatigue or laziness. He also taught them what prayer is not.

#### ***No hypocrisy, Do not use too many words***

The Lord’s Prayer is narrated at the centre of the Sermon on the Mount that presents Good News of the Kingdom of God in a summary form. In preparation for it, Jesus made two exhortations: a) He taught them how they should pray: *“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.*

*But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. “And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him”.* (Mt 6, 5-8). Prayer should not be done as a show-off, but an opening your heart to the Father in private. b). People should be aware that they are praying to the Father who knows everything. Therefore, there is no need to use too many words. What is required is the trust that whatever is asked, will be granted.

### ***Offer Ceaseless Prayer, without being tired***

Do not stop praying just because what you asked for is not given at once. *“Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened”* (Mt 7, 7-8). Keep on asking until you receive, keep on searching until you find and keep on knocking until the door opens.

Luke has recorded two parables which support the above teaching. One is about the neighbour who asks for bread at midnight (Lk 11, 5-8). The other is about the widow who constantly disturbed the Judge until justice was done to her (Lk 18, 1-8). The neighbour who was hesitant and unwilling to get up to give bread and the Judge who refused to execute justice, finally gave in and responded to the needs of the petitioners because the requests were disturbing them. If this were so, how much more our loving Father would respond to the petitions of His beloved children! This is the message of both the parables. Therefore, pray constantly without falling into despair.

## ***Only what is good for us would be given***

All are children of God. God would, therefore, give only what is good and what will be helpful to His children. *“Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”* (Mt 7,9-11). St. Luke writes *“The Holy Spirit”* in the place of *“good things”* (Lk 11, 12). The Holy Spirit is the greatest gift God can give us. Along with the Holy Spirit, all the gifts will flow to us automatically.

## ***Seek only the Will of God***

If we are not receiving what we continuously ask for, we have to search for the reason. If a child asks its mother for a sharp knife, would she give it to the child? Surely not, because she fears that the child might get hurt by it. In the same way, if what we are praying for is not good for us, God will not give it to us. The Father knows what is good and what is harmful to us. In spite of the fact Jesus in his agony prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground (Lk 22,44), God did not spare Him of the Passion. Attention is to be paid to the second part of the Prayer of Jesus. *“Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done”* (Lk 22, 42).

Though the cup was not removed, Father gave Him the strength to drink it to the last drop. This was revealed by the Angel who appeared from heaven (Lk 22, 43). Such a thing can happen in our lives too. God will give us the strength to fulfil His will. Therefore, it will be appropriate

to end all our prayers with the saying “*Let God’s will be done*”.

### ***Pray with Faith***

Deep faith is needed when we pray. Jesus has stated this in no uncertain terms. When the Apostles failed to exorcise the boy who was possessed, Jesus pointed their lack Faith as the reason for their failure: “He said to them, “*Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you*” (Mt 17, 20-21).

### ***Responsibility – Reconciliation***

Jesus has taught us that, if we carry any bitterness or ill will towards anyone in our hearts, we should first forgive the person before proceeding to pray. Sacrifices of those who are unwilling to get reconciled with persons against whom they hold a grudge will not be acceptable to God (Mt 5, 23-25). The teaching of Jesus leaves no room for doubt on this matter. “*And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses*” (Mk 11, 25-26).

### ***Pray with a Humble Heart***

*When we choose to call God, Father, we are not to lose sight of the fact that we are unworthy to stand before Him. Jesus has taught us this truth through the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Lk 18, 9-14).*

Whatever the Pharisee had said before the Lord might have been true. Almost in every matter, he was doing more

than what the Law demanded. Fasting was compulsory only once a year on the Day of Atonement but he fasted twice a week. With regard to 'tithes' too, it had to be paid only once, but the Pharisee paid the tithes for all the things he bought. One would naturally think that he deserves praise for all that he was doing. However, presenting himself as someone better than others and attempting to put down others, were not attitudes that God would appreciate. This was the evil side of the Pharisaic mind-set. Therefore, his attitude and his prayer were not acceptable to God.

The attitude and the prayer of the Tax Collector were just the opposite, mainly because he was well aware of his sinful state. This was the attitude of humility that is needed for prayer. His posture too revealed his mind-set. He had only one thing to ask of God, His mercy. *"But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'"* (Lk 18, 13).

*"Pray that you may not enter into temptation"* (Lk 22, 40). This is the last exhortation of Jesus to His disciples about prayer. Passion and Death on the Cross were great tests not only to Jesus but also to the Apostles. That test could turn into a severe temptation making them lose their faith in God. They could overcome the temptation through the prayer of Jesus. It was a prayer of surrender to the will of the Father. Jesus had also asked His disciples to pray as He did.

But the disciples failed to follow His instruction. They gave in to sleep instead of engaging in prayer. They could not stay awake despite Jesus' repeated requests. The result was frightening. All of them ran away leaving Jesus alone.

Peter denied knowing Jesus, not once but three times. It was the prayer of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit that brought them back to His discipleship.

## **Summary**

Jesus is the greatest role model for prayer, because He taught us when and how to pray, and that too, through His own life, activities and exhortations. Life of Jesus was a life of prayer, a prayer to seek the will of the Father to which He submitted Himself totally.

Jesus prayed ceaselessly from Baptism in the river Jordan to his death on the Cross on mount Calvary. Even in the midst of all His various activities, He moved away from the crowd to pray alone. This is how he remained in union with the Father. Besides, Jesus prayed at length at every turning point in his life, especially before making crucial decisions.

When a person is happy and filled with a spirit of gratitude, his feelings turn into hymns of praise. In Jesus' prayer we recognize lamentations expressing sadness, petitions listing the needs, intercessory prayers and loud proclamations of faith. As a little child sitting on the lap of the Father, Jesus prayed with trust and love. His prayers contained hope, sense of dependence, trust and feeling of security.

Jesus taught His disciples the need for prayer at different times and in different ways. Pray ceaselessly with the confidence that the Father would respond to the needs that we place before Him. He taught the disciples: never lose hope, wait with patience, do not harbour hatred or bitterness towards anyone, and love your enemies. There



is no need for too many words or any place for feelings of pride. Pray with a humble heart. Above all, seek to know the will of God so as to surrender to His will. We need to pray for the grace to develop this attitude. Thus, through His words, deeds and exhortations, Jesus taught the disciples to pray. We can now proceed to analyse the prayer Jesus taught us, the Lord's Prayer.

# 3

## Context – Structure

There are differences in the two versions of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, as recorded by Mathew and Luke, regarding the context as well as the content. Mathew recorded it at the beginning of His public ministry as part of the “Sermon on the Mount”, whereas in the Gospel of Luke, this prayer is placed towards the middle of the public ministry. Luke tells us Jesus taught the prayer as a response to the request of the disciples to teach them to pray; Mathew, on the other hand, documents the prayer as part of the teachings of Jesus without any preface. There are certain differences in the prayer also. Mathew’s version contains seven petitions after the initial address, while Luke’s version has only five. What can be the reasons for the differences in the two versions?

### *Gospels are not Chronicles*

Before attempting to answer the question, we have to keep in mind what the Gospels are. The life, activities and the teachings of Jesus are not arranged in any chronological order. There is great difference between the Synoptic gospels and the gospel of John both in the events and teachings and also in the order they are narrated. There are also differences in the way life and teachings of Jesus are presented in each gospel. The Synoptic Gospels as a whole present the activities of Jesus in the same chronological order; Jesus starts his ministry in Galilee, then the journey

to Jerusalem and finally the incidents in Jerusalem are narrated. This structure, generally understood as devised by Mark, is followed by Mathew and Luke. John on the other hand presents Jesus' activities during the public ministry both on Galilee and Jerusalem. Jesus travels not just once but several times between Galilee and Jerusalem.

This fact alone would show that none of the gospels is a biography of Jesus. They are Gospels, or the Good News of Salvation that is made available to humanity through Jesus Christ. However, this does not mean that they are mere fables. Because of a few differences in the way events are recorded, their historicity cannot be put into question. Each evangelist has followed his own method in relating the messages. The preface of the Gospel of Luke is a clear proof of this assertion. *"It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus"* (Lk 1, 3).

### ***The Context of the Prayer***

These considerations apply to the Lord's Prayer also. In the Gospel according to Mathew, the teachings of Jesus are presented in the form of five sermons. After each sermon the deeds of Jesus are reported.

- a) The Sermon on the Mount in Chapters Mt 5-7, report of ten miracles Mt 8-9;
- b) Missionary discourse in Chapter Mt 10 and activities in Chapters Mt 11-12;
- c) Sermon on the Kingdom of God through parables in Chapter Mt 13, 1-52 and activities in Chapter Mt 13, 53 - 17, 27;

- d) Sermon about the Church in Chapter Mt 18 and activities in Chapters Mt 19-23;
- e) Eschatological discourse in Chapters Mt 24-25 and activities in Chapters Mt 26-28.

The Lord's Prayer is set at the centre of the first Sermon, which presents the unique features of the New Covenant established by Jesus. The importance Mathew accords to Lord's Prayer is evident from his placing it at the very centre of the Sermon.

Luke follows a very different order. After the introductory section (Lk 1, 1- 4,13) the Gospel is divided into three parts:

- a) Activities in Galilee - 4,14 - 9,50
- b) Journey to Jerusalem - 9, 51 - 19,46
- c) Activities in Jerusalem - 9,47 - 24,53

Even though the second part is presented as a travel narrative, actually the instructions and directives given to the disciples is the main theme here. What should one do to inherit eternal life? This is the question raised both in the beginning (Lk 10,25) and at the end (Lk 18,18) of the travel narrative. The same question is raised again in the middle of the journey (Lk 13, 23) in order to stress the importance of the subject. The answers given provide clarification to the main message of the journey. At this juncture, Luke presents The Lord's Prayer as the central point of the teachings to the disciples. The importance and nature of prayer are enhanced by narrating the parable of the neighbour knocking at the door at midnight for bread (Lk 11,5-13), highlighting the care and concern of the Heavenly Father.

Though there are a few differences in the formulation of the Lord's Prayer in the two gospels, the very place given to the prayer in the structure of the gospels reveals the importance both evangelists give to the Lord's Prayer.

### ***In the Sermon on the Mount***

The "Sermon on the Mount", which fills three chapters of the gospel (Mt 5-7), begins with the Beatitudes (Mt 5, 1-12). Then Jesus continues to emphasize the importance of discipleship (Mt 5, 13-16), the characteristics of the New Covenant (Mt 5, 17-20), and the differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament (Mt 5, 21-48). Thereafter He speaks of the importance of giving alms (Mt 6,1-4), prayer (Mt 6, 5 -15) and fasting (Mt 6, 16-18). This is followed by setting forth the conditions and the attitudes needed to enter the Kingdom of God, through various examples (Mt 6,19-7,28).

In the Sermon on the Mount, great importance is given to prayer. Teaching about prayer is divided into two parts. The first part (Mt 6, 5-8) explains through examples how not to pray. Prayer should not be turned into a show-off. One must not use too many words as the Heavenly Father knows all that we need. We should bear in mind that we are praying to the Heavenly Father who knows everything. The Lord's Prayer is presented after these warnings, (Mt 6, 9-14). Jesus stresses the need to forgive others (Mt 6, 14-15). Here the literary device, known as antithetic parallelism, that is presenting two contradictory things in a parallel form in order to emphasize the point, is used. These verses presented as the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer serve as a warning that no one should ignore the importance given to prayer.

### ***In the travel narrative***

Luke positions Lord's Prayer at the centre of the journey to Jerusalem. The content of the prayer as well as its context in Luke are totally different from that of Mathew. Mathew makes it a part of the "Sermon on the Mount" while Luke presents it in his own way.

Jesus was praying at a certain place, and when he ended His prayer, one of his disciples said to him, "*Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples*" (Lk 11,1). Luke has portrayed Jesus as one who prays many times (Lk 3,21; 4,42; 6, 12; 9,18; 28). It was the example of Jesus which prompted His disciples to ask Him to teach them to pray. Besides, John the Baptist had taught his disciples to pray. The wish of the disciples to learn to pray in a similar manner resulted in Jesus teaching them the Lord's Prayer. This is the background Luke proposes to the Lord's Prayer.

The parable that follows the Lord's Prayer emphasizes the need to pray ceaselessly. Towards the end of the journey (Lk 18, 1-14) Jesus stressed, through a couple of examples and through the Parable of the widow and the unjust Judge, that we must pray without being discouraged (Lk 18, 1-8). Through the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector Jesus taught that we must pray with a humble heart (Lk 18, 9-14). The middle part of the Gospel of Luke is presented as a journey of Jesus with His disciples, but it is not a travelogue but an extensive presentation of His teachings about discipleship. In both the Gospels the need for prayer is emphasized strongly.

### ***The Structure of the Lord's Prayer***

Though there are some differences in the two versions of the Lord's Prayer, the structure remains the same. With

regard to addressing God, there is a slight difference. As for petitions, Mathew presents seven while Luke only five. The petitions can be divided into two categories. The first category deals with God-man relationships and the second with relationships among people, both personal and social. In both sections, the number of petitions is not the same. Luke’s Gospel has one less than Mathew’s. The table given below will facilitate a detailed study.

<i>Mathew 6, 9-13</i>	<i>Luke 11, 2-4</i>
<b>a)</b> <i>Our Father in heaven</i>	a) <i>Father</i>
<b>b)</b> <i>Hallowed be thy name</i>	b) <i>Hallowed be thy name</i>
<b>c)</b> <i>Thy kingdom come</i>	c) <i>Thy kingdom come</i>
<b>d)</b> <i>Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven</i>	d) <i>Give us each day our daily bread</i>
<b>e)</b> <i>Give us this day our daily bread</i>	e) <i>And forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us, and do not bring us into temptation</i>
<b>f)</b> <i>And forgive our debts as we have also forgiven our debtors.</i>	
<b>g)</b> <i>And do not bring us to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.</i>	

Both versions start addressing God as “*Father*” but Mathew gives two attributes to the Father, ‘*our*’ and ‘*in heaven*’, while Luke simply addresses God as ‘*Father*’.

As for petitions, Mathew mentions seven, two of which are not found in Luke, the third and the seventh. The third petition is about God's will and the seventh about protection from evil. We have to search for the reasons of this variation. Addressing God as Father and the issue of petitions require a detailed study. This will be the subject matter next.



## 4

# Our Father in Heaven

The very beginning of the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples, as recorded in the Gospels, poses a problem. In Luke God is addressed merely as “Father” while in Mathew He is addressed as “Our Father in heaven”. Which of the two versions is correct? Which one truly presents the words Jesus taught? What does ‘Heavenly Father’ mean? Where or what is heaven?

We have two versions of the Lord’s Prayer. Luke’s is shorter and avoids any repetitions. Mathew’s version reveals a Semitic style that emphasises an idea through repetition. It is difficult to decide which of the two versions was taught by Jesus. Jesus’ mother tongue was Aramaic, a Semitic language. Therefore, in the view of some Bible scholars, Jesus must have used the Semitic style of expression. We often observe repetitions in prayers. The Psalms are an example. But, some other Bible scholars argue that it is easier to understand and accept that the evangelist later added something as an explanation to what Jesus taught rather than deleting something from His message. Hence, they argue for the priority of Luke. But there is also the possibility that Luke is avoiding the Semitic usage of repetition that was not quite pleasing to his readers who were mostly Greeks. Hence clear decision for the priority of one or the other form is difficult. However, the following consideration will be helpful in this context.

Jesus taught us a simple prayer. Mathew wrote the Gospel for Jewish Christians, and therefore recorded the Lord's Prayer in a way which suited them. He added explanations to make the prayer appealing to his readers. The fact that there are no omissions but only added explanations of the words in Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer makes the claim rather credible. Both versions have the same value, and therefore it is difficult to make a clear decision as to which version is closer to what Christ had taught. To sum up, we will not be able to trace back the original form of the Lord's Prayer but we can seek its meaning.

Mathew's version contains an address and seven petition. Here we are trying to analyse the address. God is addressed as, "Our Father in heaven". The order of the words does not follow the way it is stated in Greek, the original language. "*Pater hemon ho en tois ouranois*" is what is stated in Greek. The literal translation is, "*Father our who in the heavens*". However, this is not the way we say it in English. We translate it as "Our Father who art in Heaven"

Every language strives to preserve its style while translating texts from other languages. First, we pay attention to the order of the words as stated in the original language. Both the Gospels start addressing God as, "Father", but Mathew has added two attributes. In Greek "Our" is regarded as an additional term while in Semitic languages, words conveying personal relationships are added as suffixes to the intended word and are treated as a single word. In Syriac language this difference can be noticed. "Aba = Father; un= Our, which is pronounced as "Abun". This might be the way Jesus would have taught His disciples.

Two things deserve special mention here: a) God is called “Father” b) “Our” is added as part of the name “Father”. Calling God “Father” indicates the personal relationship the devotee has with God. Here emphasis is given to Father-child relationship. Since both Mathew and more so Luke tell us that Jesus taught his disciples this prayer (Mt 5, 1-2; Lk 11,1), we can see an indication here as to who is worthy to say this prayer.

## **Father**

Jesus taught us that we should stand before God as His children, not as strangers or slaves. The truth that God is our Father is reflected in all his teachings. Father is the source of life and the foundation of our existence. Our ultimate goal is to return to the Father. He knows all our needs (Mt 6, 8). He loves us all equally, sinners and saints alike without distinction, and gives each one what the person needs (Mt 5, 43-48).

Hence, when we pray, we need the conviction and faith that God is our Father and experience the freedom and joy to address and pray to Him. I am not an orphan or someone who happened to come to this world by accident. I have a Father in heaven, God. I am a child of God. This conviction enables us to recognize the unique value of every person. If God is my Father, whom should I fear? Why should I be sad? What is there to despair of?

Jesus expressed this awareness in His prayers as He was always addressing God as, “Father”, in times of joy (Mt 11, 25) as well as of sorrow (Mt 26, 39). There was a feeling of intimacy in His invocations of God. Mark has recorded Jesus addressing God “Abba” (Mk 14, 36), in Aramaic the mother tongue of Jesus. This is an utterance

that expresses an intimate relationship, as children call their fathers as papa, daddy etc. Though the Jews addressed God as “Father” in their prayers, they could not comprehend the way Jesus conversed with the “Abba”. Through this way of addressing, people believed that Jesus was expressing his equality with God and His intimate relationship with the Father. This was what Jesus wanted to communicate to us and He has done it without giving any room for doubt, and that was the main reason the Jewish leaders wanted to kill him (Jn 5, 36-40; 8, 18-19. 42. 58; 10, 29, 33; 14, 9).

Jesus called God, Abba and He taught the disciples to call Him “Abba” though Jesus and the disciples did not have equal relationship with God the Father as can be seen from His words to Mary Magdalene: *“Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God”* (Jn 20,17). Jesus never addressed God “Our Father” because He is the Son of God, whereas His disciples are only the adopted children of God. Through His death and resurrection and by the working of Holy Spirit they have been raised to the status of the children of God (Rom 8, 14-17). It is this great gift, and the dignity of being the adopted children of God, which gives us the right to address God as “Father”.

### ***Our (Father)***

Secondly, calling God as “Our Father” is closely related to this truth. The disciples are a community of adopted children of God. They must live and pray not as isolated individuals, but as members of the community. By addressing God “Our Father” while praying, we realize that we are brothers and sisters to one another. Everyone,

therefore, deserves our love and respect. The question put to Cain by God was “*Where is your brother?*” Cain’s response to God was shockingly a counter-question, “*Am I my brother’s guard?*” The answer to these two questions we can find in the address: Our Father. Thus right from the beginning, the responsibility and dignity of the one who prays are clarified. God is our Father.

### ***The One in Heaven***

What is heaven? Where is heaven? Heaven is a singular word in English but in the original language it is used in plural form. It is “*Uranoi*” in Greek and “*Shamayim*” in Hebrew. “The Father in heaven” is in line with the original version. But where is heaven? In many languages, the word is used in the plural form. In Latin for example it is “*in coelis*”; in Italian it is “*nei celi*”. So, the question is whether there is more than one heaven.

Here one has to pay special attention to the understanding about the structure of the universe that was prevalent in ancient times and is present in the biblical narratives. In the beginning there was water everywhere. This primeval water was divided by a dome or firmament that was created for this purpose, and God called the firmament heaven (Gen 1, 8). The Hebrew word that is translated as firmament or dome is *Shamaim*. The word is here used in plural. The same word is used in the Lord’s Prayer. However, there was water above the firmament, which we now call sky, so it was thought that heaven, the dwelling place of God, was over the waters above the sky (Ps 104, 3). This is not a scientific view of the Universe but more of a poetic description.

The idea of heaven underwent a major change in the

New Testament, during the time of Jesus. Heaven existed above the earth and the sky like a ten-storied building. This is how it is portrayed in the apocalyptic book, the Book of Enoch. The book tells that God resides on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor, though His presence is felt in all the ten levels. This view seems to be shared by no less a person than St. Paul who talks about a man lifted up to the third heaven (2 Cor 12, 2). Of course, this has to be regarded as a poetic picture of heaven.

In the ancient perspective, the Universe is divided into heaven, earth and the netherworld. The netherworld is a great abyss under the earth, a dark ditch and is the dwelling place of all those who have died. Heaven above the sky is the dwelling place of God, though it is invisible to the eye.

Satan and demons were angels living in heaven with God, before they were reduced to the present status of evil spirits. This is the picture present in the book of Revelation. Heaven is where God resides and many references in the Bible make it appear to be a place above the sky. 'Lifted His eyes to heaven' (Jn 11, 41; 17, 1). 'Jesus ascended into heaven' (Lk 24, 51). 'The Apostles who saw it, waited looking into sky' (Acts 1, 11). These assertions give a firm impression that heaven exists above the sky.

This view, however, is not compatible with the notion of the Universe that we have today, which is based on credible, scientific knowledge. Thousands of milky ways and billions of stars exist in the sky. The earth is just a tiny speck in this vast Universe, where it is difficult to figure out what is "up" and what is "down". Such assumptions are devoid of any meaning. In this boundless Universe, the dwelling place of God cannot be determined. As a matter

of fact, God is beyond time and space. He is omnipotent and omnipresent. Therefore, heaven is to be regarded, not as a place, but as a state.

It may be difficult to accept that there can be a world which lies beyond our physical vision. We are not able to observe any such world with our normal equipments. The obvious conclusion is that heaven is not observable by human eyes and worldly instruments. St. Paul gives us a hint about the nature of heaven. *“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him”, God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” (1 Cor 2, 9-10).*

In the Bible, the term ‘heaven’ is often used as a synonym for ‘God’ as can be seen from the expression *“Kingdom of God”* which in the gospel according to Mathew is the *“Kingdom of Heaven”*. Because of the great respect they had for God, Jews used the circumlocution, ‘Heaven’ or ‘*The One in heaven*’ instead of “God”. Heaven is a symbol of God. It can even be said that heaven is God. ‘Heaven’ also points to the nature of God. From this we can draw certain conclusions about heaven.

a) Heaven is above and beyond all material things, as God is different from all creation and is beyond any definition. However, the feeling of closeness should not lead to any disrespect. This is made clear by the invocation ‘Father who is in heaven’. He is all holy and dwells in light that is unapproachable to humans. Man can approach Him only with fear and trembling. This is what is implied when we acclaim that God is in heaven (Ex 3, 5-6; Is 6, 5; Phil 2, 12; Heb 12, 18-24).

b) God is above all things as He has authority over all creatures. He is the Creator, Director, and Protector of all that exists. In normal parlance, 'Being above' is a sign of authority. This is implied in the phrase "*Our Father in heaven*".

c) God sees everything and controls all that exists. We are familiar with Telescope and Microscope. As we go higher we get a better, broader and deeper view of the Universe and objects. God who is in heaven sees everything, knows everything and directs their course.

d) Though transcendent, God sees everything, He is close to everybody, closer than the air we breathe. He dwells within every person and is everywhere in the Universe. St. Paul alludes to this truth while preaching at Areopagus in Athens: "*They should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring'*" (Acts 17, 27-28).

## **Summary**

Looking up to God the Father with child-like freedom and love, we need to speak to Him as a child would do to its father. God loves us as we are. He is all-knowing, because He is our Creator and Protector. He knows our needs, our temptations, our desires, our emotions and our failures. We cannot hide anything from Him.

At the same time, one should not forget that God is in heaven. He is the Creator of all things. He directs every move in the Universe. He is the most Holy and all powerful. He is the Judge of all things. Therefore, when we pray, we need to pray with love, respect, devotion and fear.



We are not alone since we are part of a community. We address God "*Our Father*" because we are His children. We are brothers and sisters to one another. This is a truth we are made aware of by the Lord's Prayer. We cannot reach out to God if we neglect those in need. When our brethren are neglected, God is also neglected. We need to lead a just life with deep concern for all if we are to enjoy peace of mind and heart. What is essential is the awareness that God is our Father, to whom we offer our prayers and whose precepts we strive to live by.

# 5

## Name – Hallowed - Holy

In the Lord's Prayer, there is a lack of clarity in the very first petition. We generally pray, "*Hallowed be thy name*" but we also pray "*Holy be thy name*". Which of the two versions is correct? Are they both same? What is the meaning of this petition? What does "thy name" mean? Does God have a name? If so, what is His name?

Jesus taught this prayer as a model for all prayers. That is why it is called "The Lord's Prayer". This is the prayer Christians recite the most. Anyone can recite this prayer as it is very beautiful and meaningful. It is, therefore, necessary to know what we are reciting.

After addressing God as "Father", Mathew lists seven petitions in his Gospel. In the Gospel of Luke, as repetitions are avoided, there are only five petitions. The first petition is the same in both the Gospels, about which two questions are raised. a) *Name* – what is meant by 'name of God'? What does it mean? b) Should we use the word '*hallowed*' or '*holy*'? We shall discuss both the issues.

### Thy Name

Does God have a name? If so, what is that name? Before addressing this question, we need to understand what name means.

## *Meaning of Name*

All things, persons and actions have names given by someone or other. Name is used to denote a person or a thing. Once a thing or a person is given a name, it stands distinguished from all other things or persons. Name expresses the uniqueness of a person or a matter, while revealing its essence. Origin, nature and purpose of the things are easily understood from the name. Questions such as, from where, what it is, and what it is for, are all answered by the name it carries.

Some examples from the Bible would help to clarify this. In the first chapter of Genesis, we come across many names because God gave a name to everything He created. Day, night, sky, earth, sea etc. are examples. Giving a name denotes ownership. God created and named them which means they all belong to Him. The nature of every creature was conceived and defined by God. In the second chapter, we read that God created man from dust and breathed his breath into him, which transformed him into a human being. The name Adam is derived from the word “Adama”, which means earth, indicating thereby the fragile and mortal nature of humanity

The coming of the Messiah had been foretold by the prophets. People waited for centuries for the birth of the Saviour to whom God gave the name Jesus. This name is a combination of two words, Yahweh and Shua, making the name Yahweh-shua. This is shortened into Jehoshua, Joshua and Jeshua. It became *Jesus* in Greek, Latin and English. This is the etymology of the name which God had assumed when he became man and Saviour.

A person would be given a new name when he is

chosen for a special mission. The name “*Abram*” means “*My father is great*”. *Abram* was changed to “*Abraham*”, which means “*The father of many peoples*” (Gen 17, 5). The name Jacob means one who pulls the leg or cheats, and appropriates what belongs to another. This was a name that very well defined his character. He was a coward who cheated his brother and father. But then his name was changed to Israel which means one wrestled with God and man and won (Gen 32, 28). Jesus called Simon “*Kepa*”, an Aramaic word that means rock, in Greek *Petros*, in Latin *Petrus* and in English *Peter*, indicating thereby that Jesus was going to make him the foundation for His Church.

To conclude, a name denotes the character and the mission of the person. It is a definition and a call. It expresses the dream of the one who gives the name. Therefore, only someone who knows the person well can give a suitable name to anyone or anything. God gave names to all His creatures. Man gave a name to the companion God gave him, who was “bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh”. In Hebrew “*Ish*” = man and “*Isha*” = woman (Gen 2, 23). With this background, we can ask: what is God’s name?

God did not reveal His name although the Patriarchs asked for His name (Gen 32, 29). Which name would define God? Who can know God fully? We can only say that He is ‘infinite’, ‘invisible’, ‘transcendent’ ‘incomprehensible’ beyond every imagination etc. According to Indian mystics, we can only define God with negative attributes –*nethi-nethi* - neither this, nor this.

The truth is that we cannot define God. Only God can understand Himself fully. It is impossible for man to define God with his limited intelligence. What then is the first petition in the prayer Jesus taught us? When we say

“Your name” it implies that God has a name which is a definition. But no one can really define God; still the Bible tells us that God has revealed Himself. In a way the entire Bible is the revelation of God. Of all these revelations one instance stands out, where it is reported that God in answer to Moses’ request, revealed His name.

### ***The Name of God – I am***

It was at the beginning of Exodus, the process of liberation from the slavery in Egypt, when Moses was called to be the leader. God revealed Himself to Moses in a burning bush as the God of the Patriarchs: “*And he said, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’*” (Ex 3, 6). However, when Moses insisted on getting a name to communicate it to Pharaoh, God did reveal His name.

*“God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’. And he said, ‘Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you. God also said to Moses, ‘Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’: this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations”* (Ex 3, 14-15).

The name spoken of is, no doubt, intriguing. What does it actually mean? This is not clear in the English translation. Two utterances need to be considered. a) I am and b) Who am. In the original Hebrew, this is written as “*Ihve Asher Ihve*”. Does the verb ‘*Ihve*’ refer to the future or to the present? Bible scholars hold differing views on this matter. Though the term refers to the future, it should be regarded as the present tense because for God past, present and future are one and the same. “I will be who I

will be” or “I am who am”. This name is derived from the word “*Haya*”.

When Philosophers project God as the source of existence, they are, in a way, explaining this word. However, this conclusion may be debatable because the original word is not “Who I will be” but “Who I am”. How can we then translate it? What is the name being revealed here?

‘Who I am’ or “I” is the literal meaning of the original word used in Hebrew. But, how can “I” be a name? This word cannot be translated in any other way. Therefore, we have to accept the name of God to be “I”. “I”, who has an independent existence, who is above and beyond everything else; that is the name of God. Only God can use this absolute I as a name.

People commonly introduce themselves with the name of their parents, brethren, family, place of residence, work, country and such connections. It is these connections which seem to provide identity to the person, as to who the person is. Birth, upbringing, education, work and so on help define the person. For God, however, none of these things applies. “I” in the absolute sense could only be said of God. May be this is why God revealed His name as “I am who am”.

At the same time, the instruction that God is to be addressed as “Lord God”, (Ex 3,15) gives an explanation to the name “I”. It is the Hebrew word “Elohim” that is usually translated as God. What is revealed as the name of God is given in the four letters YHWH. As the Hebrew language has no vowels, and since the people of Israel, due to their respect for God, never pronounce the name of God, it is difficult to decide how to pronounce this name. When

they see the four letters YHWH, they would pronounce it as Adonai, which means My Lord. Later on these three vowels, AOA were applied to YHWH, which resulted in the pronunciation Yahowah, or Jehowah. This is how the name of God came to be considered Lord.. However, “Lord” is not the translation of the four letters.

What is important is not so much the origin or pronunciation of the word but its meaning. The word ‘Yahweh’ reveals the nature of God. How can we know God through the name ‘Yahweh’? Name cannot be analysed in the way we do with grammar. What we need to be concerned is the message God is revealing to us through this name. How did God come to be known by this name?

The circumstances in which God revealed this name need special attention. The name is revealed at the beginning of the process of liberating a group of slaves and transforming them into the People of God. God is One who reveals Himself in history. This is what was meant by “God of the Patriarchs”. Now God reveals Himself through a new action that is liberating the slaves and turning them into the “People of God”. This action was prompted by hearing their cries amidst their oppression by the Egyptians (Ex 3, 9). There is only one way we could come to know God who revealed Himself as “Yahweh”. It is by observing His actions, listening to His words and walking through the path He shows us.

The First Commandment of the Sinai Covenant is stated as follows. *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage”* (Ex 20, 2). *Ani = I; Yahweh Eloheyka = Yahweh Your God.* This is how it was written in Hebrew. By revealing

His name, God revealed His nature namely as the liberator of slaves and of the oppressed. Persons pushed to the periphery will be regarded as His own people. The Exodus event revealed that Yahweh is the God of the oppressed.

This name assumes a wider and deeper meaning in the New Testament. Yahweh, the only God, revealed Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity. Jesus taught us to address God as (the- delete the) Father “Abba” (Daddy). That is how Jesus Himself addressed God. This might give the impression that in the New Testament the name of God is Abba instead of Yahweh. St. Paul’s assertion that God is the Father could be interpreted as confirming this view. *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort”* (2 Cor 1, 3). The name “Father” is term that portrays God as Creator, Source, and First Cause of all beings and the Ultimate Goal of everything that exists. However, the term Father does not fully express the reality that God is.

At the same time, God is Son. The term Son indicates the expression of love. *“No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known”* (Jn 1,18). The Son who was born as a man, took upon himself the sin of the world, offered himself as ransom and thus manifested the infinite love is the revelation of God. Therefore the term “Son” can also be considered as the name of God.

The love between the Father and the Son is called the “Holy Spirit” who transforms people into children of God and enables them to live accordingly (Rom 8, 9-17. 26; Jn 14, 16. 25-27; 16, 5-15). We are helped and guided by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit is also the name of God.



Ultimately, “Thy Name” denotes the Trinitarian God who was revealed through the Passion, Death on the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Jews would not pronounce the name God because of the great reverence and fear they had for God; they are reluctant even to use the word God. The references to the temple of Jerusalem will explain this factor.

Meaning of “Name” is clarified by what is recorded in the book of Deuteronomy, the final discourse of Moses. “You shall seek the place which the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there; thither you shall go” (Dt 12, 5). ‘Put his name’ and ‘make his habitation’ are used interchangeably as they both mean the same thing.

The prayer Solomon offered in connection with the consecration of the House of God also conveys the same meaning. “*Thy eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which thou hast said, ‘My name shall be there,’ that thou mayest hearken to the prayer which thy servant offers toward this place*” (1 Kings 8, 29). ‘Thy Name’ means ‘Thee’ or ‘Thy personality’. What does “Hallowed be thy Name” mean? We shall discuss this matter next.

Name of God refers to the Lord who revealed Himself through history. God reveals Himself step by step, from the creation to the new creation. However, two things stand out as centres of history, the Liberation from slavery in Egypt and the Liberation from sin through the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Through these events, God revealed Himself as Father, brother, friend, and Saviour. That is what is implied in the petition, “*Hallowed by thy name*”.

## *Hallowed or Made Holy*

Which of the two versions is closer to the original expression? This is our consideration next. Both are passive forms of the verb. But which of the two refers to the Lord? Who needs to be hallowed and by whom this will be done? There are three possibilities: a) People must make the name of God Holy b) Holiness of God must be made manifest by itself. c) God must make His Name holy. One does not have to choose any one of these interpretations. All the three should be taken together in order to get the full meaning of the expression.

Which of the two, Made Holy or Hallowed, comes closer to the original word? Being “Hallowed” means honoured, respected, glorified and worshipped. The petition might mean, “*Father, may all honour you and worship you*”. Offering worship to God is the greatest and the most basic obligation of all people. The first commandment of the Sinai Covenant is offering worship to God (Ex 20, 2). Through Moses, God asked Pharaoh to send the people to offer worship Him (Ex 4, 23). This would mean that we are asking God to enable us to be witnesses to His Glory through our life of obedience to His commandments. God should be honoured, respected and worshipped through the lives and actions of people, in such a way that God’s Glory is revealed.

The translation “be made holy” or “be sanctified” has also equal validity. Many of the modern European languages, such as Italian, French, Spanish and German follow this version. Similar translation can be seen in Latin too. “*Sanctificetur Nomen tuum*”. This idea is given priority in Syriac also. Language spoken by Jesus was

closely related to Syriac and so we can conclude that ‘be sanctified’ must have been the intended notion in the prayer Jesus taught. However, what does ‘be sanctified’ mean? Who should make the name sanctified? How? These questions require answers.

We have to bear in mind that the original prayer was phrased in Semitic style. What does ‘Sanctified’ mean? This needs to be defined first. It is “*Kodes*” in Hebrew and “*Kanthisa*” in Syriac. The literal meaning is ‘to cut off’ or ‘to set apart’, as something above and beyond from everything else, transcendent and something very unique. This meaning can be applied only to God.

The word “Holy” has two different levels of meaning. a) Ontological or existential, and b) Ethical or moral.

The first meaning is someone who stands apart and is different from everything else that exists. This is what we mean when we say ‘God is holy’. In this sense the word is also used to refer to people who are set apart for the service of God. The implication is that places, objects and persons set apart for God are by the very fact holy. The House of God is holy because it is a place set apart for the worship of God. This is what St. Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians. “*To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours*” (1 Cor 1,2).

The second meaning of the word “holy” highlights the moral aspect. Holiness is living in accordance with the revealed will of God or living in accordance with God’s commandments. This is what the saints did.

Now the petition hallowed be Thy Name could be

understood in two ways, positively and negatively. Usually, parents tell their children not to spoil the family's name or reputation. Evil deeds of children would bring a bad name to the family while wrongful activities of followers would give a bad name to their leader.

What does it mean to say that name of God needs to be made holy? The meaning is that we are not to bring disrespect to God. This is one aspect of the petition. 'Father, do not permit us to bring any bad reputation to your name'. Name of God can be tarnished by those who are known to be His followers through their unholy behaviour. Therefore, we are not to do anything contrary to the holiness of God. This is the exhortation contained in the second Commandment.

*"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain" (Ex 20, 7).* Making an oath to present a lie as truth is totally forbidden by this commandment. Further it implies that the life of the people of God should never bring dishonour to God. *"You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD" (Lev 19, 12).* People of Israel rendered the name of God unholy through idol worship and human sacrifice (Lev 20, 3). This is another aspect of the petition.

The Prophets have time and again voiced this accusation. *"Therefore, say to the house of Israel, Thus, says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations,*

*and which you have profaned among them; and the nations will know that I am the LORD, says the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes” (Ez 36, 22-23).* This assertion contains both aspects of the first petition in the Lord’s Prayer.

The People of Israel were called the People of God. God liberated them from slavery and adopted them as His own people through the Covenant at Mount Sinai. They were given a kingdom as their own and God protected them in a special way. Wherever they went, they were known as *“The People of God”*. This fact itself provided scope for bringing bad name to their God. *“But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that men said of them, ‘These are the people of the LORD, and yet they had to go out of his land’” (Ezek 36, 20).*

Their life of slavery and their conduct which led to the Babylonian Captivity brought discredit to the name of God. Their punishment did not end here. Prophet Ezekiel, after the initial accusations, assured them that the Holiness of God will be vindicated through them: *“I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations will know that I am the LORD, says the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes” (Ezek 36, 23).* Ezekiel then proceeded to explain how this would happen. God would gather the refugees, purify them and give them a new Spirit, enabling them to observe the Commandments even as they are brought back to the Promised Land. God would dwell in their midst (Eze 36, 24-38).

Now the meaning of the petition “Hallowed be thy name” becomes clearer. Their sins will be forgiven, ending the slavery and making them “The People of God” again. They would live in their land in security. God would make all this possible. Thus, through them, the Holiness of God would become known to all.

*“But the LORD of hosts is exalted in justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness”* (Is 5, 16). This proclamation of Prophet Isaiah could be seen as an interpretation of the petition. It was in this sense that the name Yahweh was used as the name of God, beginning from its revelation to Moses. The Holiness of the Name of God was manifested when the yoke of slavery imposed on the Israelites by Pharaoh was broken (Ex 6, 7; Lev 26, 13).

The climax of this revelation was the death of Jesus on the Cross (Jn 3, 16). Words and deeds of Jesus revealed the holiness of God. Jesus Himself tells this when he prays: *“I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do (Jn 17, 4).* Here ‘glorify’ has the same meaning as ‘make holy.

In the light of these reflections, we can paraphrase the first petition as follows: ‘Father, the cause of our existence and the goal of our being, as you safeguard our lives, let our lives be a witness to Thy holiness. By re-establishing justice in this world, let Thy holiness be revealed. Bless us so that we do not profane Your holy Name in any way. Don’t allow us ever to become the cause for misunderstanding Your nature or of anyone cursing You.

### **Certain Practical Reflections**

Nothing is added or magnified by our prayer “Hallowed

be thy name”. Our prayer is merely to reveal God’s holiness in this world, and for that purpose to make us instruments in His hands. Here the action of God and co-operation of people become essential. At the same time, there is a hint to the awareness that the realities in the world today stand not only as an obstacle to revealing His Holiness, but even as a cause for insulting and making unholy the name of God.

God’s name is profaned when children of God, created in His image and likeness, are subjected to injustice, atrocities and exploitation. Jesus taught us that God identifies Himself with the people who suffer from hunger, thirst or any such needs (Mt 25, 31-46).

God’s name will not be made holy just by our shouting with our tongues “Holy, Holy” even a thousand times. If people try to exterminate others just because they belong to another religion or keep a different faith, one must ask the question: which God are they trying to glorify by these atrocities. Religious terrorism, whichever religion may be perpetrating it, will not make God’s name holy. Instead, such actions only profane God’s name. When will people realize that by such cruelty against others, they are not glorifying God’s name but worshipping Satan who *“was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies”*. (Jn 8, 44)!

On the pretext of proclaiming the glory of God, people build huge, beautiful structures and organize mammoth processions, while the poor and the hungry are neglected. Will God’s name be glorified by these measures? Not at all! We glorify God’s name by acting justly and showing mercy

to the needy, and by being humble before the Lord, as He told us through prophet Micah (Mic 6,8). Jesus repeated the same teaching (Mt 23,23).

## Summary

The terms *hallowed* and *made holy*, both bear the same meaning. “Hallowed” emphasises the action of human persons while “Being made holy” focuses on the action of God. But, both notions point to the works of God and man. We can paraphrase this petition in the following words: “*Father, manifest Thy Holiness in this world by putting an end to injustice, violence, exploitation and oppression, to all that diminish and disfigure Thy image on the face of people; enable us also to participate in that process*”. Let us try to understand this petition clearly. Actually, it is a petition and an invitation at the same time. While begging to God, we are reminded of our responsibility. “*Father, make thy glory known to all through us, your children. We pray that never let it happen that your name is tarnished by our actions*”. This is the first of the seven petitions. We shall see that the subsequent petitions are largely explanations of the first petition.



## 6

### Kingdom and Will of God

We have already seen that there are a few differences between the two versions of the Lord's Prayer. In Mathew's version there are seven petitions while Luke's only five. The second petition is the subject of discussion here. What does "Thy Kingdom come" mean? What is the Kingdom of God? Is it any region on earth or a state of being?

Besides, it is difficult to understand the meaning of sayings such as, 'The Kingdom of God has already come, 'It is in your midst', 'It has come near', 'The Kingdom of God would come soon'. These statements are presented as the words of Jesus. The petition, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven", is found in Mathew's version, but not in Luke's. Why are there such differences?

Presenting an idea in different words to provide emphasis to that idea is a Semitic style of expression. However, Luke generally avoids repetitions. This will explain how seven petitions found in Mathew's version have become five in Luke's. If we accept this view, we get an important insight about the matter.

The two petitions, "Thy kingdom come" and "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven", express the same point. Since Luke has recorded "Thy kingdom come", he did not repeat the same idea by adding "Thy will be done". The petition "Thy will be done", is an explanation of "Thy

kingdom come”. Keeping this idea in mind, we shall analyse the concept of “Kingdom of God”.

Kingdom of God is a very important theme in the teachings of Jesus. The Good News Jesus preached centred around the “Kingdom of God”. He started His mission announcing the coming of the “Kingdom of God”. Not only the miracles He performed but His life style and dealings with people were signs of the “Kingdom of God”. Jesus taught about the coming of the “Kingdom of God” and its characteristics. “Kingdom of God” is, in fact, the focus of the Gospels. Hence, it is necessary to analyse the subject more closely.

Jesus lived with and taught to a people who considered themselves as the chosen people of God. The People of Israel experienced God’s special care and concern which they regarded as their special prerogative. Kingdom of God was the centre of the teachings of Jesus. How then did the people understand him? What was their view of the Kingdom of God? Did Jesus approve of their way of understanding the Kingdom? Or did He correct their thinking?

## **1. Kingdom of God in the view of the People of Israel**

The first part of the Bible, the 46 books we call the Old Testament, is the account of the revelation the People of Israel received from God and of their response to that revelation. The manner in which people spoke with God and the way they walked with Him are narrated in the Old Testament. Their history from the creation of the world to the coming of the Messiah, the Saviour, is narrated in these 46 books. In these books we can notice the idea of the Kingdom of God gradually gaining clarity.

Our search about the development of the idea of the Kingdom of God starts from the very first book of the Bible. In the first chapters of the first book, Geneses, which narrate the creation of the world and the fall of man that introduces the history of salvation, there is no mention of the Kingdom of God. The situation when man lived in accordance with the Will of God is called “Paradise”. Once man broke his relationship with God through sin, he lost the paradise. In fact, paradise is not a particular place, but a state of being in communion with God, with each other, with the nature and with oneself.

With sin this communion is broken and man distanced himself from God. People started to hate each other and were scattered over the face of the earth. Even though man lost the paradise, God is not totally absent from his life; in fact God comes in search of him, to question, to warn, to punish, and at the same time to give promises and protection (Gen 4,8-16; 6,5-8; 9,21-22). This is the picture depicted in the primeval history (Gen 1-11).

In the next stage of the history of Salvation, the Patriarchal history (Gen 12-50), we see God walking with the people and leading them. The Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were shepherds. They experienced God as a Shepherd. They believed that God would protect them like a good shepherd protects his sheep.

In the Exodus event, narrated in the next four books, Exodus to Deuteronomy, God appears as the Liberator. He is the warrior who hears the cry of the oppressed slaves, comes down, fights against the oppressive forces, liberates the slaves, and leads them to a land of their own. On the way to the Promised Land they halt at Mont Sinai where

God makes a covenant with them in which we can see the first hint about “Kingdom of God”. *“Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine and you shall be to me a **kingdom of priests and a holy nation**. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel” (Ex19, 5-6)*. The two phrases, “kingdom of priests and holy nation” have deeper meaning.

The People of Israel appears here as the “Kingdom of God”. God had chosen them and set them apart for Himself, making them a “Holy People”. Priests are those who bring offerings to God. They have also the responsibility to teach the God’s will and plan for them and thus function as mediators between God and man. This is the very purpose of priesthood. They would remain a priestly people and enjoy membership in God’s Kingdom only so long as they adhere to the Will of God. Here we get a hint that the Kingdom of God is the stage where the will of God is completely carried out. Here God is the King and the people are His subjects. In them the Kingdom of God becomes a visible and palpable reality. This relationship was established by the covenant at Sinai. This is the foundation of the Kingdom of God.

### **Kingship in Israel**

Gradually the people lost their awareness of being a holy people and a priestly nation, maybe or they did not fully comprehend its significance. They got a kingdom for themselves under the leadership of Joshua. Through the Judges they were saved from dangers and attacks of enemies. However, in the course of time, they felt that protection by the Judges was not good enough. They cried

out to Samuel to give them a king just as the other nations had (1 Sam 8, 1-5).

Samuel, though, was not too comfortable with their demand, but God intervened: *“And the LORD said to Samuel, “Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them” (1 Sam8, 7).* From this statement we can conclude that, up to this time, God was the king of Israel. Kingship got introduced against God’s Will. However, the Bible also reports that it was God who chose a man as the king of Israel, anointed him through the Prophet and set him up on the throne. Saul (1 Sam 9-11) and David (1 Sam 16, 1-13) were anointed kings of Israel by the Prophets. How are we to understand these contradictory opinions?

### ***Benefits of the Rule by Kings***

The views about kingship in Israel were formed through concrete experience of the people. On the one hand, the rule by kings was perceived as good and helpful to the nation. It was during the reign of kings that people felt that they were a people who could be proud of their kingdom. They had protection from enemies, the boundaries were secured, and there was prosperity in the land. The capital city and the Jerusalem Temple functioned as the centre that united the Twelve Tribes as one People. On account of these reasons Monarchy is seen as a gift of God.

This view was very strong and widespread during the time of King David, who was anointed by God. The prophecies of Prophet Nathan kindled the belief that the Kingdom of Israel will last forever through the descendants of David. When David lived in the Palace, the “Ark of the

covenant” was kept in the Tent. David felt that this was not right and so he wanted to build a House for God. Prophet Nathan gave full support of for this project.

This, however, was not according to God’s plan. The Lord said to Nathan: *“Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling.... When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever”* (2 Sam 7, 5-16).

‘A kingdom that would last’ was a promise made to David. People, who took the promise seriously, expected a lasting kingdom which would be handed down from generation to generation and would be ruled by the descendants of the Dynasty of David. King of Israel was regarded as the adopted son of God. This is confirmed by the proclamation by the priest during the ceremony of anointing the king: *“He said to me, “You are my son, today I have begotten you”* (Ps 2,7).

### ***Negative aspects of Monarchy***

David, though regarded as holy, had several serious failures (2 Sam 11-12). Very few of the kings who followed David stayed faithful to the precepts of the Covenant of God. Even Solomon, considered as a man of great wisdom, failed to do justice to his people. Instead, his construction

projects and vain glory put a heavy burden on the people, as can be seen from their lament in front of his son and successor Rehoboam: *“Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke upon us, and we will serve you”* (1Kings 12,4) His refusal to lighten the burden coupled with his arrogance led to the division of the kingdom into two parts (1Kings 12, 14-19), which came to be known as Israel and Judah. Miseries of people continued unabated during the entire period of the rule of kings.

After two hundred years of rule of kings, Israel, the Northern Kingdom, ceased to exist. Judah, the Southern Kingdom, continued, with nominal level of freedom, for another one hundred and fifty years. Eventually Judah also came to an end in 587 B.C. Babylon conquered and destroyed Jerusalem, and led the king, his officers and thousands of citizens to the far away Babylon as slaves; thus began the Babylonian captivity. With this, monarchy came to an end in Israel.

### ***The Prophetic Vision***

Against the background of repeated failures of the kings, another picture of kingship and kingdom began to take shape. During the period of Monarchy, people had forgotten the fact that God was their king, but God sent to them prophets with the dream of a different kind of kingdom, reviving the concept of God as the King

God will raise a king from the sons of David, who would establish a new Kingdom which would comprise of all the people of the world. He will be known as Christ the King and His rule would last forever. Such hopes were kindled in the hearts of people as a result of the preaching

of the prophets. Isaiah was the main proponent of such a concept. He made many prophecies about the future king and the Kingdom of God (Is 7, 14-17; 9, 1-7; 11, 1-9; 32, 1-20; 35, 1-10). People began to nurture great hopes about the Messiah and the kingdom he would establish.

These prophecies, however, were not fulfilled the way people had expected; just the opposite happened. With the Babylonian Captivity the people, who had been liberated by God, ended up in slavery once again similar to what they had endured in Egypt.

### ***Hope for the captives***

The People of Israel in captivity were in despair believing that they had been abandoned by God. To them God sent the Prophet known as Second or Deutero Isaiah with a message of hope. In his prophecies new dreams unfolded regarding God and the Kingdom of God. This part is known as the “Book of consolation”, because people were indeed consoled by God. Like a Good Shepherd God would end their slavery and would lead them back to the Promised Land. This is the main message of Deutero Isaiah.

Gods is Almighty. All the peoples of the world will feel happy and secure under His Rule. The People of Israel will be given special protection. God will never abandon them but will always be with them giving guidance and protection and security. Promises made with regard to their imminent liberation deserve mention. Prophet Isaiah compares Jerusalem to the mother lamenting for her children trapped in slavery in Babylon and who, she had thought, had been lost forever. Separation from her children drowned her in pain and sorrow.



God is calling Jerusalem through the prophet: *“Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean. Shake yourself from the dust, arise, O captive Jerusalem; loose the bonds from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion... Therefore, my people shall know my name; ... here am I”*. *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, **who brings good tidings of good**, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns” (Is 52, 1-7).*

From the distant Babylon, a messenger comes running with a message of great joy and consolation. He appears on the Mount of Olives. He conveys the good news to the mother who was crying over the fate of her children: *“Your God reigns” (Is 52, 7)*. *“Mal’ak Eloheyka”* is the original Hebrew expression. The verb *mal’ak* and the name *melek* are derived from the same root. The noun *melek* means king. Therefore, the literal translation would be, “He has become the king”. Hence the prophecy would mean, ‘Your God is the King and He rules’.

Who is the king? This was the question which was raised after the defeat and destruction of Jerusalem. The war between the people was projected as a war between their gods. The powerful God would win, making his people the undisputed rulers. This is the conviction reflected in the liberation from Egypt. But, victory of Babylon drowned Israel in despair. They began to wonder if their God was defeated. Doubts were expressed but they got no answer. So the prophet assured them that God had defeated all their enemies and now He rules over the entire earth. This is the meaning of the phrase “God is King”.

This proclamation provides a clear vision about the Kingdom of God. Neither the Emperor of Babylon nor anyone else has control of this world; only the God of Israel, who is the creator, is the Lord of the Universe. It is He who rules over the earth. He is the King. Accordingly, “*The Kingdom of God*” means the Rule of God, that the Will of God is executed on earth.

The prophet Deutero Isaiah was of the view that the People of Israel have a new mission to fulfil, namely to be the light to the nations. God of Israel is not only the God of Israel but the God of the entire Universe. In truth, there is no other God but Yahweh. The People of Israel are chosen to be the witnesses, priests and prophets of God in this world. This was the mission God had entrusted to Israel.

### ***Kingdom of God unfolds in the Psalms***

Psalms are a collection of prayers of Israel, formulated over a thousand-year period. There are 150 Psalms in this collection, and they provide very valuable insights concerning the Kingdom of God. The fundamental message is that God, Creator and Protector of the Universe, is the King who rules over the entire world with authority.

Therefore, God is King, not only of Israel but of the whole world. God revealed the name Yahweh to Israel. He would execute His rule in the world. His desire is that all must accept His kingship, fulfil His will, and lead a happy and secure life.

Six Psalms convey this message: Psalms 47, 93, 96, 97, 98, and 99. They explain various aspects of the “Kingdom of God”. “*For the LORD, the Most High, is terrible, a great king over all the earth*” (Ps 47, 2). “*The*

*LORD reigns; he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed; he is girded with strength. Yea, the world is established; it shall never be moved” (Ps 93, 1)*

“Mal’ak” is a Hebrew word and is translated as ‘reigns’. We have already seen this word in Isaiah 52,7. God reigns as King because He is the King of the entire Universe. He would execute justice on earth. *“The LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his truth” (Ps. 96, 13).* The same idea is repeated in Psalm 98, 9.

With the rule of God, God’s Will is executed all over the world. The entire Universe sings God’s praises (Ps 96, 1-2). *“The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!” (Ps 97,1).* The Psalmist who invites the Universe to praise God portrays God’s victory over evil as a miracle (Ps 98, 1-3). The rule of God will put an end to evil and to all those who continue to do evil. *“The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!” (Ps 99,1).*

God, who is the Lord and King, appointed and anointed a man as king over Israel and installed him as His adopted son and representative on earth, as it becomes evident in the words of the priest at the moment of anointing: *“You are my son, today I have begotten you” (Ps 2, 7).* God appointed the king as His representative, to execute justice on earth (Ps 45, 6-7). Eight Psalms, known as Royal Psalms (Psalms 2, 45, 72, 89,101, 110, 132 and 144) speak of the Kingdom of God repeatedly.

*“The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all” (103, 19).* *“A Song of Praise, Of David, I will extol thee, my God and King, and*

*bless thy name for ever and ever” (145,1). “Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD is faithful in all his words and gracious in all his deeds” (Ps 145, 13).*

However, the rule of kings turned out to be a failure in Israel. In fact, the rule of kings ended forever with the Babylonian captivity in 587 B.C. At this juncture, people began to believe very strongly that God, rather than any human king, would rule over Israel. Prophets promoted this conviction. Through a king born in the Dynasty of David, God would rule over the earth and His Kingdom would last forever. Psalms and prophecies were re-interpreted. They all pointed to the Messiah and the “Kingdom of God”.

### ***Post Exilic Period***

Those who returned from Exile did not find the dream held out by the Second Isaiah as a reality. On the contrary, they suffered severe financial difficulties. Poverty led them to yet another type of slavery (Neh 5, 1-5). Leadership in Israel shrank to a narrow mentality. The new revelation concerning their missionary role as the light of the world was easily forgotten. Though they returned after fifty years, people felt as though their kingship had ended ages ago. Even though exile and captivity was over, and they had religious freedom, still politically they were first under Persia and then under Syria. During the reign of the Syrian king, Antiochus IV (B.C. 167-164), the People of Israel were for the first time persecuted for their faith (B.C. 167-164).

### ***Kingdom of God in the Apocalyptic literature***

At this point, a new concept developed in the

“Apocalyptic literature” about kingship and kingdom. It was said that no human king can establish lasting peace and justice on earth because the world has become totally corrupt. Therefore, God Himself will enter into history to put an end to all injustice. He would establish His Kingdom on earth, where peace and justice will prevail. This is the view contained in the Apocalyptic literature.

We can see, in the prophetic literature, the beginning of this idea that God will enter directly into the world and would establish justice on earth. Amos had a vision of the re-establishment of the throne of David (Am 9, 11-15). Micah promised that God would purify the “*Holy remnant*” by washing and re-establishing (7, 8-20). Jeremiah spoke about the reestablishment of peace after terrible disasters and the total destruction of Jerusalem (Jer 4.23-31; 23, 7-8). A New Jerusalem was visualized by Ezekiel (40-48). The part of Isaiah’s teaching, generally known as the “*Little Apocalypse*” (Isaiah 24-27) tells about the direct intervention of God in great detail. However, it is in the Book of Daniel, written during the religious persecution under Antiochus IV, called Epiphanes, that we get a clear picture the Apocalyptic vision about the Rule and the Kingdom of God.

Of the many visions Daniel had, two deserve special mention. One of the visions is presented as a dream of Nebuchadnezzar, which Daniel interpreted for the king. It was about a huge statue which reached up to the sky. It had a head made of gold, body of silver, thighs of iron and foot of clay, in which the Prophet saw four empires. A stone untouched by human hands destroyed that statue. Daniel told the king: “*You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood*

*before you, and its appearance was frightening... But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (Dan 2, 31-35).*

There is a hint at the “Kingdom of God” in Daniel’s explanation of the vision. *“And in the days of those kings the **God of heaven will set up a kingdom** which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever” (Dan 2, 44).* The kingdom that will last forever belongs to God as He will establish it and rule over it. The Prophet did not specify when and how this would happen, but the second vision provides the answers.

Daniel’s vision of the Son of Man (7, 9-22) is quite well known. It is part of the vision Daniel had of Heaven: *“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Dan 7, 13-14).*

Kingdoms rooted in violence and injustice will be destroyed to make way for the Kingdom of God. The Son of Man will be the ruler of this Kingdom. One who comes in the clouds of the sky is sent by God and He participates in the Divine nature. Daniel provides the answer to the question regarding the Son of Man.

*“But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, for ever and*

ever” (Dan 7, 18). “As I looked, this horn made war with the saints, and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the kingdom” (Dan 7, 21-22). The People of God, Israel, was depicted as the Son of Man. God will give Israel a kingdom and they would rule the entire world. This idea is presented through the prophesies and the vision. People of Israel believed it and waited for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

### ***Palestine during the time of Jesus***

“Kingdom of God” was the central theme of the teachings of Jesus. However, when Jesus spoke about the “Kingdom of God” what did the listeners possibly understand? Jesus presented the “Kingdom of God” in a manner that they were familiar with. Hence, it is important to understand the expectations people in Palestine had about the “Kingdom of God”. As a precaution we have to keep this in mind that during the time of Jesus there were different views about the Kingdom of God and therefore the words of Jesus could have been understood and interpreted by the audience in different ways.

The Maccabees won the war against Syria. Simeon, the eldest son of Mattathias, ruled the kingdom from 143 to 134 B.C. People accepted him as the High Priest and king (1 Mac 14, 41). “*He should be obeyed by all, and that all contracts in the country should be written in his name, and that he should be clothed in purple and wear gold*” (1 Mac 14, 43). Purple and gold are symbols of kingship.

Thus, a new dynasty came into existence in Israel. It was known as Hasmonaeen dynasty, named after Hasmoneus,

the grandfather of Mattathias. He was a Levite, from the Tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe, not a descendant of David. Not all the people accepted the situation of the High Priest being also the King.

Simeon was killed in a plot and his son, John Hyrcanus assumed kingship (1 Mac 16, 11-24). A group of people, dissatisfied with the rule and the succession plan, withdrew into the desert and settled themselves at Qumran, on the north bank of Dead Sea, under the leadership of a priest known as “Teacher of Righteousness”. They lived like a religious community, known as Essenes or Monks of Qumran. Through severe fasting and prayer, they began to prepare the way for the Messiah in the desert.

In their view the Messiah who comes to save the people will be a priest from the tribe of Levi. Alongside, they expected also a king to come from the house of David, from the tribe of Judah. Thus they hoped for, not one but two Messiahs. The monastic members believed that they were called to join the Messiahs in the fight for the establishing the Kingdom of God. There are scholars who argue that John the Baptist, who was in the desert (Lk 1, 80), was living in the monastery of Qumran.

Pompey the Great, the Roman General, captured Jerusalem in 63 B.C; the Hasmonaean rule came to an end. In B.C. 37 Herod, the second son of Antipater, an Idumean and Cypros a Nabatean Arab princess, with the approval and help of the Romans became king in Palestine. People did not accept him since he was a half Jew and a vassal of Rome. Herod brutally suppressed the opposition. He imposed heavy taxes on the people. All he cared for was his own prestige and safety as well Rome’s good will and support.



People ardently longed for a liberator and prayed for his coming. Their dream, which grew stronger every passing day, was that a son of David would come to liberate them from foreign powers and transform Israel into an independent nation. Perceiving no other option, the Jewish leader co-operated with the rule of Herod and the supremacy of Rome, fervently hoping that the Messiah would establish a free nation for Israel.

### ***Zealot Movement***

A group of people, under the leadership of Judas, called the Galilean, in protest against the census taken by the Romans in 6 A.D. started a riot taking weapons plundering the armoury of Herod Antipas, the king of Galilee. Rome immediately intervened and tried to suppress the revolt. Despite the fact that the leaders were killed, the protest they had initiated grew into a formidable force.

Calling to mind the zeal of Elijah, they chose for the group the name Zealots. They were actually terrorists who tried to wipe out foreign rule with the use of arms. They were determined to become independent and to re-establish the Kingdom of David. It was their firm belief that the Messiah, Son of David, would come soon. When Jesus started His public ministry, the Zealots had followers not only in Galilee but also in Judea. During that period, many appeared on the scene, claiming to be the Messiah. However, the Messiah sent by God would establish “The Kingdom of God”, not the empire of David and Solomon.

### ***Popular Expectations about Jesus***

People, impressed with the activities and teachings of Jesus, were convinced that He was the Messiah, they

had been waiting for. Their conviction was apparent in the fact that Jesus was called “Son of David”. The blind man seeking the mercy of God (Mt 9,27; Mk 10, 48) and the Canaanite woman who prayed for her daughter, possessed by an evil spirit (Mt 15, 22), are examples of people who believed that Jesus was the expected Messiah.

Seeing the miracles Jesus performed, people wondered if He was the “Son of David” (Mt 12, 23). When Jesus multiplied the bread and miraculously fed thousands in the desert, an event that reminded the people of the miracles of Exodus, they wanted to make him king (Jn 6, 15). One of the robbers hanged with Jesus had no doubt that Jesus was the Messiah whom People of Israel had waited for. He prayed: *“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”* (Lk 23, 42).

The Pharisees did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. However, they believed that “The Kingdom of God” would come soon. This was evident from their question, *“When would the Kingdom of God come?”* (Lk 17, 20). Discarding secrecy and silence, Jesus took the initiative to enter Jerusalem on a donkey. People thought that their expectations were fulfilled. Everyone joined in the proclamation. *“And those who went before and those who followed cried out, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!’”* (Mk 11,9-10).

The disciples of Jesus had also nurtured similar dreams. This was reflected in their conversations. Taking the words of John the Baptist seriously, two of his disciples went over to Jesus and stayed with Him for a day. One of them, Andrew, told his brother Simeon that they had seen

“The Messiah” (Jn 1, 41), which betrayed their conviction that Jesus was the Messiah. Of course, their thinking was that the kingdom that Jesus came to establish, would be a worldly kingdom such as David had founded, and that it would come into being very soon. The request of James and John for important places in the kingdom: *“And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory”* also reflects this belief. Mark’s version “In Your glory” is stated by Mathew as “Your Kingdom” (Mt 20, 21).

After promising salvation to the family of Zacchaeus, Jesus continued his journey from Jericho to Jerusalem. Luke then speaks of the conviction the disciples had nurtured. *“As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately”* (Lk 19, 11). The Royal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and the joyful expression of the disciples deserve special mention. *“As he was now drawing near, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”* (Lk 19, 37-38)

Passion and Death on the Cross were most unexpected events that placed a heavy burden on the disciples crushing all their hopes and expectations. We can hear it in their own words. Totally disappointed with the incidents at Jerusalem, two of the disciples went to Emmaus. When Jesus walked with them as a stranger, they told him, *“... But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this*

*happened” (Lk 24, 21). Even after seeing the risen Jesus, there was no much change in their hopes and views about the Kingdom. “So, when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1,6).*

## **Summary**

How did the contemporaries of Jesus view the “Kingdom of God”? God, Creator and Saviour, is the King who would execute justice on earth. God’s rule is called “The Kingdom of God”. But God would not establish a kingdom directly. He will do so through the Messiah who will be born as a descendant of David and will be known as “Son of David”.

“Kingdom of God” will be entrusted to the People of God, Israel. When all the people are brought into this kingdom, there will be a great empire whose borders would extend to the ends of the earth. Jerusalem will be its capital, where all people would assemble with offerings. This will be a worldly kingdom and it would last forever. There will be peace and justice, and righteousness would flow like a river which never dries up. No one will hurt anyone else as everyone will be prosperous, happy and healthy. This kingdom will become a reality through the king who will be the son of David, for whom people had waited with great hope.

However, such a hope was not fulfilled. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “Let thy kingdom come”. But, what kind of kingdom did he envision? For an answer, we need to examine the life of Jesus, His deeds and teachings closely.

## 2. Jesus and the Kingdom of God

Mathew opens the Gospel with the “*Genealogy of Jesus Christ*” to show that Jesus was born as a descendant of David. “*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham*” (Mt 1,1). Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David as a fulfillment of the prophesy (Mic 5, 2). The Magi reached Bethlehem by following the star they had seen in the East, which again showed that Jesus is the “Son of David”. Anxiety of Herod and the massacre of the holy innocents (Mt 2, 1-8) corroborate this truth.

From the very beginning, the Gospel of Luke also projects Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of David. The Angel conveyed this clearly to Mary. “*He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end*” (Lk 1, 32-33). Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David, in fulfillment of the prophecies and the expectations of the People of Israel. It is clear that Jesus is king by birth and He came to establish the “Kingdom of God” on earth.

As Jesus, before starting His public ministry, received Baptism from John the Baptist a voice was heard from heaven proclaiming him the Son of God. The Synoptic Gospels present the voice quoting a verse from Psalm 2 that was used at the anointing of the king: “*Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased*” (Mk 1, 11; Ps 2, 7). The kings in Israel were just human beings who were adopted as sons of God, whereas Jesus is the Only Son of God, by nature.

During the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus gives some hint about His Kingship. He tried neither to garner support through works of miracles nor to exercise domination over others. He merely submitted to and executed God's Will in his role as the Son of God. The kingdom He establishes and the way He goes about doing it will be different from people's expectations. He did not try to gain cheap popularity by performing miracles like multiplying bread but he fulfilled the Will of the Father by self-emptying. God's will would be executed on earth as exemplified by His self-sacrifice on the Cross.

John the Baptist prepared the way for the Messiah by starting his ministry with the proclamation that the Kingdom of God has come near. *"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Mt 1, 1-2). Because of their great respect for God, Semitic people were reluctant to use the word "God". Mathew recorded it as "Kingdom of heaven". John the Baptist proclaimed that the Messiah would come after him. He added that the Messiah was so great a person that he was not even worthy to carry his slippers.

According to the Gospel of Mathew, Jesus started His public ministry with the same message that John had preached. *"From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Mt 4, 17). The Gospel according to Mathew is divided into five units (Mat 5-9; 10-12; 14-17; 18-23; 24-28). Chapters 1-4 function as general introduction. Each one of the five units consists of a sermon and a narrative that describes Jesus' activities. By calling attention to the Kingdom of God at the beginning and the end of the first unit Mathew tells

us that the Kingdom of God is the central theme of Jesus' teachings and activities.

*“And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people”* (Mt 4, 23; 9, 35) Jesus sent His disciples before Him with the very same purpose. *“And preach as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying, give without pay”* (Mt 10,7-8).

“Kingdom of God” was the focus of the activities of Jesus and His disciples. Its meaning and nature were made clear through the teachings of Jesus. Thus, the life of Jesus, His teachings and activities were centred on “The Kingdom of God”. This is the message contained in the Gospels.

### ***Signs of the “Kingdom of God” – Life of Jesus***

The life of Jesus that marked the fulfilment of the prophecies was the greatest sign that reveals the “Kingdom of God” and its nature. However, the way Jesus presented the “Kingdom of God” did not meet people's expectations, particularly of His contemporaries. They expected a king who would overthrow the Romans and establish Israel as a great empire. But the “Kingdom of God” that Jesus spoke of turned out to be very different, giving a new interpretation to the prophecies.

Though Jesus was born in the city of David, there was nothing of royal glory in his birth. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, not in the royal palace but in a stable where animals were housed. There was no place for him in the inn. Thereafter, to save His life, He had to flee to Egypt

where he lived like a refugee. His life, from the beginning, resembled that of a poor person, who lived on the periphery of the society. He grew up as the son of a carpenter, struggling to make both ends meet. What is significant is that He first lived the values and virtues of the Kingdom of God before teaching them.

When he began his public ministry, he did not seek any security, but totally relied on God's Providence, sleeping in someone's house, or on the wayside or under a tree. He suffered hunger and thirst. He did not have the security that even wild animals and birds of the air enjoyed: "*And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head"*" (Lk 9, 58). This was another aspect of the "Kingdom of God", an experience of total trust in God, that the Father would provide whatever is needed for life

The disciples of Jesus were very ordinary people. They had no high status in the society. They lived like daily labourers. Their earnings were meagre though they worked hard day and night. Their thoughts and hopes about Kingdom of God resembled those of their contemporaries. Jesus demanded a change in their thought patterns, something that was not easy for them to understand and more so to accomplish. The idea of "The Kingdom of God" grew clearer with Jesus' re-reading and interpreting anew the laws and the conflicts with the Jewish leadership. The teaching that the Sabbath was made for man and therefore one should not become slave of laws or observances (Mk 2, 28) can be seen as an example.

All the teachings and dealings of Jesus were revealing a fundamental truth that God is our Father and we are all brothers and sisters to one another. The Pharisees and the



tax collectors have equal status in the “Kingdom of God”. There is room for Zealots as well as Roman soldiers. Sinners and saints alike are welcome to the “Kingdom of God”. His only demand was that they open their hearts and accept Jesus as the Son of God and believe that the Kingdom of God has become present in and through Jesus while accepting the values of the Kingdom such as justice, love and mercy.

The disciples came to understand the nature of the “Kingdom of God” through their continued association with Jesus and his personal example. They were themselves entrusted with the responsibility of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. During the Last Supper with his disciples, Jesus did something most unexpected. He assumed the role of a slave and, kneeling in front of them, washed their feet. Through his personal example he taught them that authority needs to be used to serve others, and that the greatest among them should be willing to do the humblest of the tasks. He laid down, so to say, new lofty standards for His Kingdom. *“For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13, 15)*. Jesus emptied himself totally, taking the form of a slave and offering of his life for others.

### ***Miracles – Signs***

The miracles Jesus performed demonstrated clearly His authority and the distinct nature of the “Kingdom of God”. As recorded in the Gospels, most of His activities were miracles like exorcism, healing, exercising control over forces of nature and restoring life to the dead. These actions manifested the presence of the “Kingdom of God” and its special features. John narrates seven miracles which

Jesus performed, calling them not miracles but signs of the “Kingdom of God” He was going to establish. Two themes in particular – Life and Light - were conveyed through these signs.

### ***Exorcism***

It is generally agreed that of the four Gospels, the first one to be written is the Gospel according to Mark. The very first miracle this Gospel narrates is an exorcism (Mk 1, 21-28). The exorcism publicly declares that the world was under the dominion of Satan but the coming of Jesus signals the end of this dominion. This was publicly announced through the one possessed by the evil spirit. *“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God” (Mk 1, 24).*

The Gospels state that Jesus had come to destroy the kingdom of Satan. The exorcisms performed by Jesus and later by the disciples are continuation of Jesus’ victory over Satan, gained in the desert. The exorcisms He performed were like conquering the guard standing with weapons in front of the palace and liberating the people who had been enslaved (Lk 11, 21-22). The exorcisms should be seen as a sign of the presence of the “Kingdom of God”, Jesus said: *“But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Mt 12, 28).*

The actions of Jesus liberated people from the dominion Satan had established through sin. Demonic possession, from which one is liberated through exorcism, is only the most visible sign of that dominion. The influence of evil on man’s value system and faith is much more deep and dangerous. Liberation from this kind of slavery cannot be

achieved through exorcism alone; it needs evangelization, which equips persons with new convictions and enables them to appropriate and live according to the values of the Kingdom of God. Through evangelization human person is liberated from the dominion of evil. This is what happens when we believe in the Good News. It was for this purpose that Jesus chose the twelve Apostles and sent them out with authority (Mk 3, 14-15).

### ***Healing***

Most of the miracles Jesus performed were related to curing people of their ailments. Jesus healed people of all kinds of illnesses. There is a basic understanding in the bible that the root cause of all sickness is the influence of sin and its after-effects. This view is found in the Gospels also. However, Jesus did not say that all the illnesses are caused by sin. In fact, Jesus affirmed that sickness was not necessarily caused by a person's sin or the sin of his ancestors. In response to the question of the disciples concerning the man born blind Jesus said: "*It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him*" (Jn 9, 3). However, He did not deny the fundamental relationship between sickness and sin. Besides, He also links healing with forgiving sins.

Once a paralyzed man was brought to Jesus. Because of the huge crowd they could not get close to Him. So, they removed the roof of the house and lowered him near where Jesus was sitting. The first thing Jesus said to him was, "*Your sins are forgiven*" (Mk 2, 5). Healing was a sign of total liberation Jesus granted to people. Through forgiveness of sins, people are freed from the dominion of sin and Satan.

Disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus and asked Him whether He was the one long awaited by the People of Israel. The signs Jesus listed as response deserve special attention. *“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them”* (Lk 7, 22). Healings are signs of spiritual rebirth, signs of new life.

The blind received not only physical sight but also inner understanding and faith, so much so they could recognize Jesus to be their Saviour which led to their decision to follow Him (Mk 10, 52; Jn 9, 35-39). When the dumb receive hearing, they listen to the Good News. When the lepers are cleansed, they become members of the “Kingdom of God”. The dumb, when their hearing and capacity to speak are restored, proclaim the Gospel. Human nature, weakened and distorted by sin, would be purified and strengthened. This is the “Kingdom of God” that Jesus proclaimed.

### ***Dominion over Powers of Nature***

People are generally scared of natural disasters such as earthquake, severe storm, or great waves from the deep Sea. Nature possesses dreadful powers. Aside from the people of the past, even men of today, including those who are proud of their ability to discover new elements in Nature, become panicky when faced with natural disasters. They rush to seek shelter in safe places. Over the last ten years, world has faced countless number of Tsunamis, storms, floods, earth-quakes and wild fires. The latest disaster to befall us is Covid-19 which brought the entire world to a standstill.

In this context, the power that Jesus exhibited over

natural forces is astonishing. The Sea of Galilee is not a large sea, but a lake, about 13 Kilometres wide and 25 Kilometres long. The storm that emanates from the mountains could destroy the calmness of the Lake and the great waves could drown the boats of the fishermen. The disciples were experienced fishermen and used to such inclement weather, yet they feared that their boat might sink any moment to the bottom of the sea. They grew scared and cried out to the Lord who was sleeping peacefully.

It was during this episode that the disciples discovered another side of Jesus. He was sleeping peacefully but when He heard their cries, He opened his eyes and with just one word calmed the storm. The squall ceased and the sea turned tranquil again. In wonder the disciples said to one another, *“Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”* (Mk 4, 41).

On another occasion, Jesus sent His disciples to the Sea where a storm was about to break out. This was when Jesus had multiplied bread in the wilderness, and people wanted to make Him king. The disciples appeared happy about the move and wanted to support them. Jesus, therefore, sent them to the other side of the Sea to separate them from the people. The wind was against them and the Sea was turbulent. Though they tried hard to row the boat, they could make no progress. All on a sudden, they saw a man walking over the waters of the Sea. They grew scared thinking it to be a ghost. But soon they realized that it was Jesus, their Master. *“But immediately he spoke to them, saying, “Take heart, it is I; have no fear”* (Mt 14, 27).

The disciples asked each other, ‘Who could He be who controls the storm and the Sea, and walks over the waves?’

With a single word He stills the Sea and controls the wind! There can be no doubt that He is God'. With all the fears eliminated and the powers of evil conquered, another facet of the Kingdom of God came to be revealed. The power of God is manifested in the Kingdom of God.

### ***Food***

Food is a basic need of human beings. This is hinted at in the creation account that tells us that God created plants before creating birds, animals and man, in order to provide them with food. However, the challenge of food will remain so long as man's hunger stays unsatiated. Even today one third of humanity goes to bed without adequate food despite the claims that the world has developed and most nations have become self-sufficient in food production. Millions of children perish due to malnutrition. Death by starvation does not make any news in our country. Against this background, one of the miracles Jesus performed deserves special mention.

The first temptation Jesus faced in the wilderness was to turn stones into bread and satisfy His hunger. He overcame the temptation by proclaiming the importance of the Word of God (Mt 4, 3-4). But, when thousands of people were hungry, He multiplied bread and satisfied their hunger. This is the only miracle recorded in all the four Gospels. The very fact that all the four Gospels narrate this incident demonstrates the importance Jesus and His disciples accorded to food. However, before performing the miracle, Jesus asked the disciples to share what they had.

The disciples, who felt helpless did not know that they were with someone who could multiply five loaves of bread into several thousand loaves. The miracle was also a sign

of the Kingdom of God – providing food to the hungry. Everyone had to share all that they had with others. The bread then was multiplied and all had their fill.

The miracle has to take place first in the hearts of people, learning to regard others as brothers and sisters. When love rules our hearts, Kingdom of God would become a reality, both in the individuals and in the society. *“There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need”* (Acts 4, 34-35; 2, 44-45).

Marriage celebrations are times of great joy, with abundant supply of food and drink being the norm. It will be a matter of big shame to the family if by chance food or drink runs out. That is precisely what happened in the wedding feast at Cana. However, the family was saved from disgrace by the timely intervention of Mother Mary. At her prodding, Jesus transformed the water in six jars, each of which could hold 120 liters, into wine and brought immense joy and relief of the marriage party. This is yet another facet of the Kingdom of God, namely to provide food for the children of God to be happy, and not let them slide into any stress. This, according to the evangelist John, is the first miracle Jesus performed (Jn 2, 11) which shows the importance Jesus attached to people’s dignity and well-being.

### ***Life to the Dead***

All of man’s hopes and efforts, cries and lamentations finally end up in death. People have been trying various ways to escape from the jaws of death. But death remains

an inscrutable reality, a threat and an enemy, refusing to submit to any of man's ploys. It was against this backdrop that the biggest manifestation of the Kingdom of God occurred. The Gospels report that three different persons were raised from the dead.

Jesus brought back to life a 12-year-old girl a few minutes after her death (Mk 5, 35-43). The sole admonition given to the father of the girl was, "*Do not be afraid, only have faith*" (Mk 5, 36). Jesus spoke to the deceased girl in Aramaic and His words were, "***Thalitha Kum***", which means "Girl, get up". She got up and walked. Jesus asked the parents to give her food, possibly to emphasize that food is essential to maintain life. All this was part of the proclamation of the "Kingdom of God".

The widow of Nain had only one son. Even before the pain of losing her husband had subsided, her son, her only hope, also died, leaving her completely heart-broken. Jesus met the widow at the city gate as the body was being taken to be buried. Jesus had walked 35 Kilometres from Capernaum to reach Nain and it would seem that His only aim was to restore the boy back to life. He had come to Nain after healing the servant of the centurion. After raising the boy to life, He restored him to his mother and then He continued his journey (Lk 7, 1-17).

Jesus said to the mother who was walking behind the body of her son, "*Do not weep*" (Lk 7, 13). It was not an empty word because Jesus had all the powers to solve the problem. In fact, at His command, the young man sat up. He began to speak as well, as if to make it abundantly clear that what was happening was real and not a hallucination of the viewers. When the son was restored to the mother,



her tears stopped and her face turned joyous. This is the Kingdom of God, which brings one from death to new life and from tears to joy.

Lazarus of Bethany had breathed his last three days before Jesus arrived in that place. His sister Martha told Jesus that the body might have started to decay and there would be a foul smell. But the Heavenly Father heard the prayer of Jesus. Words of Jesus crossed the tomb and reached Sheol, the abode of the dead. The dead man walked out of the tomb. Only John has reported this event (Jn 11, 1-44). It was done in front of many people, all of whom had witnessed the miracle. What emerges as Good News is that the Kingdom of God is life and joy.

The greatest of all the miracles of Jesus was yet to take place. The Jewish leadership had Jesus crucified, accusing Him of blasphemy and terrorism. They closed the tomb with a huge rock, sealed it and set up guards so that no one could steal the body. But the seal was broken. The tomb was open and the body was not found in the tomb. The truth is that the One who died had risen, defeating death. This was a fact confirmed even by His enemies (Mt 27, 62-65; 28, 11-15). This is the Kingdom of God. Death, the biggest enemy of man, had been conquered by Jesus through his own death and resurrection.

The resuscitation of the dead that Jesus performed gives a foretaste of the resurrection that all people will receive. The three people whom Jesus resuscitated died again. But the Resurrection of Jesus is different. He has conquered death for ever and will not die any more. Resurrection of Jesus is guarantee of the resurrection and life without end which would be granted to all. This will be the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

## ***Kingdom of God unfolded through Parables***

The life of Jesus provided an inkling to the unique characteristics of the Kingdom of God. The miracles turned out to be a proof of its presence. But then, what exactly is the Kingdom of God? For an answer, we have to turn to the teachings of Jesus. Jesus started His public ministry announcing that the Kingdom of God was at hand (Mk 1, 14-15). He invited everybody to enter the Kingdom.

He taught the people about the Kingdom through many parables. What was unknown to them was explained with things they were familiar with. The word “Parable” is the translation of the Greek noun “*Parabole*”; the verb is “*paraballein*” The verbal form consists of two words: a preposition “para” and “ballein” which means ‘to place a thing in parallel to another’, like the rail tracks. Parables are stories from daily life used to explain the mystery of the Kingdom of God. Jesus used parables to teach invisible divine truths in a way that ordinary people could understand. He made extensive use of parables. There are more than forty of such parables in the Synoptic Gospels.

A parable usually communicates a single message, to which details are added to provide substance to the story. The Parable of the Sower is an example (Mt 13, 1-9). Three fourths of the seeds sown were lost, but the balance one fourth fell on good soil which brought forth grains, a hundredfold. This parable highlights an important feature of the Kingdom of God. No fruits are produced in many people who listen to the Word of God, because of their laziness, selfish interests or the opposition they face on account of the Word. However, many others who listen to the Word of God make their lives fruitful. The message

of the Parable is that there is no need to feel disappointed or desperate. Like this, the other parables also have only one central message.

A parable can be interpreted by drawing attention to certain details of the story. The parable then gets to be referred as an “Allegory”. We can see a clear example in the way the parable of the sower is interpreted in the gospels (Mt 13, 18-23). The seed is the Word of God, the Sower is Jesus and the field is the human heart. Variations in the field represent the various attitudes of people. Through the Parable, Jesus exhorts us to produce good fruit. *“As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Lk 8, 15).*

Besides parables and allegories, Jesus often communicated His message using similitudes. The Log and the Speck in the Eye (Mt 7, 3), Treasure and Heart (Mt 6, 19-21), camel and the Eye of the Needle (Mk 10, 25) are examples. Proverbs also can be included in this category. For example, *“Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God” (Lk 9, 60).* *“Where the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together” (Lk 17, 37).* The first saying means when a call is received for discipleship, respond to the call immediately without worrying about other matters. The second proverb exhorts not to feel anxious about the end of the world. When it is due, it would happen. Jesus has used many examples and proverbs, to explain the “Kingdom of God”.

Comparisons with familiar things and practices also can be included in the category of parables. *“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; if he does, the*

*patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but new wine is for fresh skins” (Mk 2, 21-22).*

At times instead of similarity, contradictory character and behaviour are used to demonstrate an idea. This is the case in the example the Widow and the Judge (Lk 18, 1-8). Here is a judge who fears no one and has no sense of justice. He does not even fear God. Even so, because of the constant pestering and requests of the widow, he would relent and would execute justice for her. Can we not expect far, far higher levels of goodness from God, who is boundless mercy and love! This parable was meant to encourage us to remain steadfast in our prayers. The same idea is conveyed through the Parable about a man who came seeking bread at mid-night at his neighbour’s door (Lk 11, 5-9). These are some broad observations about the parables. We shall now look more closely at the special features of the “Kingdom of God”.

### ***Small Beginning***

The picture of the Kingdom of God Jesus portrayed ran counter to the expectations of the people of His time. They were expecting a king like David to come who would conquer all the nations of the world and establish an empire of Israel. This was their dream. But Jesus spoke of the mustard seed, which was smaller than all other seeds, but which would grow to be bigger than several other shrubs to the extent that birds could build their nests on them. Behind this parable one could notice the picture of the huge tree Nebuchadnezzar saw in a dream (Dan 4, 10-28).

A Carpenter from Nazareth with a small band of followers, largely fishermen, initiated a project small like a mustard seed but which, when it grows, would encompass the entire earth and all the people.

### ***Inner Force***

The Kingdom of God would grow and bear fruit, not because of external forces but by the power of God. The seed that grows by itself (Mk 4, 26-29) conveys this message. Without much ado, it grows slowly and creates total change in life. This is the nature of the “Kingdom of God” Jesus had envisaged. The truth was demonstrated through the examples of Salt (Mt 5, 13) and Yeast (Mt 13, 33).

### ***Overcoming obstacles, it would produce fruit***

Do not despair even if there is opposition or persecution and it looks as though everything is lost. Do not lose hope but maintain your faith as you proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Live according to its precepts. People who receive the Word with a pure heart would produce fruit. This truth is conveyed by the Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat (Mt 13, 24-30; 36-40). At the same time, Jesus has taught us that we are not to judge others. Judging people should be left to God. It is possible that what we consider as weeds today might turn out to be wheat tomorrow.

### ***The Newness of the Kingdom of God***

A person has to change his attitude to be able to understand and to accept the Kingdom of God that Jesus has initiated. This was Jesus’ call from the very beginning. “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent,*

*and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1, 15). He also asked them, “Do not stitch new cloth to the old cloth while instructing them not to put new wine in the old wine skin” (Mt 9, 16-17). In short, Jesus’ instruction was that there should be a change in the attitude, which would, in turn, induce change in the value system and behaviour. Kingdom of God is a reality which entered the world through Jesus Christ.*

### ***It is Precious***

A person will have to pay a big price if he aspires to become a member of the Kingdom of God. However, the price will be seen, not as a loss but as a gain. To illustrate this, Jesus cited the example of the field where there was a hidden treasure. The man sold all that he had to buy that piece of land. Similarly, a person would sell everything he has to own the precious Jewel (Mt 13, 44-46), which would bring him joy of owning something he regards as very special. People will have to leave their family for the sake of Christ. By becoming a member of the Kingdom of God they risk losing their very life. They will, however, do this happily because what they gain is immensely greater and it would give them immeasurable joy (Lk 14, 25-27).

### ***Merciful love of the Father***

Several of the parables teach that God, our Heavenly Father, is waiting to receive us and to transform all the people into God’s family and be called His children. One of them is the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The younger son left home with his share of the possessions. But the father waited for his return eagerly, day and night. When the wayward son returned finally after squandering all his wealth, his father received him with great joy and celebrated

his return with a grand banquet. The Parable throws light on the heart of the Heavenly Father and His Kingdom.

The elder son refused to enter the house, but the father went out and tried to persuade him to join in the celebration. God the Father wants all the children to be with Him (Lk 15, 11-32). There is a place in His heart even for the corrupt Tax Collector and the Pharisees who had put on the mask of the righteous. Therefore, change your attitude and return to the Father, Jesus is telling us. Discard guilt feelings and masks, and come to the Father with the attitude of a child of God.

### ***Love that seeks the lost***

God desires that no one should be lost because there is room for everybody in His heart. The shepherd who seeks the lost sheep and the house mother who searches for the lost coin (Lk 15, 3-10) are symbols of the Father who rejoices over a repentant sinner. When we find a lost person or a precious thing, we experience, not anger or hatred, but joy and happiness. The “Kingdom of God” is a symbol of great joy.

### ***Joy – Celebration***

Jesus spoke of banquets and celebrations with considerable excitement. By making use of the Parable of the Banquet to explain the “Kingdom of God”, He gives importance to sentiments of joy. Comparing the heavenly kingdom to a banquet was a common practice among Jewish Rabbis. “When one of those who sat at table with him heard this, he said to him, *“Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!”* (Lk 14, 15). However, banquet in the “Kingdom of God” has a special significance.

It is not a celebration held for the rich but for those rejected by the society. Therefore, in this Heavenly banquet, preference will be given to the poor. In the fullness of time when the Kingdom of God achieves its perfection, some unexpected things will happen. Many who take pride believing they are inside the Kingdom might actually be outside, while those who think they are outside might actually be inside the Kingdom (Lk 14, 16-24). Therefore, we have to discard pride and unwanted complexes of all kinds and come down to the level of the lowly. Honour the lowly persons viewing them as valuable, respect them and assist them in every way needed, extending justice.

### ***Gratuitous Gift***

The Kingdom of God is the free gift offered to us through Jesus Christ. *“Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”* (Lk 12, 31-32). God is a loving Father who would fulfil all our genuine needs. We cannot pay for His love because it is a gratuitous gift.

### ***Be ready to pay the Price***

Have no anxiety about the future, but instead trust the Providence of God. He would protect us and inspire us to share with others all that we have. Find security, not in your accumulated wealth but in the protection of God. This would enable us to remain sensitive to the needs of others and to solve the problems of the community to the best of our ability. *“Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that do not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroy”* (Lk 12, 33).



## ***Narrow Door***

The “Kingdom of God” is a free gift to us. There are parables which say that it is like a house or a city. It is not a gift given to the lazy. The inheritors are those who, with a firm mind, renounce everything else and seek the “Kingdom of God” with hard work and constant vigil. *“For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Mt 7, 14).*

Jesus, coming after John the Baptist, proclaimed the “Kingdom of God”, gaining entry into which is mighty difficult. *“The law and the prophets were until John; since then, the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently” (Lk 16,16).* Entry into the Kingdom may seem impossible for human beings but those who trust in God can attain it.

For the sake of the “Kingdom of God” we have to renounce not only our wealth but even our family. *“If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14, 26).* Being a disciple means to become a member of the Kingdom of God, and we are not to place any obstacle on our way. “Hate” merely means that we shall not let anything to come in the way of our following Jesus.

## ***The essence is Mercy***

The values of the “Kingdom of God” are truth, justice, freedom and brotherhood. Above all, the ultimate foundation of the Kingdom of God is being perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect. *“You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5, 48).* This is how

Mathew presents Jesus' exhortation. But Luke explains it a little differently. *"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful"* (Lk 6, 36). *Mercy conveys the maternal quality of God.*

*"Rahamim"* is the Hebrew word for "Mercy". *"Rahamim"* is derived from the word *"Rehem"*, which means the womb of a mother. Mercy is the attitude a mother has to the foetus in her womb as the unborn baby is totally dependent on her. The baby has nothing other than what the mother gives. Such dependence creates feelings of tenderness and mercy. A man was lying wounded on the road. The priest and the Levite ignored him and went their way. But a Samaritan, who came that way, felt compassion, descended down from his donkey and assisted him. This is compassion, the essence of the "Kingdom of God".

To the measure we give, we shall receive mercy in return. If we do not show mercy to the needy, we will not be able to receive God's mercy. *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy"* (Mt 5, 7). If we do not show mercy, we cannot expect mercy from God. This was the warning contained in the Parable of the "Rich man and Lazarus" (Lk 16, 19-31). Foolish is the person who gathers wealth, without showing mercy and without sharing it with those in need and thinks that he can enjoy it forever. This truth is illustrated by the parable of the rich fool (Lk 12, 16-21). *"But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So, is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God"* (Lk 12,20 -21)?

Being mindful of the fact that all that we have is a gift of God, we should share our wealth with those in need. Only those who share can participate in the Kingdom of God.

## *Produce Fruit*

The Kingdom of God is a free gift from God, which at the same time entails also a mission. Jesus taught this through several parables, especially, the Parable of the Talents. The ones who worked hard to multiply the Talents they had received, grew worthy of being entrusted with greater responsibilities, whereas, the one who chose to bury the Talent, was deprived of even what he had received earlier (Mt 25, 14-30; Lk 19, 12-27). We must work hard without making demands. The Kingdom of God is not a right but a gift. This truth is made known by the parable where persons who came to work at the first hour and those were hired at the eleventh hour were paid the same remuneration (Mt 20, 1-16).

Work hard, but don't make demands. If one does not produce the result God expects, everything will be lost. This truth is communicated through the Parable of the Wicked Tenants. (Mt 21, 33-44). Jesus told this parable at a time of conflict with the leaders in Jerusalem. The vineyard stands for the Kingdom of God. The parable is a warning to the leaders of the people of Israel. If they forget that they are only tenants with the duty of cultivating the land and try to take possession of the vineyard by killing the only son of the owner of the vineyard, they will be bringing total destruction on themselves. Behind the picture of the vineyard, tenants and the only son there stand the Kingdom of God, the leaders of Israel and Jesus the only Son of God. *"He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons"* (Mt 21, 41). The same truth is driven home by the story about the Fig Tree which did not

bear fruit and was therefore cut down and burned in the fire (Lk 13, 6-9).

### ***When would it come?***

Jesus was asked when the Kingdom of God would come. His responses suggest three possibilities.

#### ***a) Right Now, in our Midst***

*“Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Lo, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Lk 17, 20-21).*

Jesus corrected the misunderstanding among the people that there would be great events to herald the coming of the Kingdom of God. He did not jump from the top of the tower as challenged by the devil (Mt 4, 5-7), nor did he give any miraculous signs as demanded by the Pharisees (Mt 12, 38-39). Proclamation of the Good News and invitation to repent are indicated as the signs of the Kingdom of God (Lk 11, 29-32).

The statement that the Kingdom of God is in your midst can be interpreted in three ways. The word “midst” deserves special attention. The Greek word “*Enthos*” is translated as “in your midst”. This could mean that the Kingdom of God is in the midst of those who were listening to Jesus. Some would say that the Kingdom of God has arrived in our midst through Jesus because He is its embodiment. Some others say that the Kingdom of God will become a reality in the lives and relationship of the people who accept the Word and live according to it. There are still others who argue that neither of these interpretations is correct. “*Enthos*”

should be translated as “within” meaning ‘inside you’, ‘in your hearts’. Therefore, we must consider the Kingdom of God as a spiritual reality rooted in the hearts.

There is no need to choose between any of these interpretations. They could be considered as complementary interpretations because The Kingdom of God is a reality that gets rooted in the hearts and makes radical changes in the value system, which in turn becomes evident in the social relationship. The Kingdom has come into existence with the coming of Jesus. It grows in the human hearts and leads to the formation of new communities. That is the visible fruits of the Kingdom, the community that lives by the values of the Kingdom.

Life of Jesus provides ample proof that the Kingdom of God has come on earth. His presence and activities demonstrate its existence. This is what yeast does. It makes the entire flour in the pot ferment without much ado and without attracting attention. The Kingdom of God which grows through persons would renew the world in a similar manner. Therefore, let go of the worry about when the Kingdom of God would come. Instead, accept its values and live by them.

### ***b) At the End of the World***

The Kingdom of God has already become a reality here on earth. But this alone will not be a fully satisfactory answer to question, when the Kingdom of God will come. The end is yet to come that will completely renew everything. The History would end and that would be the end of the world. That is when the Son of Man will come in all His glory.

The book of Revelation presents the end of the world

as a new creation. *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men... And he who sat upon the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev 21, 1-5).*

All weeping and tears will cease. The powers of evil will be completely eliminated. The dead will rise. The earth will be renewed and death will be no more. Heaven will come down and God will live with people. This is the New Heaven and New Earth; this is the Kingdom of God in its fullness. *“Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power” (1 Cor 15, 24).*

It is God who, through Jesus, brings lasting victory to the world. Jesus did not offer a definite answer to those who asked Him about the end of the world and the second coming of the Son of God. All that Jesus said was that it would happen but the time has been kept a secret by the Father. Further revelation was not part of Jesus’ mission (Mk 13, 32-33).

### ***God would ask an account of our lives***

The Kingdom of God is a gratuitous gift. Man is required to seek it first. He must seek justice by acting justly in accordance with the commandments of God. *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” (Mt 6, 33).* ‘Seek the Kingdom of God’ means to live according to God’s Will. ‘Seek justice’ also means the same thing. Each one, at the moment of his

death, will be asked to present before God an account of how he has used the gifts received. This is usually called the particular judgment. In addition, at the Last Judgment also everyone will be asked to present an account of life.

In this regard, the Parable of the Dishonest Manager (Lk 16, 1-8) is a good illustration. Another illustration is the Parable of the Talents (Mt 25, 14-30) and of the Master, who arrives at an unexpected time and examines the servants, to determine who among them has to be rewarded and who deserves to be punished (Lk 12, 35-37. 42-46). These parables are examples of persons being asked to present an account of their doings.

Jesus has, however, provided a clearer and a more detailed description in the parable of the Last Judgment (Mt 25, 31-46). When the Kingdom of God is revealed in its fullness, Jesus will come as Judge and everyone will have to present an account of his life before Him in public. Based on that account, eternal life or eternal punishment will be awarded.

### *c) Today through the Brethren who seek our help*

The basis for the Final Judgment is love and care shown to our fellow human beings. Faith has to be expressed in action, which means rendering assistance to those who deserve. Persons who are hungry or thirsty, having no clothes, refugees and prisoners deserve to be helped. We should be able to recognize the face of Jesus in them. The attitude shown towards such people will serve as the basis for the “Last Judgment”. The Final Judgment will entirely depend on our decision and the life we lead today.

*“Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom*

*prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ ... And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25, 34-41).*

### ***Be Prepared***

The three ways of the coming of the Kingdom that Jesus spoke about, imply that we should remain vigilant at all times. We do not know when the world would end. However, one thing which is certain is death. With death, opportunities to make decisions and to make changes in life would cease. Since we do not know the day or the hour, we have to remain vigilant at all times. This has been driven home through several parables that Jesus told His disciples.

The Parable of the “Ten Virgins” is a powerful example (Mt 25, 1-13). The coming of the bridegroom refers to the Last Judgment and also to a person’s death. *“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour”* (Mt 25,13). The answer Jesus gave to the disciples, who asked him about the time of His Second Coming and establishment of the Kingdom of God, is presented by Mark as the Eschatological Discourse (Mk 13). During that discourse Jesus warns His followers several times, five times to be precise, to remain vigilant (13, 9. 23. 33. 35. 37), because the hour of His coming is unknown. We



should therefore constantly keep awake and be vigilant without losing faith and hope, even amidst difficulties and persecutions.

Jesus comes to us with the Good News of the Kingdom of God, not just at the time of death but all of our life. Listening to the Word of God, participating in the Sacraments, promptings received from the Holy Spirit and meeting with people deserving of our help, are all occasions provided to us to respond to God's call. In all these situations, it is Jesus who comes into our life with the desire to grant us membership in the Kingdom of God.

## Summary

St. Paul has defined the Kingdom of God in a single sentence. *“For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”* (Rom 14, 17). This is a reiteration of what Prophet Micah had already said. To the question of the devotee, what offering he should make in the Temple, God responded through Prophet Micah. *“He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”* (Mic 6, 8).

For Prophet Micah, the values of the Kingdom of God are justice, mercy and humility. This is what man should practice in his life. Jesus' message was no different. He rebuked the Pharisees who gave importance to the details of the law but not its essence. *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done,*

*without neglecting the others” (Mt 23, 23).* The Kingdom of God is not of this world. It is a Divine reality. Therefore, its values are different.

This was the vision Jesus had before Him when He taught the disciples to pray “Let thy Kingdom come”. The petition, “Thy kingdom come”, points to the fact that the Kingdom of God has not yet fully become a reality on earth. Therefore, we pray to the Father to make it a reality. Father, let all your children live in justice, peace and lasting joy. May everyone come to know your mercy and fidelity. This will nurture in all people a sense of justice, mercy, humility and fidelity. This is the second petition.

# 7

## Your Holy Will

*“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6, 10).*

This is the third petition in the Lord’s Prayer as reported in the Gospel according Mathew, but it is not found in the Gospel according to Luke. What could be the reason? What is the “Will of God”? If God is the Creator and Protector of all that exists, can anything happen against His will? Do we then have to say that all violence, cruelty and crookedness occur in accordance with God’s will? Above all, how can we come to know the Will of God? Has God given us any indication?

There are several questions having no easy answers. The first thing which comes to our mind is the issue of differences in the two versions of the Lord’s prayer, recorded by Mathew and by Luke. Mathew employed the literary style common in the Semitic language by repeating the same idea in parallel verses. Luke did not follow it because this Semitic style was not popular among his readers. This might shed some light on the idea of “Will of God”.

### ***Kingdom and the Will of God***

The petition *“Let thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* stands parallel to the other petition *“Let thy Kingdom come”*. This would imply that *“The Will of God”*

is a repetition of the idea of “*Kingdom of God*” in other words. Hence it could be argued that all what we have seen in our analysis of the concept, Kingdom of God, are repeated here in different words. But such a conclusion is not fully correct.

Synonymous Parallelism is a literary form wherein what has been said in the first sentence is repeated in different words in the second sentence, with greater detail and different nuance. Hence, the *Will of God* could be considered as an explanation of the *Kingdom of God*.

In the analysis of the petition “Let thy Kingdom come” we have seen that it is a state where the plan of God is fully executed. With the coming of Jesus, the “Kingdom of God” has come on earth but its presence and influence is not yet complete. This could be said about the “Will of God” also.

At the same time, we need to think of the relationship between “Heaven” and “Will of God”. What is Heaven? What is “Will of God”? How could we discern it? Is all what is happening on earth in accordance with the will and plan of God? We have to find answers to these questions too.

## ***Heaven***

We could give a simple definition of heaven as the state in which the salvific plan of God is fully realized. It is not a place but a state of being. Those who lived and died in total submission to the Will of God are called saints. Those who follow the Will of God all the time are known as angels. These two are also referred to as those who live in Heaven. We could see a symbolic depiction of heaven in the New

Jerusalem which descended down to the earth, as described in the book of Revelation.

*“I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21, 3-4).*

The state, in which God dwells with people and people dwell with God forever, is heaven. There will be no more death and parting, pain and sadness, weeping and tears. Heaven is presented in the Bible as a state of perpetual happiness. Hence, “As it is in heaven” would point to such an experience. When the Will of God is fulfilled to perfection, such a state would emerge. ‘May that state come soon’ is the meaning of the prayer.

### ***Will of God on Earth***

This petition involves three things: a) The Will of God has not been fulfilled on earth b) God can make His Will become a reality on earth c) The petition involves a request to have the Will of God fulfilled on earth at the earliest. To be able to understand of these three things, we have to know what the Will of God is.

If we study the Bible, we would get greater clarity about the Will of God. The Doctrines of the Catholic Church would also help discern God’s Will regarding people and societies. The Canon Laws and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), especially the explanations about the Lord’s Prayer (CCC 2822-2828) provide a brief, precise picture about the Will of God.

## ***Will of God in the Bible***

God has a plan for the entire Universe, the earth and its people as a whole and for every individual. This has been clearly stated through Prophet Jeremiah. *“For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope”* (Jer 29, 11). This message is directed not only at the People of Israel, but at all the nations in the world. God’s plan for humanity is the welfare of all the people. But, how would this project be fulfilled? We have to listen to the Commandments and the other directives of God.

## ***In the Creation Account***

In the first pages of the Bible, we see two creation accounts (Gen 1 -2). In the first account (Gen 1,1-2,4a) man is portrayed as the pinnacle of creation. At the conclusion of creation, God created man in His own image and likeness. God’s plan for man is described by the sacred author. *“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth”* (Gen 1, 26). At the first reading of this passage, one could get an impression that dominion over all creatures was God’s plan for man. However, the goal God has for people would become clearer if we examine the words of God closely.

God’s intent was not to extend unrestrained domination to people over all creatures. Man was to operate as manager and representative of God on earth. He should neither become a slave to any creature, nor allow anything to make him a slave. Man should submit to God’s Will and

show total obedience to Him. Man's limitations as well as his mission will be made known to him through the plan of God. This would prevent him from idol worship and enslavement. In the process, his dignity and responsibility as a representative of God are highlighted.

Also, in the second creation account (Gen 2, 4b-25,) where it is said that God formed man from dust and breathed life-giving breath into his nostrils and as a result, man began to live, a similar plan can be found. It was a time of joy and prosperity for man. He was in Paradise where he could experience the presence of God. In the task entrusted to Adam in the paradise the Will of God is revealed. *"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die"* (Gen 2, 15-17).

Man should be God's representative on earth. He has an obligation to the Universe, to himself and to his life partner and above all to God, the Creator. This is the Will of God. As long as he observes God's instructions, he could live in Paradise. If he disobeys, he will lose the Paradise. Paradise is a symbol of heaven. Sadly, man disobeyed God and lost the Paradise.

That man could violate the command of God is evidence of the freedom and dignity he enjoys. At the same time, all the miseries he experiences originated from the fact that he disobeyed God. When the command was given, God also gave man freedom, knowing that he might misuse it. Man is the major cause of the disasters we experience today, man,

acting against the Will of God. The first man, Adam, ate the forbidden fruit, and by such an action, lost the Paradise. This is a symbolic way of communicating that God did not desire the situation but permitted it.

### ***A New Beginning***

Man broke the command of God and, as a consequence, lost the paradise. He became alienated from God, from Nature, from others and from his own self. Once man distanced himself from God, Nature became his enemy. In a manner of speaking, they hated each other. Life became miserable and ended in death. In this situation God willed to enter into human history. God decided to start everything anew with the call of Abraham. God's Will was revealed in the commands God gave to Abraham, who was then living in Haran.

*“Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves” (Gen 12, 1-3).*

Leave everything you earned and proceed to a place I will show you. The goal was not clear, but God will show it to him, that is the first part of the call. The second part of the call that reveals God's Will for Abraham is a promise - a great nation, a land for himself and universal salvation. God desired that all the peoples of the world should attain salvation through Abraham. Abraham heard the call, obeyed God, and left his home leaving behind all the security it had provided.



The journey was not easy. The destination appeared to be farther and farther away. The promise was repeated, and God revealed His Will twice. *“When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless” (Gen 17, 1).* God walked with Abraham and guided his path. We must also be aware of His presence in our lives, which will make our lives pure and secure.

Abraham was put through an acid test, through which the Will of God was revealed. *“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (Gen 22, 2).* All the promises made to Abraham were centred on his only son, Isaac. It was through him the dream of having a great nation, a land of their own and universal salvation was to become a reality. Ordering that the son be sacrificed as a holocaust seemed a cruel command and a negation of all the promises given thus far.

The sacred author does not tell us anything about the emotions and the internal conflicts of Abraham. He heard the command, obeyed the voice, took his son and went to Mount Moriah, which God had pointed out to him. There he erected an altar, arranged the logs, bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar. He took the knife to cut his son’s throat. At this point God’s Will was revealed once again.

*“By myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess*

*the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice". So, Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba" (Gen 22, 16-19).*

It was difficult for Abraham to understand and obey what was revealed as God's Will. However, he did not question God's command but obeyed Him, placing his trust fully in God's plan. This is the lesson we need to learn from Abraham: Trust in God and obey His commands, no matter how strange and unreasonable they might appear.

### ***God who guarantees freedom***

In the Salvation history, God's Will was revealed with greater clarity during the Exodus from Egypt and then through the Covenant God made with the People of Israel on Mount Sinai. The People of Israel, who were the heirs of the Promises, were subjected to harsh slavery in Egypt. Sweat of the slaves mixed with their blood as they were tortured, cried out to the Lord from the field. This led to the revelation of God's Will in a powerful way.

God heard their cry and came down. He called Moses to be the leader and the liberator, gave him the staff, as a sign of authority and sent him to Pharaoh with the command: *"You shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me"; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son" (Ex 4, 22-23).* There is no doubt that God had accepted the People of Israel as His own People so that they would be free and no one would make slaves out of them.

God commanded that people be freed so that they can worship Him. This might seem as if they were made slaves of God. There are persons who raise such issues. Many people think that worshipping God amounts to becoming slaves of God. If that is true then can we say that God desires the freedom for all human beings?

An answer to this question will depend on the answer one gives to the following questions: *Who is God? What is worship?* We have to remember that God who sends Moses to Pharaoh is the one who declared that Israel is His first-born son. Before asking for worship, God reveals Himself as the Father. From this context it becomes evident that Worship is acknowledging someone as the source of one's existence and well-being, and the goal of one's life. True worship is accepting and confessing: *You are my Lord. I totally belong to you. Your Will is my rule of life. Being with you is my heaven.* Such is the attitude of the one who worships.

We are not to worship anything other than God, be it a person, money, desire, or ideology. It will be plain slavery if we submit to any of them. God created man in His own image and likeness and gave him life with His breath, not to make a slave out of him but to raise him to the level of being His own child. Therefore, worshipping God is not slavery but partaking of the freedom and joy of being a child of God. It is for this purpose that God freed the People of Israel from slavery.

This was not intended as an isolated case of some particular nation. What God did for the People of Israel, He desires to do for all peoples. Israel has the duty to proclaim to all the nations and peoples of the Earth that God wants to

adopt every human being as His own child. This is implied in the preface of the Sinai Covenant. *“Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel”* (Ex 19, 5-6).

The commandments proclaim aloud that God desires the integral welfare of all peoples. The aim of all the religious and social laws that follow the Ten Commandments is the same. The collection of laws known as “Code of the Covenant” Ex 21-23, “Holiness Code” (Lev 17-26) and “Deuteronomic Code” (Dt 12-26) have all the same purpose.

At the same time, they have to remember the paths of the past, the liberation God gave them, the protection they enjoyed and teach these truths to their children. *“Only take heed, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children’s children”* (Dt 4,9).

The greatest commandment God gave them is that of love. *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might”* (Dt 6, 4-5). This is the most important law, the foundation and the essence of all the laws. This commandment is very close to what Jesus revealed as the Will of God.

### ***Freedom to choose***

Even as God has revealed this law, man has the freedom to obey it or to go against it. This freedom makes

him different from, and sets him above, all other creatures. The book of Deuteronomy highlights this freedom and encourages the people to make their decision. *“See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil... I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him; for that means life to you and length of days, that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them”* (Dt 30, 15-20). We must obey the commandments, not out of fear or compulsion but out of love. This is the only way to remain close to God, the source of all life.

Man has the freedom to choose but God would guide him to make the right choice. What to choose, which choice would lead to life and would be good for the person, will all be revealed to him. *“And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it”* (Is 30,21). In addition to the written laws, God guides us through His inspiration. Hence we need to listen, obey and then make our decisions accordingly.

### ***Misleading interpretations***

*“You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel”* (Ex 19, 6). The purpose of choosing and appointing the People of Israel as a priestly nation and a holy people, and guiding them on the right path, was that they should come to know the love of God and share it with other nations. They should be the witnesses of the true God and a light to the world. This indeed is the goal of all the laws God has given us.

God desires that all must come to know Him, and realize that they are called to be the children of God. As the children of God, they must live in accordance with the Will of God and follow a life style befitting their status. But the persons, chosen to be witnesses to God's love, lost sight of their goal and wavered from the path of justice.

The duty of priests is to be a mediator between God and people. They must teach the people who God is, motivate them to live in accordance with the Commandments, bring before God the prayers and offerings of the people and bless them in God's Name. The People of Israel must perform this task before other nations. For this purpose, God had selected a tribe, the tribe of Levi, and some of them were anointed as priests.

Aaron was the first High priest chosen and anointed by God. But instead of leading the people on the right path, he collected gold from the people, melted it, formed a calf out of it and placed it on the altar for them to worship (Ex 32, 1-29). This was a great fall. Worship of God was replaced by idol worship. Idol formed by human hands was installed in God's place. Instead of living in accordance with God's Will, Aaron projected his own will as God's Will. Instead of organizing the life of people in line with God's Commandments, he reduced their worship to external observances.

### ***Empty Rituals***

Spirituality based on observances was what the priests had taught the People of Israel. Sacrifices, qualities of the sacrificed animal, the way sacrifice has to be made, prayers offered and songs sung were given more importance than the attitude of the person offering the sacrifice. When the

Tent of Meeting was built and the Ark of the Covenant was placed in it, people believed that God's presence was in the Tent. When Solomon built the Temple and placed the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, their belief was that the invisible God dwelt amidst the darkness.

### ***Vanishing Presence of God***

God, who called and walked with Abraham, God who liberated the People of Israel from slavery and led them through the desert to the Promised Land, is now believed to dwell in the inner dark room of the temple, called the Holy of Holies. People came to the Jerusalem Temple seeking God's presence, with costly offerings. God, who was now dwelling in the house built for Him by Solomon, came to be considered as a glorious king like Solomon, even more, as the King of kings. As they used to bring offerings to the king, people had to bring offerings to God also. It could be animals, grains, blood or oil as there were different kinds of sacrifices. Everything was offered to please God and to receive favours.

The priests gave leadership to this kind of religiosity. They encouraged the people, assuring them that God would be pleased with their offerings. Gradually the Temple and those engaged in service in the Temple grew rich. As Jerusalem became the religious and political capital the king grew in popularity and authority over the people. Eventually, religion and religious observances became tools to dominate and amass wealth.

People continued to visit the Temple with great devotion, participate in the services and return back to their places joyfully. But the 'god' who had gained entry into their hearts was not the God who came down hearing the

cry of the slaves, but the ‘god’ who, they believed, was pleased with their offerings and would shower blessings on them in response and in proportion, to their offerings.

### ***God who Destroys the Temple***

*“I saw the LORD standing beside the altar, and he said: “Smite the capitals until the thresholds shake, and shatter them on the heads of all the people; and what are left of them I will slay with the sword; not one of them shall flee away, not one of them shall escape” (Amos 9, 1).*

Historically Amos is the first of the writing prophets who has a book in his name, He preached mostly in the main worship centre of the Northern Kingdom, Bethel, in 760 B.C. In Israel, religious observances had become so corrupt that people gave importance only to rituals, while neglecting the essential part of worship, which is “justice”. Prophet Amos exposed the false religiosity that provided a smoke screen to hide all their brutality and exploitation. He invited the people to return to the original experience (Amos 5, 4-7) reminding them that God does not desire their celebrations and sacrifices.

*“I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen” (Amos 5, 21-23).*

The priests had placed great importance on religious observances and rituals, but Prophet Amos termed all these as empty and meaningless. The leaders could not take his critic and threats as the voice of God. In fact, the High



priest Amaziah approached the king with accusations against Amos, and with his support forbade Amos from speaking at Bethel, which was the royal shrine. *“And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there, but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom” (Am 7, 12-13).* People did not care to find out what God was telling them through Prophet Amos.

Amos criticized the meaningless observances severely. There was only one thing God wanted, the prophet told them: *“Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5, 24).* Justice will reign when one lives in accordance with the Commandments which reveal the Will of God. *“Sedaqa”* is the Hebrew word for justice. Man is called to remain just in his relation to God, to the brethren, to Nature and to oneself. When this happens there will be justice for all, and Shalom, peace, will be established. When this justice is denied then there is the *Mishpath*, the right judgment, to be executed through court order that guarantees justice to those who had been denied.

This is what God desires from the People of Israel. Religious rituals and practices that do not help to create and maintain a life style that promotes justice and righteousness is not in accordance with God’s Will. This was the stance taken not only by Amos; almost all the true prophets proclaimed this message aloud.

The last Prophet Malachi (450 B.C) also gave importance to justice, by taking a stand against religious practices which do not promote justice. *“Oh, that there were*

*one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire upon my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand” (Mal 1, 10). Special protection should be given to the poor (Mal 3, 10). There should be reconciliation in the society which will flourish if we love and forgive one another (Mal 4, 5-6). These are the things God desires from people.*

### ***What is important is Love***

Prophet Hosea, who came just after Amos (750-730 B.C.) is known as the Prophet of the love of God. He was a priest and he preached in the northern kingdom, Israel. Hosea severely criticized the religious observances which had strayed away from the right path. He was critical of the priests who had been anointed to guide the people but had failed to fulfil their responsibilities.

*“Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel; for the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds and murder follows murder” (Hos 4, 1). After proving that all the commandments of the Covenant had been violated, the prophet goes on to demonstrate who is responsible for this violation.*

*“Yet let no one contend, and let none accuse, for with you is my contention, O priest...My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children” (Hos 4, 4-6). People are getting ruined because*

of ignorance. The priests who, forgetting their mission of teaching the people and guiding them according to the commandments of the Covenant, concentrated on rituals and festal celebrations, are responsible for the tragic situation. What should be done now?

Should they continue to offer more sacrifices or add to the celebrations? Celebrations are not what God wants. *“I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings”* (Hosea 6, 6). A real conversion, a return to the original spirit is required; the sweat, blood, tears and cries should be remembered. God liberated the people from slavery and guided them through the desert. If they now come back to the Lord, He will give them the power to discern the will of God and obey the Commandments. *“I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy”* (Hos 2, 19).

Justice, truth, love, mercy and fidelity are needed to come to know God and to live in accordance with His will. These are the gifts God would give just as a bride-groom gives dowry to the bride at the time of wedding. Only through love can one know God.

### ***Justice, Mercy and Humility***

Prophet Isaiah, known as the prince of prophets, was a contemporary of Hosea. He preached in the Southern Kingdom of Judea, mainly in the capital city, Jerusalem. He portrayed the sacrifices offered in a society where justice is denied to the poor as an insult to God.

*“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams*

*and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of he-goats... I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me... When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood”* (Is 1,11-15). God does not want any of these things. He does not eat the meat of animals or drink their blood. He does not want to hear the noise of their celebrations. What, then, is the offering which will be pleasing to God?

*“Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow”* (Is 1, 16-17). Faith in God and devotion to Him should be expressed in their dealings with others, especially with those in need. Widows and orphans stand for the persons of the lowest strata in the society. By administering justice to them, one will be doing God’s Will.

People returned from Babylon with great expectations but they found themselves trapped in great difficulties. Poverty and hunger forced many to sell themselves as slaves. Wealth was accumulated in the hands of a few who did not consider exploiting the poor as a crime. In the absence of a king in Israel and the situation of foreign domination, the religious leaders had the total control over the people. They concentrated on worship through religious rituals, fasting and penance, prescribing meticulous laws for each and every celebration, all the while ignoring the poverty and misery of the people and supporting the few rich in the society.

It was in this situation that God revealed His Will through Prophet Isaiah, Generally, known as Trito Isaiah and issued warnings to them. To the people who complained that fasting and prayer did not produce the expected results, God said through the prophet that their prayers were not being answered because they were seeking only their own wellbeing when they fasted.

*“Why have we fasted, and thou seest it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and thou takest no knowledge of it?’ Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high” (Is 58, 3-4).*

After making it clear that *God* does not desire fasting which is merely a religious observance, the Prophet tells the people what God really wants. *“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? (Is 58. 7-7).*

No one should enslave the people God has adopted as His own children. All would receive what they need for their life. They were liberated by God so that they could be free and independent. *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves; and I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect” (Lev 26,13).* His Will is that everyone must have equal justice, rights and respect.

The message of Prophet Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah was not different. To the devotee who was ready to make any sacrifice to please God and obtain God's blessings, God spoke through the prophet. *"With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"* (Mi 6, 6-8).

God is speaking through the prophet to a people who were sacrificing even human beings in order to please God and obtain His favours (2 Kings 16,3). In the words of Micah we can see a summary of what God had revealed through Amos, Hosea and Isaiah. All that God desired from the people was justice, mercy and humility. These virtues are required to nurture human relationships. Without these no one can please God. All the prophets unanimously proclaimed this message. 'Act justly, show mercy to the needy and be humble before the Lord'. Being humble means renouncing arrogance and accepting the reality for what it is.

### ***In the Wisdom Literature***

There are seven books known as Wisdom Books, namely, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach. These Books through advices, speeches, proverbs and prayers, give a clear picture about the Will of God. Out of them, eleven Psalms known as wisdom Psalms (1, 37, 49, 73, 91, 112,

119, 127, 128, 133, 139) deserve special attention because they present in detail what God's Will is and what kind of a life God desires. Psalm 119 with 176 verses, the longest chapter in the Bible, is a very clear and beautiful description of God's will that is expressed through the Law.

Psalm 15 is a Liturgical Psalm which sets forth God's Will in very clear terms. It is presented as the question of the devotee and the answer of the priest as to who is worthy to come in the presence of God. The priest standing at the door of the Temple gives the official answer. He starts with a general statement that one should walk blamelessly which is further highlighted in ten points. 1. Do what is right 2. Speak only the truth, 3. Do not slander, 4. Do no evil to friends 5. Do not take reproach against neighbour 6. Do not speak ill of others 7. Do not mingle with the wicked, 8. Be true to your words, 9. Do not lend money at interest, and 10. Do not accept bribe.

These injunctions are relevant at all times and they are expressed by the Psalmist as the Will of God. Those who follow these norms can experience the presence of God. Those who do not follow these injunctions, have no right even to set foot in the Temple compound. One should not lose sight of the implications of these instructions, even today.

A life of obedience to God is the true devotion. This would not allow us to act unjustly or to support any one who acts unjustly. It would instead prompt us to deal firmly with persons who act unjustly and to intervene in a creative way to ensure that justice is done to those who deserve it. Here it may be appropriate to consider the warnings contained in the book of Sirach.

*“If one sacrifices from what has been wrongfully obtained, the offering is blemished; the gifts of the lawless are not acceptable... Like one who kills a son before his father’s eyes is the man who offers a sacrifice from the property of the poor. The bread of the needy is the life of the poor; whoever deprives them of it is a man of blood. To take away a neighbour’s living is to murder him; to deprive an employee of his wages is to shed blood” (Sir 34, 18-22).*

The teaching needs no interpretation. It is clear that those who seek the Will of God need to pay attention to these warnings. Acting otherwise and then trying to please God through worship, sacrifices and celebrations will be tantamount to killing the son in front of his father. This teaching compels us to examine our conscience to see if we are committing any such crimes.

### ***Misplaced Priority***

Cyrus, King of Persia, defeated Babylon in 539 B.C. and became the unrivalled leader of the Middle East. Cyrus decided to grant freedom to all the peoples who had been enslaved by Nebuchadnezzar. He issued an edict in 538 B.C. allowing the people to return to their native places if they so desired. The prophecy of Isaiah was thus fulfilled. Many of the captives from Israel returned to their native places.

However, those who returned did not find the prosperity and joy that the prophets had promised. Instead, they faced utter poverty and misery in their own land. The religious leaders claimed that the misery was caused by the wrath of God, because of the failures of the people in their religious obligations. They advised the people to pay meticulous attention to religious practices. In spite of the



rigorous implementation of the religious laws, the misery of the poor only worsened, as can be seen from their complaints.

*“Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brethren. For there were those who said, “With our sons and our daughters, we are many; let us get grain, that we may eat and keep alive... “We have borrowed money for the king’s tax upon our fields and our vineyards. ...we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have already been enslaved; but it is not in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and our vineyards” (Neh 5, 1-5).*

It was during this time around 548 B.C., that a Scribe named Ezra came to Jerusalem with a group of captives from Babylon and embarked upon a serious religious renewal program. He assumed leadership for the radical transformation of the People of Israel. His contention was that all the miseries fell on the people because they broke the Law of God while acting against the Covenant God had made with them. He believed it and proclaimed it loudly. The source of infidelity was that they mingled with the Gentiles and adopted their religious practices. Ezra was fully convinced of these viewpoints and he taught them to all the people, indeed very passionately.

### ***Religious Reform under Ezra***

There was only one solution, cut off all relationships with the gentiles, starting with marital relations. Those who had married gentile women were forced to divorce them immediately (Ezra 9-10). This was followed by strict control over religious laws and observances. Everyone must obey

all the directives rigorously. The priests were instructed to enforce the religious regulations meticulously. People must return to the source, celebrate sacrifices and festivals strictly according to the precepts of the Covenant. Most of the Old Testament books, especially the Pentateuch, were completed during this time. Those who seek to know the Will of God must read these books, particularly the book of Leviticus, people were told.

Ezra attached great importance to the external observances but failed not pay attention to internal renewal. What he advocated was strict observance of the laws. Strict definitions and correct interpretations were made available to people. The disciples of Ezra were formed into a group who came to be known as Scribes. Their duty was to interpret and apply the Law in the various situations of daily life and teach the people.

There were various kinds of sacrifices and related observances. Detailed study was carried out in order to determine how the laws should be applied and observed. The instructions were explained in detail and were executed strictly. The lament of Prophet Jeremiah, "*How can you say, 'We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us'? But, behold, the false pen of the scribes has made it into a lie*" (Jer 8, 8) turned into a reality. The laws God had given to safeguard freedom became a heavy burden to the people. Priests came to believe that they alone were following the Will of God to perfection.

People had forgotten the lesson they had learnt during the Babylonian Captivity that they were called to be a light to the nations. Moving away from the Gentiles, they withdrew into the ghettos they had created for themselves,

believing that they were a holy people. They stayed on in a dream world, giving all the importance to religious observances, which they regarded as the Will of God.

### *Zeal of the Pharisees*

Antiochus IV, the king of Syria, who ruled over Israel (B. C.) took on the name Epiphanes which means “God Manifest”. He proclaimed himself to be God, issuing an order to the people in his kingdom that they should worship him as God. The people of Israel faced a serious problem. Disobedience could invite severe punishment. Many obeyed out of fear, though unwillingly, without resistance, but a group of people decided not to obey the king’s orders, even if it meant persecution and death. They called themselves Chasidim which means “holy”. Later they came to be known as Pharisees. Their life, dress, etc. were different from those of others and so people called them Pharisees, which means “those who are set apart”.

They pledged to obey all the laws, both the written laws and the traditions of their fathers without any exception. This was their resolve and they observed them diligently. They believed that, by doing so, they were obeying the Will of God. People, not so diligent in observing the laws, were regarded as sinners and cursed. This attitude reflected in their daily life and inter-personal relationships.

Such was the religious situation that existed in Israel when Jesus arrived on the scene. The Pharisees who observed the laws faithfully, taught others to do likewise, and tried to execute the law rigorously, firmly believing that they were the religious leaders and the only ones acceptable to God.

## ***Jesus and the Will of God***

*“In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (Heb 1, 1-2).* Word is the means of expressing oneself. The Bible refers to the Commandments through which God expressed His will as the “Words”.

Going a step further, in the New Testament we see that God reveals Himself through the Word. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn 1, 1).* The Word became God Incarnate in Jesus Christ. *“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (Jn 1, 14).* It was this Word which revealed God and the Will of God with authority. *“No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (Jn 1, 18).*

The words and deeds of Jesus were such that they revealed God and His will. The Gospels have recorded that Jesus constantly searched for and listened to God’s Will for Himself. In this case, Jesus is a model in seeking God’s Will so as to live by it. Before teaching us to pray that God’s Will be done, Jesus made efforts to know God’s Will and to surrender to it without any hesitation, showing us thereby how we should pray and live.

## ***Jesus obeying God’ Will***

During His Baptism in the River Jordan, Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit and the Father proclaimed, *“You are my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”*

(Mk 1,11). Immediately after Baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness for fasting and prayer. It was an intense search to discern the Will of God and to surrender to it. Bread, miracle and power were used by Satan as temptations which Jesus rejected by overcoming them (Mt 4, 1-11).

During His public ministry Jesus faced similar temptations many times but He submitted to the Will of the Father which enabled Him to gain victory over all the temptations. An example can be seen in the response that Jesus gave to the Jewish leadership who sought an unusual sign from Him (Mt 12, 38-42; 16, 1-4).

Jesus lived his entire life in accordance with the Will of the Father which He considered as more important than food. This is clearly communicated in the response given to the Tempter: “But he answered, *‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’*” (Mt 4,4). The same message is conveyed in the conversation with the disciples who came to Him with bread near the well in Samaria: “*Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work’*” (Jn 4, 34).

Jesus lived his whole life fully according the Will of the Father. Apart from the Father’s Will, Jesus did not have any will or plan of his own. This becomes evident in the conversation with the Jewish leadership. “*Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise’*” (Jn 5, 19). “*I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me’*” (Jn 5, 30).

Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world as a human being to reveal God's Will and fulfil it. He clearly taught us what God's Will is. *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day"* (Jn 6, 38-40).

Leading His life in accordance with the Will of the Father was not easy for Jesus. All through His public ministry he had to deal with conflicts, especially towards the end of His life. The Synoptic Gospels narrate the internal conflicts Jesus faced in the garden of Gethsemane. John, though, portrayed them in a different way.

*"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour"? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour"* (Jn 12, 27). The "hour" (*hora* in Greek) points to the glorification of Jesus through the passion, death and resurrection. Though Jesus was aware that the final hour would be filled with great suffering, it might appear that He had, towards the end, some hesitation to face the suffering. *"Father, glorify thy name. Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again"* (Jn 12, 28). This prayer is an indication that Jesus had totally surrendered to the Will of the Father.

Something similar happened during the prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. *"And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch". And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were*

*possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt"* (Mk 14, 33-36). Due to the intensity of the inner conflict, *"His sweat fell on the ground as drops of blood"* (Lk 22, 44). The cup and the hour refer to the same thing, to the dreadful suffering Jesus had to undergo.

Jesus' attempt to discern the Will of God gives deep insight into His personality. Jesus is a man and God at the same time. The capacity to understand things and to make appropriate decisions is an essential part of human nature. This is more than true of the Divine nature as well. In the one Person of the Son of God both the human nature and the Divine nature were fully present. The temptation to avoid the intense suffering originated from the human nature but Jesus surrendered finally to the Will of the Father. The sweat which turned into blood was an indication of the intense struggle between the human nature and the Divine nature in him.

The temptation did not end in Gethsemane but reached its climax on the Cross. On the one hand, Jesus faced the challenge to come down from the Cross and prove his Divinity (Mt 27, 39-42). On the other, there was total silence from the part of God the Father. Jesus took upon himself the sins of the world so much so, as Paul writes to the Corinthians: *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"*. (2 Cor 5, 21). The cry from the cross reveals how acute this conflict was: *"And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* (Mk 15, 34). The depth of faith and the

intensity of suffering needed to discern the Will of God and to surrender to it become evident in this cry. By recording the cry of Jesus in Aramaic (Mk 15, 34) the Gospel shows that they are the very words uttered by Jesus.

This, however, was not the last word of Jesus from the Cross. John records: *“When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, “It is finished”; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (Jn 19,30).* And Luke says: *“Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last” (Lk 23, 46).* Finally, Jesus entrusted His life into the hands of His Father. This is an example to His disciples, to enlighten them about the response Jesus expects from them. Like Jesus, they should pray intensely to know the Will of God. Once it was revealed, they must surrender to God’s Will to the extent of even offering their very lives. Before teaching this by words, Jesus taught them by His actions. He demonstrated to them how to find the Will of God and to live by it.

### ***Call to Obey the Will of God***

All the four Gospels have recorded the teachings of Jesus as to how God’s Will is revealed. The essence of the Gospel of Mathew, presented through five sermons, is contained in one sentence: *“You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5, 48).* After presenting the Beatitudes (Mt 5, 1-12) and the call to glorify the Heavenly Father by becoming the “Salt of the earth” and the “Light of the world” (Mt5,13-16), through six examples Jesus shows the new dimension he gives to the old laws. The call to imitate the Father is nothing but a summary of all the invitations.



We would become worthy of being the children of God, which is both a gift and a mission, when we become perfect like the Father. We have to realize the dignity of being the children of God and lead a life befitting our status. But, can the sinful people who are weak with numerous limitations become perfect like the Heavenly Father? Luke has responded to this question. *“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful”* (Lk 6, 36). The perfection of the Father that the disciple should try to imitate is His mercy, compassion.

The parables of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10, 25-37), the Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, the house Mother who searches for the lost coin, and the Father who waits for the son who was lost (Lk 15) are examples of the teachings about the mercy of the Father. The example of the Father’s mercy needs to be followed by the children. This would result in mercy getting extended to all, and all will have joy and lasting peace. This is the Will of God revealed through Jesus.

### ***Heart is the Centre***

The teachings and commands of Jesus unmask the hypocrisy and emptiness of the cultic religiosity that was prevalent among his contemporaries, especially the Pharisees. *“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice. They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger”* (Mt 23, 2-4). The following seven invectives, each of which starts with the lament “woe to

you”, dramatically expose the hypocrisy of their teachings and more so of their lives.

Whatever they do is only to make a show before the people. Even when they “sit on Moses’ throne” (Mt 23, 2) and wear garments of honor (Mt 23,5), their hearts are full of greed and self-indulgence (Mt23, 25). The exclamation “Woe to you” is not a curse, but a lament. “Alas” would be a better translation of the Greek “*Ouai*”, which again is the translation of the Hebrew “*Hoi*”. It expresses the pain and grief of the one who sees the miserable situation of the people one loves.

What God wants is nothing of this. While giving excessive importance to the details of the rituals they discard and forget what is essential: “*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others*” (Mt 23,23). Here we get a clear indication about God’s Will. Justice, mercy, fidelity- this is what God wants. A religiosity bereft of these values and practices that do not promote them do not obey the Will of God.

### ***Love is most Important***

A total change of heart will be needed and the change should be evident in daily life and decisions. It was for this purpose that the precepts of the Covenant in the Old Testament were given. The prophets continued to proclaim this truth and called for a radical conversion of hearts. Jesus summarized the content of the commandments in just one word, “Love”. When someone asked him what was the most important law to attain eternal life, Jesus replied by

mentioning this commandment (Lk 10, 25-28; 18, 18-20). 'Above all, love God and your neighbour as yourself'. This reply is a combination of the two bible passages, Dt 6, 4-5 and Lev 19, 18.

The Gospel according John has recorded how Jesus presented the Commandment of love as a new commandment, the sum total of the Will of God. *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another"* (Jn 13, 34). *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"* (Jn 15, 12-13).

The Will of God revealed by Jesus is to forget oneself and to offer one's life for friends. Our inspiration is God's love. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"* (Jn 3, 16). 'Love of God' rooted in deep faith is the foundation of this Commandment. Making a firm decision and putting in constant efforts to fulfil it, will amount to taking up our cross and following Jesus. We must not let any obstacle to come in the way which might separate us from the love of God (Rom 8, 35-39). In such a life the will of God will be done as in heaven. For this we need God's help and that is why Jesus asked us to pray ceaselessly.

### ***In the life of Early Church***

*"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth"* (Acts 1, 8).

The resurrected Lord gave this mission and command to the Apostles before Ascension. In their continuing mission, it will be the Holy Spirit, the power from High, who would guide them and strengthen them while revealing God's Will. The fulfilment of this promise is recorded several times in the Acts of the Apostles. The Book narrates numerous instances of how the disciples discerned the Will of God, took decisions and organized the life of the Church accordingly.

The Apostles were united in prayer and waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit: *"All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers"* (Acts 1, 14). They waited to hear the voice of God, even as they were engaged in incessant prayer, relying on the intercession of the Blessed Mother. This was just the beginning. While waiting, a decision they made enabled them to know God's Will.

Jesus had chosen twelve Apostles to form the New Covenant Community, the Church, which replaced the twelve tribes of Israel. Judas, one of the twelve Apostles, betrayed Jesus and then he committed suicide. The Apostles decided to choose someone in his place as they believed it to be the Will of God. They prayed for guidance to decide whom to choose. They sought the opinion of the community who had suggested two names. They prayed to God and then *"They cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles"* (Acts 1, 26).

Many such incidents can be found in the Acts of the Apostles. The practice continues in the Church even to this day. The process involves collecting the views of the

community, praying to understand God's Will and then making the choice by casting votes. The tradition started in the Jerusalem Council (15, 1-29). Decisions are taken in this manner at all the levels of the Universal Church, from Ecumenical Councils to Parish Council.

We can see such method being used in making personal decisions as well. For example, God said to Philip to share the Good News with the man from Ethiopia (Acts 9, 26). Another example is seen in the life of Saul. He had set out to exterminate the Christians but the Christ experience he had at the gate of Damascus changed him and made him a very different man. Saul became Paul. Persecutor became an ardent apostle of Christ. After that every step Paul took was in accordance with the inspiration, and the Will of God (Acts 16, 6-10; 18, 9. 21; 20, 22).

### ***In the Teachings of the Apostles***

The Letters the Apostles wrote to the Churches they had founded form twenty-one books of the New Testament. All of them explain in detail how we can know the Will of God and the necessity to obey them. A few examples are given here.

Paul in his First Letter to the Church in Thessalonica outlines his teachings and the ways to know the Will of God. *"For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from unchastity"* (1 Thess 4, 2-3). This is clearly a statement about the Will of God for all: your sanctification.

There are two dimensions for holiness, one existential and the other ethical. Persons, places and things, which

are set aside for God, are holy, meaning that they belong to God. This is the first dimension. The second dimension is that persons set aside for God must live only for God, adhering to the laws He has set for them. When the two dimensions merge together in a person, he becomes a holy person, a saint. In his first letter to the Corinthians, the way he addresses the community gives a hint to these two aspects of holiness: “*Paul, ...To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints*” (1 Cor 1, 2).

How can one stay holy in accordance with God’s Will? The “Will of God” is explained in greater detail at the end of the First Letter to the Thessalonians. “*We beseech you, brethren, to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil*” (1 Thess 5, 12-22). The exposition of the Will of God concerning us is so clear and vivid that it does not need any further clarification

The Letter to the Hebrews was written keeping in mind Jewish Christians who were facing religious persecution. Here Jesus is presented as the role model of discerning and following the Will of God, highlighting how difficult it was for Him to do that. “*In the days of his flesh, Jesus*

*offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered” (Heb 5, 7-8).*

This would remind us of the prayer in Gethsemane. Sweating with blood, Jesus sought the Will of the Father which He obeyed till death. Jesus is the example for us. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews states, quoting Psalm 40, 6-8, that Jesus came into the world to fulfil the Will of the Father. *“Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said... “Then I said, ‘Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God... And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10, 5-10).* This description about the surrender of Jesus to the Will of God is similar to what Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians: *“Being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2, 8).* God, no doubt, desires total surrender to His Will. However, surrender does not end in death but leads to resurrection and a new life. The proof of this is Jesus’ own resurrection. *“Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name” (Phil 2, 9).*

Leading a life in accordance with the Will of God is not easy as it imposes control over many of the natural inclinations. Such a life involves severe sufferings and offering of one’s life as a witness to the love of God. It means following the example of Jesus, as exhorted by St Peter. *“For it is better to suffer for doing right, if that should be God’s will, than for doing wrong” (1 Pet 3, 17).* *“Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought, for whoever has suffered in the flesh*

*has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer by human passions but by the will of God” (1 Pet 4, 1-2).*

Suffering will be part of our life because our nature is dominated by sin. Therefore it will be much easier to live according the natural tendencies rather than obey the commandments of God. There takes place a conflict in the soul of man, between good and evil, between the Will of God and selfish desires. This is what Paul dramatically depicts in the Letter to the Romans: *“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...So, I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of is” (Rom 7, 15-25).*

We can recognize in these verses the inner conflict every person undergoes. This is the context of the petition *“Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven”*. Prayer is meant to help the person to deal with this conflict. As Paul concludes the lament with the assertion *“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom 7, 25)*, he conveys the meaning and depth of this prayer with the hope that, through Jesus, God will strengthen us.

## **Summary**

*“Let your Will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* is parallel to the petition *“Let thy kingdom come”* This might



be the reason why Luke omitted this petition. Here is a summary of the insights we gather from searching for the meaning of this petition.

The cruelty, exploitation and violence that are so widespread today are not compatible with the Will of God. Man is given the freedom to know the Will of God. He can either obey God's commandments or reject them. God created man in His own image and likeness in order to be His representative on earth. However, what God demands of him is not obedience of slaves but affectionate self-surrender of children.

The Will of God was evident already in the creation narrative. God desired that man should be His representative on earth. Cultivating and protecting the garden was a key feature of this responsibility. At the same time, there is also the possibility that man, forgetting his representative character, might try to become the master. Here we can see the dignity of man, his freedom; at the same time freedom is also the root of his fall. Unfortunately, man forgetting his place, acted as if he was the master of the garden. He misused his freedom, and in so doing, he brought about his own downfall. He tried to become like God, and the result was that evil entered into the world. From this point onwards, there will be conflict between God's Will and the will of man, between good and evil.

Though man can still come to know God's Will, the power of evil established dominion over him in such a way that he finds it impossible to live according to that Will. The Bible describes how man is liberated from that slavery step by step. God revealed His Will to man in various ways, most importantly through the Ten Commandments.

They contain prescriptions about the relationship between God and man, and the relationship among men themselves. But people failed to live by them. Gradually the spirit of worship was lost and people limited themselves to religious observances. Prophets tried to correct this attitude but religious leaders did not comprehend their warnings.

Jewish religion attached great importance to religious observances, projecting them as the Will of God. During the time of Jesus, these empty rituals guided the spirituality of the Jewish People. Jesus tried to enlighten them about the importance of adhering to the spirit, rather than the letter of the law. It is not enough that the outside of the vessel is cleaned but it is more important that the inside is cleaned as well. One should pay attention not only to what is being eaten but also to the thoughts occupying the heart. All the observances must be an expression of our inner spirituality. Jesus criticized the Jewish leadership for turning the law of God into a heavy burden for the people. God desires all the people to be His children. This is why Jesus taught the disciples to address God “Abba”.

Jesus, the Word of God who became man, has summarized the Will of God in one single sentence. “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another*” (Jn 13, 34). Jesus expressed the depth of God’s love. “*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*” (Jn 15, 12-13). “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*” (Jn 3, 16). While teaching, Jesus held out the love of God as the Will of God, and showed through His life what they

should do. *“Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done” (Lk 22, 42).*

God desires the good of all the people. All are children of God and therefore we are brothers and sisters to one another and should live in peace and harmony. While calling God “Our Father” we must recognize that we are all children of the same Father. This will bring joy to all, making the Kingdom of God a reality on earth. The face of the earth would be renewed (Ps 104, 30). The New Heaven and the New Earth would become a reality (Rev 21,1-4). Through the petition, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven, Jesus is teaching us to pray to the Father to hasten that day. The promise of Jesus, “Behold, I am coming soon” (Rev 22, 12), is an answer to this prayer. Therefore, keep on praying without getting tired or discouraged. Wait for the will of God to be fulfilled in the world, in my life and co-operate with God. We pray: ***Maranatha - Come, Lord Jesus.***

## 8

### Bread

The fourth Petition in the Gospel according to Mathew, and the third petition in the Gospel according to Luke, deals with food. However, there are some differences between the two versions. In Mathew it is, “*give us today our daily bread*”, whereas in Luke it is “*give us each day our daily bread*”. Which of these two is more faithful to what Jesus taught and why these differences? By teaching to pray for bread, isn’t Jesus reducing us to the level of beggars before God? Without hard work, will food be available? Does this petition teach people to become lazy? These are some of the questions being asked with regard to the petition for bread.

#### *Second Part of the Petitions*

The first three petitions in Mathew and the first two petitions in Luke emphasize matters relating to God, namely Thy name, Thy kingdom, Thy will. After invoking God as “Abba”, Father, the first petitions give importance to matters related to the Father. Though Name, Kingdom, and Will are intrinsically related to human life, their relatedness to the Divine is given more importance. But the next four (three) petitions directly address the needs of people, namely our bread, our debts, our temptations and our deliverance. Their relationship and their differences are evident in both the Gospels.

The most basic needs of man and the problems he encounters are included in the second part of the Lord's Prayer. Some tend to think that praying to God for bread makes man a slave and a beggar, which is totally meaningless. We pray to God, addressing Him as Father. Hence, it is not slavery or begging but presenting our needs to the father as a son or a daughter would. Children who narrate their problems to the parents are not viewed as slaves or beggars but are perceived as being affectionate and experiencing inner freedom with their parents. This is exactly what happens when we pray to God.

### ***Bread – Food***

The second part of the prayer that contains four petitions, starts with bread. Both Mathew and Luke present the petition in almost the same words, with a slight difference, as can be seen from the comparison given here below. "*Give us this day our daily bread*" (Mt 6,11). "*Give us each day our daily bread*" (Lk 6, 3).

### ***Daily Bread- Needed Food for the Day***

The petition "give us", as well as the object "our daily bread", is the same in both gospels, whereas the time element is different. In Mathew it is "this day" or "today", but in Luke it is "each day". This is how most of the English versions translate this petition. The gospels were written in Greek. The official Latin translation that is accepted by the Church is the one done by St. Jerome, called the Vulgata. When we check with the original text, and the first official Latin translation, that is used in the Latin Liturgy we find some more differences.

In the Greek version of both gospels, we have the same

word for daily bread-that is “*arton hemon ton epiouision*”, but in the Vulgata we have two different adjectives for the bread. In Mathew we have “*panem nostrum supersubstantialem*”, whereas in Luke we find “*panem nostrum cotidianum*”. The difference is seen in the translation of the Greek word ‘*epiousos*’. St. Jerome has used two different words for that one Greek word in the two gospels. It is difficult to understand why he used two different words for the same Greek word. However, an analysis of the word *epiousios* will provide an insight into this difference.

The word *epiousios* can have four different shades of meaning.

1. When the word is considered as deriving from a combination of two words- *epi+ousia*, it would mean “necessary for existence”. It would be the bread we need. This is the meaning St. Jerome has taken for the Mathean version of the prayer using “*panem nostrum supersubstantialem*” = “bread for our existence” or “bread we need”.

2. It can be considered as deriving from the combination of *epi+ten ousan+hemeran*. Then the meaning would be “for the current day” or “for today”. It is this sense the petition is usually translated as ‘daily bread’. St. Jerome has taken this translation for the Lukan version as “*panem nostrum cotidianum*”.

3. The third possible interpretation is that the words derive from “*he epiousa + hemera*”, then it would mean “bread for the following day”, or “the bread for tomorrow”.

4. There is still a fourth possible translation, taking it as deriving from “*epienai*”. Here after the prefix “*epi*” a slight change is proposed in the derivation of the word. Instead of the “*einai*” which means “to be”, or “to exist”,

another root, “*ienai*” is suggested. Then it would mean the bread of the future, the bread of the world to come, the eschatological bread.

Here the term bread gets a deeper, spiritual meaning. “Tomorrow” stands for the perfection of the Kingdom of God, pointing to the “New Heaven and New Earth”, and also denoting the second coming of Jesus. Here the prayer would be for the full realization of the Kingdom of God. Though not used frequently, this translation should not to be regarded as wrong, because bread or food denotes all that is needed for people’s life. To conclude, there is no need to decide which of the four translations is correct. All the four translations can be seen complementing each other.

### ***Today – Daily***

There is a difference in the two Gospels in phrasing the request for food, food we should always have. While Mathew writes “give us this day (today)” Luke writes “give us each day”. “Give us the food each day”. This difference can be seen in the original Greek also. However, in Latin, St. Jerome uses the word “*Hodie*” in both versions, meaning “today”. The indication of time “today” could point to a reality beyond time and space, valid for always. The Words of Jesus also refer to this truth. “*Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day*” (Mt 6, 34). This verse tells us that no one is to worry about tomorrow but instead we should surrender ourselves into the hands of God. The present is the most important moment and so just now we should pay attention to the present moment only.

Luke's mention of "Each day" points to the constant and unending Providence of God. There is nothing wrong in praying to God, who protects us always, to be with us every day. This is not to be understood as a sign of anxiety about tomorrow. Acknowledging that it is the Heavenly Father who gives us all that we need, we place our request before Him, in a spirit of freedom characteristic of God's children, to give us the food we need for the day.

Teaching of the Bible with regard to food is not limited to this single petition. The theme of "food" can be found in numerous places in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, especially in the teachings of Jesus. Food is the need of all the creatures on earth, not only of humans. We shall now proceed to look deeper into the meaning of this petition.

### ***Going Deeper***

There are four aspects with regard to the petition for "Food". a) Food is a symbol b) Food is a gratuitous gift c) Food involves a mission d) Food is a temptation. These four aspects will be studied with Bible as the basis.

#### ***a. Food is a Symbol***

We pray to the Father, 'Give us the bread we need for our sustenance and for supporting life'. That food is essential to sustain life is clearly set forth. All that is needed for the body is expressed in a single word "food". Not only man but also all the creatures - the animals, the birds and the plants - need food, that is made available by God. This reality is acknowledged through this petition. This is the first of the four levels of understanding the subject of food.

Man is different from all other creatures because he



has the capacity to think and make decisions. This enables him to lead an intelligent life. For human beings personal relationships have great importance because they live as social beings in a society, and not as isolated individuals. Human relationship is important for the growth of the society, which is dependent on food. When we add the prefix “our” to the word “food”, the social dimension gets conveyed.

Going a step further, “food” expresses the God-man relationship also. When we address God Father and make a petition to Him to give us bread, it assumes a spiritual dimension. “Bread” is turned into a Sacrament or a sign. It was in this sense that Jesus offered himself as bread which was broken for others during the Last Supper. *“I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn 6,51)*. According to Jesus’ command, when Christian communities bless and break bread, it becomes a Sacrament, conveying the spiritual dimension of bread (1 Cor 11, 17-34).

Bread is an essential element for the physical, social and spiritual life of the human person. This has to be borne in mind when we pray for bread. Bread sustains not only our physical life but contributes also to our spiritual and eternal life. It was in this sense that Jesus offered Himself as bread which was broken and shared. He was born in Bethlehem which means the “House of bread”. He still lives in our midst as bread from heaven in the Eucharist.

### ***b. Bread – a Gift***

Every living creature requires “food” to survive. Life is a gratuitous gift from God. This is a lesson which is

taught and reiterated time and again, from the first book of the Bible, Genesis to the last book, Revelation.

The theme of bread starts in the two creation narratives which state that bread is a gift of God. God created plants before creating all other creatures to make sure that they have food to survive. Plants were created along with the earth, minerals, water, air and light. God created everything the creatures need for their survival (Gen 1, 6-30). The first gifts God gave us are a place to live and food to nourish.

*“And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food”. And it was so” (Gen 1, 29-30).*

In the second creation account also, this idea is reflected. The body God created from dust was made alive with the breath of God, after which God created the Garden of Eden for man to live in. The sacred author presents this in a story form but he speaks about “food” in this way. *“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Gen 2, 16-17).* While declaring that food is a gift of God, certain conditions are placed which show that we must receive the gift in accordance with the command of God.

The Garden of Eden, which is also called the Paradise, is portrayed as the state of being with God. The Bible tells us that when the present world, which is under the

dominion of evil, will end, the New Age would begin. Then man will be in the presence of God again. God will be the “Tent” where man will dwell, and there he will not experience hunger or thirst (Rev 21, 1-4). The River that flows from the throne of God and the Lamb will enable trees to grow on both sides of the river. The fruits on those trees symbolise the life-giving bread God provides (Rev 22, 1-3).

There are numerous descriptions in the Bible about God giving food to man. From Egypt, the land of slavery, People of Israel travelled through the desert to reach the Promised Land where they could enjoy freedom. The desert was a place where there was no shade or water or food for their survival. God gave them water from the rock and showered Manna from heaven. They were asked to keep some “Manna” in the Ark of the Covenant as a reminder of that incident (Ex 16, 33).

Prophet Elijah was fed by the bread the crow brought for him (1 Kgs 17, 6). When the stream dried up, he was sent to a widow in Zarephath. God saved them by not letting the flour in her pot and the oil in the jar dry up, which helped her to give food to Elijah (1 Kgs 17, 8-14). All these events show that bread is a gift of God.

Through Joseph, Pharaoh was warned that there would be a famine and therefore they should gather and save food needed for the years of famine (Gen 41, 1-36). By the words of Elijah there was drought in the land for three and a half years. Then in response to his prayer God sent rain and the earth became fertile again (1 Kgs 17, 1; 18,45) All these incidents teach us that that food is a gratuitous gift of God.

Words and deeds of Jesus showed that bread is a gift from God. God's compassion and power were exhibited through the miracles Jesus performed. *"Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat; and I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way" (Mt 15, 32).* On two occasions Jesus multiplied bread to satisfy the hunger of those who followed him, thereby making it known that bread is a free gift of God, a gift God gives freely to the hungry.

Jesus provided food not only for the body but also for the overall wellbeing of the people. Before giving them bread, He taught them the Word of God and healed the sick. *"As he went ashore, he saw a great throng; and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick" (Mt 14, 14).*

While acknowledging that bread is a gift of God, we should not forget of the teaching about the attitude of the one who receives it. God, no doubt, knows all our needs but He desires that we should acknowledge our needs before Him and ask for help. God expects us to be grateful for the blessings we receive from Him and ask for help. God expects us to be grateful for the blessings we receive from Him. Thus the prayer for daily bread comprises three elements, namely petition, faith and gratitude.

### ***c. Bread – Mission***

That bread is a gratuitous gift of God is only one side of the story. The gift involves a mission as well. Bread is not a free gift that God gives to the lazy. Creation, the world and all its resources, are gifts of God. However, to deserve the

food that God gives, man needs to work. The mission can be viewed from four angles: work, moderation, sharing and protection of Nature.

### **Hard work**

*“The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it”* (Gen 2, 15). God’s gift along with the hard work of man makes the earth fertile and productive. Hard work is a great mission which enables us to participate in the creative activity of God. However, sin rendered work difficult and painful.

*“And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, You shall not eat of it, cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return”* (Gen 3, 17-19).

The salt of sweat is required to make bread. It might look like a curse but work is a mission entrusted to man. The earth and all the resources are kept alive by the breath of God. The earth requires also the work of man, who is created in the likeness and image of God because it is part of God’s plan to make the earth humane and divine.

The spiritual side of hard work also needs to be considered. Not putting in hard work, proportionate to one’s ability, is bad and sinful. Pointing to himself as an example, Apostle Paul gives an exhortation. *“We did not eat any one’s bread without paying, but with toil and labour*

*we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you. It was not because we have not that right, but to give you in our conduct an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: If anyone will not work, let him not eat” (2 Thess 3, 8-10).*

Production of bread is dependent not only on physical labour but on several other types of work as well. Contribution of intellectual, social and spiritual labour is no less important in the making of bread. Just as the body has many parts, but every part has a different function, works allotted to various people are different. When everyone performs the responsibility entrusted to them, we would then obtain what we need. This petition strikes at the very root of laziness which is rampant and growing in our land.

### **Moderation**

The Earth and all its produce are made for man and for the other creatures. However, availability of products is limited, which means everyone must take only what is needed for survival. There is a limit to the rights of individuals. Violation of this law has caused many problems to people and other creatures. Earth can easily provide to all what is needed for people but cannot cater to their greed.

What should have been made available to all is unfortunately being possessed and consumed by a tiny minority leading to want, poverty and famine. There has to be a curb on luxury. People with a consumerist mind-set seem to believe that everything on earth belongs to them. As a consequence, there is today a strange phenomenon, a spectacle of laziness and obesity on one side and deprivation and death because of starvation on the other.

There is an urgent need to develop an ‘ethic of enough’. Spirit of moderation is essential. Paul writes: *“If we have food and clothes, that should be enough for us”* (1 Tim 6,8). *“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”* (1 Tim 6, 10).

## **Sharing**

Sharing is motivated by love which prompts us to give willingly to others what they need from what we have. Merely letting people collect what is left over from our table is not in accordance with the spirit of this prayer. The Parable of the rich man who piled up riches not realizing that his end could be near (Lk 12, 16-21) and the Parable of Lazarus who died of starvation at the door of the rich man’s palace (Lk 16, 19-31) bear ample evidence to this truth. Through these parables, Jesus has taught us the importance of sharing.

Indeed, a sizeable portion of Jesus’ teaching is centred on the theme of sharing. Jesus has exhorted us to share what we have with those in need, without giving in to anxiety but trusting in the Providence of God. *“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys”* (Lk 12, 32-33).

The early Christians followed this instruction scrupulously and shared all that they had with one another, which brought them joy and peace. Their life is a witness to the love of Jesus to the world. *“And all who believed*

*were together and had all things in common” (Acts 2,44)  
“There was not a needy person among them, for as many as  
were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought  
the proceeds of what was sold” (Acts 4, 34).*

Sharing was a characteristic trait of the Christian community and should continue to be so always. Paul reminded the Church in Corinth about this after urging them to share generously with those in need. *“I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality” (2 Cor 8, 13-14).*

### **Protecting Nature**

Protection of Nature has great significance with regard to bread because God has entrusted the earth to the care of man (Gen 1, 26-28). *“The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (Gen 2, 15).* It is obvious that the Bible attaches great importance to the preservation of Nature. God did not grant man licence to use the garden as he likes or misuse the power he has. Rather, man is asked to take care of the earth as God’s representative. Towards this purpose, man must toil hard on the soil and protect it as willed by the Creator.

The first two chapters of the Book of Genesis emphasize man’s responsibility towards the Universe. Only if we act in accordance with the Will of God, food will be made available to all the creatures. Whenever we pray to God for our “daily bread” we should remember our responsibility in this regard.

Unfortunately, man who was given charge of the



Universe instead of protecting it, destroyed it. *“The earth is utterly broken, the earth is rent asunder, the earth is violently shaken. The earth staggers like a drunken man, it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and will not rise again”* (Is 24, 19-20). What Isaiah depicted in an apocalyptic language has become a reality today.

In season and out of season, rain pours down on the earth causing death and destruction. Temperature keeps rising steadily every year, melting the glaciers and the snow on the mountains. The earth appears to have lost its equilibrium. What Isaiah had prophesied has become a reality. Earth-quakes, which spread disaster all over the earth, have become all too common. Volcanoes are spewing lava into the skies ferociously and contagious diseases are striking hapless peoples with monotonous regularity. Drinking water sources are drying up and rivers have become contaminated. There are cracks in the ozone layer, created to safeguard people from the rays of the Sun.

Disasters are occurring one after another without interruption because man has been abusing Nature. It can boldly be said that greed of man has caused all this ruin to Nature. Scientists have diagnosed the cause of these disasters. The waste created by motor vehicles, electronic equipment etc. cause levels of pollution far more than the earth can bear. Discarded plastic waste coupled with the electronic waste suffocates the earth. By swallowing such waste, whales are dying in hordes. Air conditioners and similar instruments produce waste enough to convert the earth into a vast cemetery.

There are people who blame the Bible for man’s reckless dealings with Nature. It is argued that the Bible

has emboldened man to behave as he does, because the Bible tells that God has made man the master of the world (Gen 1, 26-30), putting everything under his feet (Ps 8,6-8) and giving him unbridled power over Nature, to deal with it as he chooses. But this is a baseless accusation. The truth is that God has mandated man, as His representative, to protect and maintain the earth, as a shepherd his flock and as a farmer his field.

The global problems are to a great extent caused because people have forgotten their responsibility towards the earth. When we pray to God for bread, we must bear in mind our responsibility to protect the earth. We should never forget that we are part of this world and that our survival and our wellbeing depend on the equilibrium of the nature.

#### ***d. Bread – Temptation***

*“And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread”. But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’” (Mt 4, 3-4).*

The sixth petition in the Lord’s Prayer is “Lead us not into temptation”. This is a direct confrontation of temptation. This subject will be discussed in detail later. For now, only the temptation created by “bread” will be the focus.

Temptation ultimately is the instigation and desire to break the Commandments, to act against the Will of God and to rebel against Him, and thereby to become like God, or equal to God. Various circumstances give rise to temptations. But all the temptations are caused by Satan, the evil power. What is frightening is the fact that bread,

given by God to sustain our lives, could become a cause of temptation. Hence, constant vigilance is required.

Jesus after the baptism at Jordan, where he received the anointing by the Holy Spirit and heard acknowledgement by the Father that he is His beloved Son, went into the wilderness to prepare Himself for the public ministry through fasting and prayer. He was hungry and needed food. It was in this context he faced the first temptation. In the desert, there are plenty of stones and the easiest way to get food was to turn those stones into bread and satisfy his hunger. As the Son of God, he has the power to do it.

This is a temptation that has much deeper implications than what strikes first. By doing this miracle he will not be just satisfying his own hunger, but can satisfy the hunger of the entire humanity. The first danger implied here is the attempt to reduce all the needs of man into the material bread, and by doing so one can gain control over the world. Bread becomes a means of domination. This is one aspect of the temptation.

However, acting to meet the personal desires without seeking the Will of God, or rather taking one's desires as the ultimate criterion for making decisions is tantamount to going against the Will of God. The response of Jesus reveals the true colour of the tempter; at the same time, it teaches how to conquer temptations. The Word of God was far more important than the material bread.

The temptation for bread did not start with Jesus. During the journey through the desert, People of Israel faced such a temptation many times. It all began when they were hungry. They complained against Moses, forgetting the miseries they had endured in Egypt. *“The whole congregation of the*

*people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Ex 16, 2-3).*

God showered "manna" from heaven to satisfy their hunger. At this point, the temptation assumed a different form. Moses had told the people to collect only what they needed for the day. But some took more than what was required. As a result, some others found themselves having to settle for less than what they needed. This was another aspect of the temptation, namely an attempt to hoard things and enrich oneself without any regard to the needs of others. However, the guilty were punished for their greed. *"But when they measured it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; each gathered according to what he could eat" (Ex 16, 18).*

The second temptation was concerning anxiety about the future. They began telling, 'we got manna today but what about tomorrow?' Nothing is certain. So, they set aside some portion for the next day. They did not trust in the Providence of God but relied more on their own plan. Punishment followed immediately. *"They did not listen to Moses; some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and became foul; and Moses was angry with them" (Ex 16, 20).*

Work hard every day but take for yourself only what is needed. Do not encroach on others' space or take what belongs to them. Have trust in God's Providence. Such are the lessons the Bible provides in connection with Manna.

When the People of Israel found manna raining down from heaven, they accepted it with joy at first. They relished its taste and proclaimed it to be the bread of angels. *“Man ate of the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance”* (Ps 78, 24-25). However, with the passage of time, they got fed up with manna and even staged a protest against Moses and Aaron. They said manna was no match to the tasty food they were served in Egypt. They forgot all the miseries they had suffered while in slavery, but complained instead. *“Now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at”* (Num 11, 6).

They lamented and protested, “The people spoke against God and against Moses, *“Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food”* (Num 21, 5). The bread from heaven now turned into a worthless food. They said that they wanted meat to eat. *“Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving; and the people of Israel also wept again, and said, “O that we had meat to eat!”* (Num 11, 5).

Hunger for luxury was yet another temptation the theme of “bread” gave rise to. This was not about satisfying hunger or maintaining life, but way beyond it. Not content with nutritious food, they craved for tastier meals. They felt that the food they received was not tasty. Life was also becoming burdensome because conveniences were not adequate. All in all, they were dissatisfied with everything about their life. Seized as they were by desires and greed the issue of “bread” turned into a temptation.

They cried out, ‘Let us return to Egypt’. God heard their protests and murmurs and gave them a response. Their greed prepared for them their burial ground. *“The*

*LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall not eat one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, but a whole month, until it comes out at your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the LORD who is among you, and have wept before him, saying, "Why did we come forth out of Egypt?"* (Num 11, 18-20).

The Lord kept His word. The wind blowing from the Sea brought with it quails in millions. Driven by uncontrolled greed, people gathered and ate the quails far more than they should have. Overeating resulted in throwing up the food they had eaten. *"While the meat was yet between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague. Therefore, the name of that place was called Kibrothhattaavah, because there they buried the people who had the craving"* (Num 11, 31-35). Here we get a direct picture of the gravity of the disaster that greed would bring with. The place where the dead were buried was called Kibrothhattaavah, which meant the grave of greed.

This is not just an event that happened ages ago. Even today we can witness the temptation of "bread" at work. Modern man digs his own grave through his greed. He is not satisfied with what he has. He is not able to say "enough" to things and possessions. He seeks pleasure and is prone to excesses, in eating, drinking, merry making, trying to enjoy life in every way possible that could lead to use of drugs and sexual abuse and so on. Disaster follows, reminding us of the horrors of Kibrothhattaavah.

Temptation related to bread is not only about amassing

wealth by personal work but also about attempting to grow wealthy quickly by misappropriating what belongs to others. Internal conflicts in countries, encroaching the territory of other countries, religion-related violence unleashed by terrorists and persecutions driving people to turn into refugees, are all deplorable situations. The petition contains their cry to the Father for bread. The powerful hasten to seize everything which results in the poor losing their share of the possessions. As an undertone of this petition, one should be able to hear the cry of the hungry and the shouts of the powerful who cause the hunger by robbing the poor of their daily bread.

## **Summary**

Of the seven petitions presented to the Father, the fourth is a request for “bread”. The first three focus on the Divine, and the next four deal with the needs of people. Of these four, the most important one is the request for “bread”, needed to sustain life. Requests for other material needs are also included in this petition. “Bread” and food refer to the same reality.

Mathew and Luke have recorded this petition. The difference between the two versions is the emphasis given to certain aspects of the petition, though there is not much difference in the meaning of the petitions themselves. Daily bread and bread we need means the same thing.

Bread is a symbol, which includes material, spiritual, personal and social needs. Requesting for bread is not degrading in any way but highlights the freedom people enjoy, their dignity as children of God, and trust in God the Father.

Bread is a gratuitous gift of God but, at the same time, the theme is a reminder of the responsibilities of man. One needs to work for wealth certainly but must also learn to say “enough” to things and possessions, and share willingly what he has with those in need. Bread is produced by the work of man with God’s help, in the world created by God. The earth and its produce belong to God, and man is only the supervisor and tiller. Man is responsible for maintaining the equilibrium of the earth so that all creatures can grow and develop. Man carries the responsibility to ensure that nothing disturbs the stability of the earth. Preservation of Nature is part of this petition.

Theme of “bread” reminds us of certain temptations and warns us to stay vigilant about them. Bread is not limited to material things only. Greed for luxury will lead to disaster and turn the earth into a graveyard. Thinking that ‘everything belongs to me’ and getting trapped in the prison of selfishness, and the danger hidden in holding expensive banquets without caring for people who are starving without food, are addressed in this petition. One must never forget that the bread one eats is mixed with the sweat of the workers, the blood of the oppressed and the tears of the starving. This petition reminds us that the bread eaten without sharing with the hungry might prove to be poison that would cause eternal damnation.



# 9

## Forgiveness

The fifth petition in the Lord's Prayer is begging for forgiveness. While the first three petitions start with the preface "Thy", the last four petitions begin with the prefix "Our". It is therefore clear that the second part of the Prayer deals with inter-personal relationships, the needs of people and the problems they encounter. Of the four petitions, the second one is our focus here.

Both Mathew and Luke have recorded this petition but there are certain differences between the two versions.

Mathew: *"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors"* (Mt 6,12).

Luke: *"Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us"* (Lk 11, 4).

This is not a mere problem with the translation. There is a difference between the Lord's Prayer we use at home and the one we recite in the middle of the Mass. Similarly, there are differences in the versions used in the Syro-Malabar Mass and in the Latin Mass.

Forgiveness is the main theme of this petition. We seek forgiveness from God as we forgive others who have wronged us. That the issue is forgiveness is quite clear. However, what is not clear is what is it we are asking God to forgive us and what is it we are forgiving others. There

is some confusion about this. Words such as trespass, debt and sin are used here, which also needs clarification.

The relation between God forgiving us and we forgiving others also need clarification. On the one hand it would seem the prayer makes our forgiving the condition for God's forgiveness, while on the other hand it would seem the prayer is making a comparison between the two. Is the relation one of a condition or of a comparison? Is it because we forgive others that God forgives us or is it God forgives us as much as we forgive?

This is a subject where many doubts and misunderstanding still persist. Confusion is evident in the translations of the Bible into various languages and in the different translations of the same language as well. The matter, therefore, requires a detailed study. The meaning of this theme in the original Greek and the various possibilities of translation will be discussed.

## **1. Sin – Debt – Wrong: in translations**

The original New Testament was written in Greek language. Though Jesus spoke Aramaic, all four Gospels were written in Koine Greek, which was the language of conversation during that time. It was from this the New Testament got translated into other languages. Therefore, we need to look into the various possibilities and nuances of the word in Greek.

Mathew and Luke use two different words. In Mathew it is "*Opheilemata*", meaning 'debts' but in Luke it is *panti ophelonti*- to all (those who are) indebted. Both words are derived from the same verb "*Opheilo*", which means "owe, be indebted, be obliged, have an obligation to give". Thus,

whoever is obliged to give is called “debtor”. Whatever is to be given or to be paid is called “debt”. There is no ambiguity about this in the version of Mathew. The literal translation is, “As we forgave our debtors, forgive us our debts”. We shall discuss the various aspects of forgiveness later.

The Greek word, “*Opheilemata*” is translated into Latin as *debita* in the Vulgata. The English word debt is derived from this root. Hence, the question whether it would be more appropriate to use the word “debtors”, is valid.

This problem exists in the English translation also. The word commonly used is “Trespass”, which means ‘cross the boundary’. It denotes entering into an area one is not supposed to enter. However, this is not the only word used in the prayer in English. Some versions use the word “debt”. The word “sin” is used far more. This conflict, largely a matter of semantics, can be seen in most of the main translations.

For example, King James Version (KJV), New International version (NIV), New American Bible (NAB), Jerusalem Bible (JB), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Community Bible (CB) etc. use the word “debt” but, New English Bible (NEB) and Good News Bible (GNB) use the word “wrong”. At the same time, People’s Study Bible (PSB) uses the word “sin”. Here we can see that most of the English translations use the word “debt”.

This problem exists in other languages also. In the French ecumenical edition, which was brought out with the cooperation of Catholics and Protestants, the word “tort” which means “wrong” is used. In the German ecumenical edition, the word used is “Schuld - Schuldiger” which means debt - debtor; but it can also mean offence, guilt,

sin. In the Italian translation there is no room for doubt, the word used is “debita - debitori” which means the one who owes something, debt-debtor.

This brief search shows that what is contained in the Lord’s Prayer in Mathew’s Gospel, is: “Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors” or “those who are indebted to us”. But this does not provide a complete answer to the question. If the Bible says “debtors”, then where did the word “sin” come from? What does it mean? To find an answer, we have to turn our attention to the Gospel of Luke.

The Lord’s Prayer in the Gospel of Luke is comparatively shorter and the reason we have already seen. In Luke, the petition is phrased as, “Forgive us our sins because we have forgiven our debtors”. Two different words are used to refer to the failures that happen in relationship between God and man and in human relations. We ask God forgiveness for our sins. In the original language, Greek, the word used is “Hamartia” which means “sins”. Sins are faults committed by people in their relationship with God. Various aspects require further study, which we shall come to, later. In the prayer, we use “sins” because of its usage in the Gospel of Luke.

The difference between sin and debtors (debt) is evident in the official translations of Italian, German and French languages. We can note the difference between sin – debtors in most of the English editions also. But GN and NEB have used the word “sin” or ‘those who did us wrong’. In PSB, the word “sin” is used in both the places.

This short analysis would lead to the conclusion that the Lord’s Prayer has two versions. The text of the Prayer is

longer in the Gospel of Mathew, because it is presented in Semitic style, and is seemingly closer to the original words of Jesus. In the Gospel of Luke, repetitions are avoided and the Prayer is stated in a way that the readers can understand easily. The two words “sin and debtors” are found in the Gospel of Luke. Those who recite the Lord’s Prayer based on the Gospel of Mathew, say only “debt-debtors”. What does the “debtors” mean? What are sins? Answer to these questions would require further analysis.

## **2. Sins- Debtors: in search of the roots**

Why are we, in the Lord’s Prayer, asking for forgiveness for our sins in different ways? We shall examine this issue closely in the light of the Biblical teachings. As stated above, Mathew and Luke present the Prayer differently. *Mathew’s Gospel reads, “Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors”*, while Gospel of Luke says, *“Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (Lk 11, 4)*. Two different words are used in the original language, Greek, to refer to sin and debts. We have to find the meaning of the original words.

### ***Debt – Debtors***

In the Gospel of Mathew, the same word is used in both the places. The original Greek word “Opheilo” is the verbal form, while the word “Opheilema” is the noun meaning debt, what is owed. The word as “Opheiletes” means one who is indebted, the debtor. This word is normally used to depict a type of relationship that can exist between people. While Jesus was a guest at the house of Simon the Pharisee, a public sinner came to Him, washed His feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed them and anointed them with perfume.

In the story Jesus told the Pharisee, there is mention of debtors. “*A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?*” (Lk 7, 41-42). In this story, there is no doubt about the meaning of “debtor”. The one who borrowed money or the one who is obliged to pay back the borrowed amount is called a “debtor”. ‘Debt’ is the amount to be paid. It is this meaning the Parable of the Merciless Servant (Mt 18, 23-35) conveys. However, the word ‘debt’ has also other implications.

The Bible tells us that the whole relationship of man with God is one of indebtedness, because we have nothing that we have not received from God. Everything we have we owe to Him. This debt is being presented as the obligation to obey the Commandments and live a life of total submission and obedience to God. There are two types of laws, prescriptions and prohibitions, laws which tell us what we should do and laws which tell us what we should not do. If we do not do the things we are required to do, it becomes a debt. If we do the things which are forbidden, it would amount to violation of the law, trespass. The first one is generally translated as debt, while the second one as sin.

In the Gospel of Mathew, obligation to God and its violation are conveyed by the same word. Therefore, the word “debts” has an implication that is above and beyond the socio-economic level, pointing to a spiritual dimension.

Luke has also used these words with this meaning, while teaching about the need of repentance, calling attention to two historical events. “*Those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others*

*who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Lk 13, 4).* The word “offenders” is used here in the NRSV, but the original Greek word is “*opheiletai*” and the plural of *opheiletes*. A literal translation should have been debtors.

On the other hand, while calling to repentance citing an incident of the Galileans whom Pontius Pilate had put to death, Jesus asked: “*Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus?*” (Lk 13, 2). Here the word used is the plural form “*hamartoloi*”. From these two parallel events it can be concluded that when used to refer to the God-man relationship, debt - debtors and sin - sinners are used with the same meaning.

The verb “*opheilo*” and related nouns and adjectives refer to neglecting one’s obligations. However, this is only one aspect of sin. Not only that, the word which is usually translated as “sin” is another Greek word. In the New Testament, the Greek word generally used for sin is, “*hamartia*”. Its verbal form is “*hamartano*, and adjective is *hamartolos*. The word “*hamartema*” is also used as the noun. All these words denote the English word “sin”; to sin, sinner, sin. Therefore, to know about sin in the New Testament, the ideal thing would be a study of the various ways these words are used and the circumstances in which they are used in the Synoptic Gospels, and all the other NT Books. Since such a study is beyond our scope, we shall confine ourselves to a few general observations.

Though “*hamartia*” is a Greek word, to find its meaning in the bible we have to refer to Hebrew, the original language of the Old Testament. The Jews, who translated the bible

into Greek, knew well the Hebrew words used in the Bible and their subtle nuances depending on their usage.

Translating ‘sin’, which has a wide range of possibilities, is not easy because the language into which the word is translated might have more than one word to convey the meaning. There might be many different meanings for the same word according to the context it is used. Anyone who has tried to translate would have experienced this difficulty. Hence one has to ask which all Hebrew words might stand behind the one Greek word “*hamartia*”.

### ***The Hebrew words behind the Greek word hamartia***

A close examination reveals that more than a dozen Hebrew words are translated as “Hamartia”. Of these the most important ones shall be discussed here, paying attention to the context and various shades of meaning.

**a) “*Hathaa*”** is the Hebrew word that is generally translated as “*Hamartia*”, which means sin. But then, what is the original meaning of this word? It means to ‘miss’, miss the target, lose the track. If this is the case, meaning of sin would be ‘failing to reach the goal which had been set in advance’, going the wrong way instead of on the right path. Sin is moving away purposely from the path set by God. This may be translated as losing the way, taking the wrong path or committing evil against God. “*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!*” (Ps 51, 2). The Hebrew word translated here as sin is *hathaa*, which means an action against God. This is what sin is.

The word ‘*hathaa*’ can mean rebelling against God, or turning unfaithful to Him, or to deliberately avoid fulfilling the mission entrusted. In worldly affairs, the word is used for



non-observance of the precepts of the Covenant or acting against them. For example, in 1 Sam 19, 4: “*And Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father, and said to him, “Let not the king **sin against** his servant David; because he has not **sinned against** you, and because his deeds have been of good service to you”*. Jonathan was interceding for David in front of his father, Saul. The word “*hathaa*” is used here twice to denote an act of evil and infidelity. The word “*hathaa*” is also used to indicate wrong-doings while receiving guests (Gen 20, 9), to breaking of the marriage contract (Gen 31, 36) and to other similar sins of omission.

**b) Aon:** This word is translated as iniquity, doing what is forbidden or breaking the law, or being guilty before the law. David prays, in Psalm 51, 2: “*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin*”. Here the word “*iniquity*” translates the Hebrew word “*aon*”, while “*sin*” translates *hathaa*. Besides indicating guilt, the word *aon* can also mean the punishment for the crime committed. When the Psalmist laments, “*For my iniquities have gone over my head; they weigh like a burden too heavy for me*” (Ps 38, 4), it would seem that his iniquity is vexing him from within and is proving to be a punishment for his sin.

**c) Pasha – Pasha.** This Hebrew word means ‘to cross the border’, or ‘to enter into forbidden area’. It is translated in English as ‘*to transgress - trespass*’ which denotes crimes committed against another person. This is the case in Gen 31, 36 where Jacob questions Laban: “*Then Jacob became angry, and upbraided Laban; Jacob said to Laban, “What is my offense? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me?”*”. Pasha can also refer to crimes committed against nations as can be seen in Amos 1,3: “*Thus says the LORD: “For three transgressions of Damascus, and for*

*four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron". In the spiritual realm, the word refers to another dimension of sin, which is crossing the boundaries set by God or breaking His commandments. "Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness" (1 Jn 3, 4). "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!" (Ps 51, 2)*

Besides these two dimensions, "*Pesha*" is used also to denote rebellion against God, and denying God's authority and even rejecting God Himself, as can be seen in what is presented as a lament of God: "*Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken. "Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me" (Is 1, 2. See also 1, 28; 46,8; 48, 8). "Pesha" is sin deserving severe punishment. Prophet Micah highlights this point through the question the devotee: "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Mi 6, 7).*

**d) "Marad" = rebel, "mered" = rebellion.** The verb means 'to rebel, be bold and audacious in acts of rebellion or disobedience. It can also mean creating conflicts against the king in power. Zedekiah, the king of Judah broke the promise of submission made to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and raised the flag of rebellion. "*He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God; he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD, the God of Israel". (2Chr 36, 13). This is a very clear example of the meaning of marad. Another such example can be seen in the question of the Assyrian General Rabshakeh to Hezekiah, king of Judah:*

*“Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? On whom do you now rely, that you have rebelled against me?” (2 Kings 18, 20).*

The verb “*marad*” is used also to signify raising rebellion against God. *“Only, do not rebel against the LORD” (Num 14,9). “And he said to me, “Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels, who have rebelled against me;” (Ezek 2, 3). “We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from thy commandments and ordinances” (Dan 9, 5).*

**e) “*Rashaa*”** is translated in English as *wicked* or *wickedness*. It means ‘a deliberate act to hurt another’. Korah and his companions who started a rebellion among the people are labelled as “*the wicked men*” (Num 16, 26). Malachi called them “*evildoers*” (Mal 3,15) and Ezekiel branded them “*wicked*” (Ezek 3, 18). The term implies hitting someone with folded fist with the intention of hurting, as in Isaiah’s protest against false worship, “*strike with a wicked fist*” (Is 58, 4). Such various usages of the word convey different meanings.

**f) *Raa: Bad - Evil:*** This word shows another dimension of sin. In Dt 30, 15 the word is usually translated as *adversity*: “*See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity*” (Dt 30, 15); or *evil* as in “*my lord the king is like the angel of God to discern good and evil*” (2 Sam 14, 17); “*Woe to those who call evil good and good evil!*” (Is 5, 2) and “*Seek good, and not evil*” (Amos 5,14).

**g) *Shaqar – Cheating:*** ‘*Shaqar*’ means deal falsely, to deceive a person, to hide the truth or to tell a lie, to make a false oath or a false swearing, or to cooperate with others in deceiving another person. All this is prohibited by the

eighth Commandment on the ground they are tantamount to rejecting God. Here are a few examples from the Bible: “When I would heal Israel, the corruption of Ephraim is revealed, and the wicked deeds of Samaria; for they **deal falsely**, the thief breaks in, and the bandits raid without” (Hos 7, 1); “from prophet to priest, every one **deals falsely**” (Jer 6, 13). “Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for **false witnesses** have risen against me, and they breathe out violence” (Ps 27, 12).

**h) Asham** means offence or guilt. It is an act which causes loss of any kind, such as money or of good name to another person and would require atonement for the offence committed. *Asham* also simply means atonement for crime.

**i) Shagag, Shaga** means to go astray. The original meaning is to roam around aimlessly. Here “sin” is going astray or engaging in wrongdoing or committing a mistake without full knowledge.

**j) Thaab - Thoyeba** means creating a feeling of disgust by doing something improper or abominable. The word is closely related to worship and refers to anything which would be very displeasing to God.

**k) Aaval - Evalet** means folly, acting imprudently. It is ignorance of the truth, whereby truth is denied or the person moves away from truth. Truth gets distorted and depicted wrongly.

There are many more such words in Hebrew, pointing to one aspect or another of sin. From what we have seen, we can gain a broad understanding of the word “sin” in the Old Testament. Reference can be made to two more incidents in the Bible, involving sin, the adultery of David and the manner in which God sent Nathan to announce

his crime and punishment (2 Sam 12, 1-12). In Psalm 51 that is presented as David's confession of sin and prayer for forgiveness we can see several aspects of sin. Then David prayed "*wipe away my sins (Pesha) and wash me from abomination (Avon)*"; "*purify me from my sins (Hatha) as I did wrong (Raa) in front of you*" (Ps 51, 1-3).

It is impossible to define "sin" or convey its meaning in one word. Isaiah expresses the truth about sin and its dreadful nature. "*Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: "Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have **rebelled** against me. The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel **does not know**, my people **does not understand**" Ah, **sinful** nation, a people **laden with iniquity**, offspring of **evildoers**, sons who **deal corruptly**! They have **forsaken the LORD**, they have **despised the Holy One of Israel**, they are **utterly estranged**"* (Is 1, 2-4). We can grasp the seriousness of sin only by realizing the damage it does to our relationship with God. If a person loses awareness of God, he would lose awareness of sin as well, though the feeling of guilt might linger in him.

True awareness of sin would lead to repentance which arises from the conviction that God loves us. This awareness would enable us to know the real nature of sin. Sin is cutting off our relationship with God, caused by rejection, rebellion and lack of gratitude. Through the Parable of the "Prodigal son" Jesus depicted the various aspects of sin, which had been pointed out by Isaiah. The younger son, rejecting the love of the Father, left home, and lived as he chose. When he had lost everything and could only find an assignment to tend to the pigs, and was still starving, began to think of the love of his father. "*I will*

*arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have **sinned** against heaven and before you" (Lk 15, 18).*

The word "sin" would not suffice to explain the content of the petition fully. This might be the reason why we say in the liturgy "sins and debts". This is not a repetition in the Semitic style but shows the two sides of sin. Even if we add a dozen more words, all aspects of sin will not be expressed. For a full understanding of sin, a deep awareness of the love of God is needed. "Our Father in Heaven" leads us precisely to that experience.

### ***Sin in the New Testament***

The teaching about sin is clearer and deeper in the New Testament. There are three aspects of Sin. Sin is a) an action b), a state of being and c) a power that leads to evil. The NT teaches that Jesus Christ liberates individuals, the entire humanity and the whole world from these three dimensions of sin, and makes salvation possible. The Synoptic Gospels speak more about sins of individuals and about sinners, whereas the Gospel and epistles of John focus more on the dominion of sin and the state of slavery to which humanity has been subjected. Paul, while conceding the importance of these two levels, teaches that sin dwells in man and makes him incapable of doing good (Rom 7, 13-24). Evil entered man, through the sin of the first parents, rendering him weak; but through Jesus, man is liberated (Rom 5, 12 – 7,25). To the cry, '*Who would liberate me from death, caused by sin*', Paul gives the answer. "*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin*" (Rom 7, 25).

No matter how much we discuss, and how many more

words we use, we cannot express the full meaning of sin. Luke's version, "*forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us*" (Lk 11,4) might be considered as more acceptable. There is still a question remaining unanswered. "*As we have forgiven*" or "*As we forgive*", which of the two versions should we use in the Lord's Prayer?

### 3. "As we have forgiven" or "As we forgive"

The petition for forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer is being translated in various ways. Some editions have, "*As we have forgiven*". In some other editions, it is rendered, "*As we forgive*". Besides, in the Gospel of Mathew, the term "as" seems to be a comparison implying that forgiveness of God will be in the same measure as we forgive our debtors, "*as we have forgiven our debtors*" (Mt 6,12. In the Gospel of Luke, however, the petition for forgiveness of God seems conditioned by our forgiving our neighbours, "*forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us; and lead us not into temptation*" (Lk 11, 4). Among these different versions, what might have been intended by Jesus?

It is very difficult to find a satisfactory answer to this question, especially because of the two different versions in Mathew and Luke. First of all we have to pay attention to the various possible interpretations of the words. The most likely translation of the words recorded in both the Gospels needs to be ascertained first. Thereafter, we need to examine the themes, forgiveness of God and forgiveness of man.

Mathew – "*And forgive us our debts, as we also have*

*forgiven our debtors” (Mt 6, 12).*

Luke – “*And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (Lk 11,4).*

Luke uses two words, sins and debts, while Mathew uses only one word, debts. The subject of discussion is the tense used in relation to forgiveness, and the difference between forgiveness of God and forgiveness of man.

In Mathew, the clause is recorded in the past tense “*As we have forgiven*”. The tense called “Aorist” is used to denote something which happened in the past. It does not imply whether the action was done in a moment or it had taken a long time, whether the result of that action continues to the present or not. For these, there are different tenses in Greek. The exact translation should have been as we forgave, but usual translation is “As we have forgiven” as the verb is in the perfect tense. This tense points to an action done in the past the effect of which continues to the present. Though Mathew did not use this verb form, we are discussing it to clarify the meaning. It is not enough that we forgave others in the past but our forgiveness must have a lasting impact. ‘Once upon a time I forgave others but now we are in hostility again’, is not an acceptable situation. In fact, in this condition, we cannot use the prayer Jesus taught us. “As we have forgiven” or “As we are forgiving”, both versions are correct and acceptable.

In the Gospel of Luke, the usage, “*We also forgive*” is a perfect translation from the original Greek. The original word used in Greek denotes an incident which is happening here and now. The one who asks God’s forgiveness shows the basis for seeking forgiveness, “*We also forgive*”. Hence, in the daily recital of the Lord’s Prayer, either of the two



usages will be acceptable. However, we need to consider the norms of God's forgiveness and of man's forgiveness. This is an important question. The answer cannot be found from the two words in the Prayer alone. We have to study carefully the teachings of Jesus in detail.

### ***The Norm of Forgiveness***

Mathew concludes the Lord's Prayer with a saying that can shed some light on the subject. "*For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*" (Mt 6,14-15). The Greek word, "*Paraptoma*", is used here to signify "*trespass*". The same word is used in the original Greek text in both the places. *Transgress - trespass* means to act against the law. In reference to God, this can be called "*sin*" while in reference to people, it may mean "*wrong*". The implication is that only if man forgives, God would forgive him. The norm of God's forgiveness is forgiveness by man of the wrongdoings of others. "*As we have forgiven*" is fulfilment of the condition referred to.

But, in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Mt 18, 21-35), a different theme emerges. A man owed the King Ten Thousand Talents. Ten Thousand Talents can be considered as Ten Thousand Crore Rupees. The King ordered the man to sell all that he had and to pay back the money. The man pleaded for mercy. Having regard to his request, the King withdrew the order and cancelled the debt. However, shockingly the same servant did not show any mercy to his fellow servant who owed him merely One Hundred denarii, equivalent of fifty thousand Rupees. He put him in prison until he cleared the debt. Hearing this the

king called him and asked: *“And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also, my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart” (Mt 18, 33-35).*

There is no ambiguity about the meaning of the story. The one who was granted forgiveness did not extend forgiveness to his fellow servant. A person who would not forgive his fellowmen will not be able to receive the forgiveness of God. Besides, it is important to note that forgiveness is not a one-time act but an on-going attitude, to be practiced all the time. To drive home this lesson, Luke shared another Parable.

Jesus was the chief guest at a dinner party in the home of a Pharisee. As he sat at table, a public sinner came and knelt before him, washed his feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, anointed them with perfume and kissed them respectfully. Seeing this, the Pharisee tended to view Jesus with suspicion and a condescending attitude. However, Jesus clarified the matter to him with the help of a story (Lk 7, 36-50).

Two debtors owed moneylender 500 and 50 denarii. Neither of them could pay him back, so he cancelled the debt of both. Which one then will love him more? The Pharisee answered, it will be the one who was forgiven more. You are right said Jesus. Similarly, it is certain that the public sinner loved God more because her many sins had been forgiven. Those who have been forgiven more will love more and those who have been forgiven less will love less. It would imply that the woman loved God

so much because she has experienced God's forgiveness through Jesus.

But Jesus' clarification: "*Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much*" (Lk 7, 47) raises the question: was she forgiven because she loved or she loved because she was forgiven? What comes first, God's forgiveness or human love? The answer is to be found in Jesus's assertion. "*He who is forgiven little, loves little*" (Lk 7, 47). God forgave her not because she loved Him, but because she experienced the forgiving love of Jesus, she could love God more.

The sinful woman was able to love God because through Jesus, she came to know the love of God. The Evangelist does not say when she first met Jesus or when she received forgiveness. All that he says is that she was known to be a public sinner and yet she dared to come to the house of the Pharisee, seeking Jesus. Her courage and risk-taking behaviour reveal her inner state, the awareness of her sinful condition, her keen desire to see Jesus and her readiness to pay any price.

Jesus did not forbid the woman, who stood behind him crying, from coming close to Him. Nor did He look at her with contempt or any condescending attitude. He accepted her repentance, love and service with joy, all of which became a sign of the forgiveness she received. Repentance and love broke all the boundaries. She washed Jesus' feet with her tears, anointed them with costly perfume and kissed them ceaselessly. All these were indications of deep love and unmatched gratitude.

In this story, what happened first or what happened next, is of no relevance. Her deep awareness of her sinful

state and her surging desire to see Jesus were gifts of God, just as Zacchaeus was moved to climb on the tree to see Jesus. Whoever submits to the inspiration of God would be guided by Him. God would lead the person to forgiveness, salvation and joy. God initiates and man obeys, and he finds himself on the path of God.

Similar things happen with regard to forgiveness and absolution of sins. Jesus took on the sins of the world and through His self-sacrifice, earned forgiveness for all. However, to receive this forgiveness, one has to be willing to forgive one's brethren from the bottom of one's heart. The merciless servant could have received the cancellation of his debt, but because he did not forgive his fellow servant, he did not receive forgiveness from the king. Likewise, I can experience God's forgiveness only when I wholeheartedly forgive all those who may have wronged me in some way.

From this perspective, Mathew and Luke seem to say the same thing through two different verb forms. "*For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get*" (Mt 7, 2). The meaning of sin and forgiveness is made clear here with the help of the two parables. Receiving God's gift would depend on my attitude and behaviour. To the extent I forgive, I shall be able to experience God's forgiveness.

If I close my eyes I would only experience darkness; it is not because the sun is not shining but because I have closed my eyes. God loves us unconditionally but I have to prepare my heart to accept God's love. I remain in darkness, not because there is no light but maybe because I have no sight or I have closed my eyes.

## Summary

The petition for forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer is, simultaneously, a prayer and an exhortation as well. Love is involved and a mission is implied. What makes me capable of forgiving is actually the forgiving love of God. In the measure I give, in the same measure I shall receive. This should not be an isolated event. Just as the water flows continually, I must also go on extending forgiveness to others, to be able to experience God's forgiveness. Jesus would grant us the required grace and energy.

# 10

## Test - Temptation

One of the petitions in the Lord's Prayer is, "*Lead us not into temptation*". This gives rise to another question. Would God lead anyone into temptation? It is difficult to believe that God who is the source of goodness would lead any one to temptation. There is also another version of this petition as "*lead us not to the test*". Pope Francis has proposed a correction to this petition and as a result an amendment has been made in some liturgical prayers as "*Do not allow us to fall into temptation*"

The problem exists also in the original language, Greek. Mathew and Luke use the same word "Peirasmos" which is derived from the verb "Peiraso". The meaning of the word changes depending on the circumstances it is used. It can mean a test a person undergoes to assess his capacity, whether the person can do a certain activity. If he cannot, he has to improve his competence. But this cannot be what is meant by the petition.

When used in the spiritual realm, "Peiraso – Peirasmos" assumes a different meaning. For example, this is the word used when people try to test God. The Greek word "Peiraso" is the translation of the Hebrew word "massah". An incident from the life of the People which occurred during the desert wandering would reveal its meaning. There was no drinking water and people protested against Moses (Ex 17, 1-7). God provided them water from the rock. However, the sacred author tells us that the people

who quarrelled for water and Moses who struck the rock twice did not believe firmly in God, were testing God. *“And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the fault finding of the children of Israel, and because they put the LORD to the test by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?” (Ex 17, 7).*

The word “Massah” is derived from the verb “Nassah”. Another meaning of test is seen here. It was possibly in this sense that Jesus spoke to the tempter: *“Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’” (Mt 4:7).* We cannot, however, say that the prayer has this meaning.

The Greek word “Peiraso” has yet another meaning: “induce someone to do wrong” or “lead someone to sin”. A person who encourages someone to sin is called “Peirason”. The person who tempts another person becomes the “Tempter”. It is better, then, to use the word “tempt- tempter- temptation”. This is why in the official prayers we say, “Do not allow us to fall into temptation”. The word “Temptation” is more appropriate than the term test.

What is “Temptation”? Would God lead someone into temptation? We have to find an answer to this question. Ultimately, the motivation to move away from God, or to act against His will, is called “Temptation”. God would not tempt anyone to do this. The tempter is not God but the power of evil whom we call Satan and devil. “Tempter” is used in the Bible as a synonym of Satan.

A couple of incidents in the Bible would help to understand the nature of temptation. The first temptation was the one the first parents faced in the Paradise, the temptation to eat the forbidden fruit (Gen 3, 1-7). The

origin of the temptation was from an outside force. The temptation appears in the form of questions, ideas, and suggestions. Eating of the forbidden fruit would make them like God, and they would know good and evil. This knowledge implies the power and authority to decide what is good and what is evil, or to take one's own will and decision as the ultimate criterion of good and evil, of morality. Becoming like God here means taking the place of God, making oneself God.

This was the motivation provided by Satan for violating God's command. The fruit was good to the eye and its taste delightful. Though they knew that they were breaking the command of God, the good fortune that the Serpent had said the fruit would bring them, clouded their thinking. *"So, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate"* (Gen 3, 6).

This is the nature of temptation, portraying evil as good, pressurizing to focus on the benefits one would receive, and to forget everything else. Believing it to be good, they chose the evil. This is a trick, to present truth as lie and lie as truth. Bible calls this force the Tempter or Satan.

The ultimate aim of Satan was to distance man from God. The same thing is taught through the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father in Heaven, do not allow us to move away from you". If this is the meaning of the petition, won't it be better to use the word, "Temptations"? However, both the Evangelists use the singular form, "Temptation". In the original Greek also, the word is in the singular. Hence, the



petition is referring to a temptation that is different from the daily temptations we encounter.

Certain incidents in the New Testament would shed further light on this point. Jesus fasted and prayed for forty days in preparation for the public ministry, at the end of which the tempter told Him to turn stones into bread to satisfy His hunger and to capture the attention of people by working a miracle. ‘Worship Satan and you can dominate the world’. Such is the nature of temptation. The real face of the tempter is here unveiled. He urges man to put Satan in God’s place and worship him. Jesus issued a warning to the disciples: *“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren”* (Lk 22, 31-32).

Passion and Death of Jesus caused a great crisis for the disciples, just as Jesus had warned them: *“he said to them, “Why do you sleep? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.”* (Lk 22, 46). This foreboding demonstrates the intensity of the temptation they would face and the need for prayer. In fact, the prayer in the garden of Gethsemane expresses the gravity of the temptation Jesus Himself faced. *“Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done”* (Lk 22, 42).

The mission entrusted to Jesus by the Father was to take upon himself the sin of the world and redeem humanity through offering himself in sacrifice. This mission is called “The cup”. Praying for having it removed shows the severity of the temptation. However, in the same breath, Jesus prayed, *“nevertheless not my will, but*

*thine, be done*". With this cry Jesus attained victory over temptation. The temptation was repeated on the Cross too. The onlookers challenged Jesus to come down from the Cross and prove His divinity. Temptation is to act against the Will of God and, by so doing, to reject God.

Besides these, there is also an eschatological implication in this concept of temptation. There may come terrible situations when all the disciples might be tempted for a general apostasy. *"Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Lk 18, 8)*. This worrisome question points to possible rejection of faith. However, this petition cannot be limited to the eschatological temptation of general apostasy. In various situations, the faithful might be tempted to renounce their faith and go against the Will of God because of pressure and persecution, or by the illusion of a better life. This petition is aimed at avoiding all such occurrences.

The request *"Do not lead us into temptation"* also requires clarification. According to Bible, God will not tempt anyone. *"Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one" (Jas 1, 13)*. We have seen the difference between "Test" and "Temptation". Temptation may be a better word to express the intended meaning. According to James, it is each one's evil desire which gives rise to temptation. *"Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire" (Jas 1,14)*. At the same time the Bible teaches beyond any doubt that man is tempted by Satan. The advice of Peter, *"Be sober; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pt 5, 8)*, is an example of such teaching. The Book of Revelation through

several symbols describes how Satan tempts and attacks the Community of the faithful. Persecutions are depicted through various symbols (Rev 12-20).

Hence, it is not God who causes temptation but Satan and the evil desires created by the power of evil. Why, then, are we praying to God not to “*lead us into temptation*”? Two things are to be considered here.

According to the Bible, God is the source and creator of all that exists. There is no one equal to God. This is the cornerstone of faith in “One God”. Therefore, Satan and all his actions are subservient to God because Satan could act only as much as God permits. Another thing to take into account is that actions against God’s salvific plan can occur only to the degree God permits. Indeed, this is a difficult concept to comprehend, but it cannot be ignored. The story of Job is an example. Satan could test him severely only because God had allowed it.

In the light of these considerations, we can now draw some conclusions. The petition “*do not lead us into temptation*” does not mean that God would tempt anyone to do evil. The meaning is, “*Do not allow us to be tempted beyond our capacity to resist*”. This can be daily events, or persecutions which compel a person to renounce his faith. Accordingly, this petition can be phrased as, ‘*Do not allow us to be tempted too severely, and do not abandon us in the hands of the tempter*’.

Of course, we cannot deny the possibility of a test turning into a temptation. As a matter of fact, temptations are opportunities given to deepen and to prove our faith in God. It was with this purpose, God tested Abraham (Gen 22, 1). He could have disobeyed the command of God, refusing to sacrifice his only son. But Abraham obeyed

God and revealed the depth of his faith. As a result, the test remained just a test only.

Just the contrary happened in the case of Adam and Eve. God had put them to test, forbidding them from eating the fruit of the tree “*of the knowledge of good and evil*”. The test turned into a temptation for Adam and Eve. They failed the test by going against God’s command, thereby losing the divine life both for themselves and for all future generations. The incident shows that a test can turn into a temptation and, if not handled rightly, can lead to disastrous consequences. This is what is implied in the prayer Jesus taught us. It is with this meaning in mind some English editions state the petition as, “*Lead us not to the test*”. In this context, the test is not any ordinary examination, but the eschatological test involving eternal consequences.

## Summary

God would not tempt anyone to commit evil. He would, however, permit temptations which can serve as opportunities to profess and to deepen one’s faith. For some, these tests can turn into temptations, and so we pray that we are not tested beyond our capacity. Our petition is “*Do not allow us to move away from you by renouncing our faith and do not abandon us to the powers of evil*”.

In addition, through this petition we request God not to let us become a cause of temptation for anyone through our word and deed. It places a great responsibility on every person not to become a cause of sin to anyone else. One must always remember the serious warning: “*Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea*” (Mt 18, 6).

# 11

## Protection

The last petition in the Lord's Prayer recited at home, says: "deliver us from evil". The same is said during the Mass in Latin Rite. However, in the Mass of Syro-Malabar Rite, the prayer recited is, "Save us from the evil spirit". Which of the two versions is more faithful to what Jesus taught? Why are we praying in two different ways? Is there any difference in meaning between the two versions? What is evil? Who is the evil spirit?

The Lord's Prayer is presented somewhat differently by Mathew and Luke. We have already discussed the reasons for this difference. We have also spoken of the nuances of certain words and their differences. Keeping to this trend, towards the end of the Prayer, Mathew has added a petition for protection. Why do we say the Prayer differently, one way in the church and a different way at home? The question merits an answer. In addition, meaning of the words, evil and evil one needs to be clarified.

As we turn to the Bible, what strikes us first is that this petition is not found in the Gospel of Luke. We have already seen that repeating an idea in a parallel way for emphasis is a feature of the Semitic style. Luke in general avoids any repetition. Luke appears to have regarded the petition "*deliver us from evil*" as an explanation and a repetition of the petition "*lead us not into temptation*". Accordingly, he omitted it altogether.

We have also to ask, which of the two versions, evil

or evil one, is closer to the original expression in Greek. Both are acceptable because the original Greek word can be translated either way, as evil or as evil one

We see this difference in other languages also. In Latin it is difficult to decide whether it is from evil or from the evil one, because the expression (*libera nos a malo*) can be translated either way. In German also the situation is the same. The expression (*erloese uns von dem boesen*) can be translated either way. In English it is generally translated “from the evil one”. However, Italian and French editions mostly state, “from evil”. The problem is difficult to solve because there is confusion in the original text, Greek.

### ***In the Original Greek text***

The Greek original version reads: “*Alla rousai hemas apo tou ponerou*”. “Deliver us” is what is said in the first part. However, confusion remains in the second part, “*Apo tou ponerou*”, because of the peculiarity of the language. In Greek all words fall into one of three genders, feminine, masculine or neuter. Depending on the way the word ends, its gender will become apparent. If the word ends in “a”, it is feminine, if it ends in “os”, it is masculine and if the word ends in “on”, it is neuter. If this were the sole basis, there would not have been any problem.

In Greek and Latin, depending on the case, the end of the word will be different. Sanskrit follows the same logic, while this is not the case in English or Malayalam. Therefore, as the case changes, the end of the word will also change. In some cases the end of the word belonging to masculine and neuter, will look the same, making it difficult to conclude to which gender the word belongs.

“*Poneros*” is a masculine word, translated as “wicked

or evil”. However, the same word can be used in neuter gender, in which case the end will be “*Poneron*”. But in some cases, genitive, dative and ablative, the ending of both masculine and neuter words would be the same, making it difficult to decide whether the word is masculine or neuter. Both are possible and the translator is forced to decide the gender. This will explain the differences in the two versions discussed earlier on, as also the difficulty in deciding which translation is correct or the exact version of the prayer taught by Jesus. Deciding this on the basis of a single word is not possible. We have to search for the idea that is being expressed through the word in the gospels at large and in the teachings of Jesus. This will take the search to a larger area. Instead of engaging in such an elaborate exercise, we shall discuss the matter briefly.

Two observations are relevant here. 1. ‘Evil’ means an impersonal force while ‘evil one’ points to a person. Likewise, ‘power of evil’ also points to a person who is capable of thinking and deciding. 2. This phrase is not found in Luke, possibly because he considered it as an explanation of the petition, “Lead us not into temptation”.

### ***Temptation - Tempter***

Temptation is the subject of our discussion. God does not tempt anyone. There is a difference between a test and a temptation. Temptation is an instigation to act against the Will of God, to move away from Him and to put oneself in His place. The first parents in Paradise were asked not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil as a test of their obedience, but it turned into a temptation for them through the intervention of an external agent, the serpent. Jesus also faced such a temptation in the beginning of His public ministry. Ultimately, the aim of all temptations is

rebellion against and rejection of God. The temptation can be subtle or obvious. Intensity of the temptation can be high or low. Temptation is a force which tries to move us away from God.

We cannot say that temptation is part of human nature because everything God created was good. From where then did evil come, evil which turns man away from God and drives him to act against His Will? What the Bible tells about the first sin, the temptation that caused the first sin, and the role of the tempter (Gen 3, 1-14) is relevant here.

During the Baptism in Jordan, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit came down to anoint Jesus. The voice of the Father from heaven proclaimed Him as the beloved Son. Immediately after this event, Jesus went into the wilderness to prepare for the public ministry. It was the Holy Spirit who led Him into the wilderness to face the temptation: *“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil”* (Mt 4, 1). There is no room for any doubt here. The tempter is a person – Satan. He is not just an idea or some impersonal force, but a person with his own will and plans who stands against God and His plans.

Here temptation and tempter go together. They are not a natural inclination a person has but a force that seems to enter into him from outside. This is depicted as a temptation. The disciples should recognize the gravity and nature of temptation and of the force standing behind it. It is to this discernment the petition *“Save us from evil”* calls attention.

### ***Satan - Devil***

According to the constant teaching of the Bible, the root cause of all the evil man suffers is sin, to which one



is led through temptation by the power of evil called Satan and devil. Though the force behind the first temptation is called serpent (Gen 3, 1), it was actually Satan, as is clearly stated in the Book of Revelation: “*And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world*” (Rev 12, 9), the embodiment and source of evil. This is reiterated many times in the Bible.

The word Satan is derived from the Hebrew word “*Satana*”, meaning ‘oppose’, ‘accuse’. There are some indications in the Bible to the fact that Satan originally was an angel, who fell from grace due to pride, and was thrown out of heaven. He became an enemy of God and the source of evil. The lament over Babylon seems to imply such an event. “*How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High’*” (Is 14, 13-14).

Evidently the prophet is speaking about Babylon in symbolic language, presenting it as day star, because seen from Israel, Babylon is in the East and so the epithet “Day Star” suits it well; but behind this picture we can see the sinister force that tried to become equal to and challenge God. St. Jerome translated the Hebrew word for “*Day star*” as a proper name *Lucifer*. This has become in common parlance the synonym of Stan

Likewise, we can recognize an evil force behind the lamentation of Ezekiel about Tyre. “*The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord GOD: “Because your heart is proud, and*

*you have said, 'I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas,' yet you are but a man, and no god, though you consider yourself as wise as a god... therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Because you consider yourself as wise as a god, therefore, behold, I will bring strangers upon you,... Will you still say, 'I am a god,' in the presence of those who slay you, though you are but a man, and no god, in the hands of those who wound you?" (Ezek 28,1-19).*

The Book of Job seems to imply that Satan was an angel. Satan roams around the world and points out to God, like an attorney, all that is lacking in the people. It is argued that in the beginning his name was "*Satanel*", like the names of other angels such as Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, but after the fall, "*el*" was removed from his name. 'Accuser' is the meaning of his name. The book of Revelation also hints at the fall of Satan (Rev 12, 7-10).

"*Diabolos*" is another Greek word, used to indicate the power of evil. It is translated as devil. The word is derived from two words "*Dia+ballein*", which means 'throw in between'. It signifies one who creates divisions among people. He distances people from God and from one another.

In addition to these two, many other words are used in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, to refer to Satan. Liar and father of lies (Jn 8, 44), Enemy (Mt 13, 39), Murderer (Jn 8, 44), Ruler of this world (Jn 12, 31), Belial (2 Cor 6, 15) Beelzebub – the ruler of the demons (Mt 12, 24). Thus, Satan is known by so many different names, pointing to different characteristics of the evil power.

One thing to be noted is that all these names appear in the singular form. Nowhere do we see the plural 'Satans' used. The same is true also about the word devil. We do

not find the plural devils. But there are other words used in plural such as demons, evil spirits etc. Demon is the translation of the Greek word *Daimon*- plural *Daimonia*. These refer to the forces the gentiles worshiped as gods.

When the Bible speaks about cases of demonic possession it refers to fallen angels, who, due to their rebellion against God, lost the status of being angels and were reduced to evil spirits. They are not the souls of the dead but fallen angels who were thrown out of heaven. In the Bible, they are variously called as evil spirits, wicked spirits, spirits which cause illness etc. They all operate under the influence of Satan, the power of evil. They are like soldiers who work for Satan (Lk 11, 18). In the whole Bible there is only one instance of Satan entering a person, namely the apostle Judas Iscariot (Lk 22, 3; Jn 13, 27). As a consequence, he betrayed Jesus and then committed suicide.

### ***Activities***

To understand the meaning of this petition, we have first to know the works of Satan. By tempting the first parents and even Jesus, the Son of God, Satan showed his true colours. The name of Satan stands for pride and rejection of God. His ultimate aim is to move people away from God, the source of life. It means destruction of the person, eternal death and eternal hell. We have to be vigilant about falling victims to eternal death, as Jesus has warned: *“But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear him!”* (Lk 12, 5).

Satan could tempt even the Apostles and make them fall into his trap. The Passion and Death of Jesus was an opportunity for carrying out his machinations. This is the

reason why Jesus sounded a strong warning to His disciples. *“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren” (Lk 22, 31-32).*

The disciples understood the severity of the temptation of Satan. One of them betrayed Jesus while all the others ran away, leaving Him alone. Peter, who had boastfully declared that he would never ever renounce Jesus, denied Him three times. The Twelve Apostles, whom He had chosen to be the foundation stones of the New People of God, were all scattered. Apparently, His dream the “Church” itself had come crashing down. The hand of Satan could be seen in all these events. His temptation caused the catastrophe. Finally, it was the prayer of Jesus which regrouped the Apostles and saved the Church from destruction.

The word “wicked” does not fully convey the depravity of Satan’s character. Wickedness conveys only one side of evil. Deliberate intent born out of malice to destroy someone is the other side of Satan’s nature. The Greek word “*Poneros*” has a wider meaning. Personification of “evil” is what is envisaged.

### ***The Evil One - The Evil***

The last petition in the Lord’s Prayer is “Save us from the evil one”. That this translation is appropriate should be evident from the explanations so far given. If so, is it wrong to pray “Save us from evil”? The answer to this question will depend on the response to another question, ‘What is evil’? There is a saying in Latin, “*Omne ens est bonum*”. It means whatever exists is good, because it was created by God, who is all powerful and full of goodness. *“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it*

*was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day*" (Gen 1, 31). Creation of the universe was completed with this assessment. Then what is evil? We can say in brief that "evil is the absence of good" or rather misuse of goodness is evil. Here we have to see "good" in two different dimensions, relative and ultimate goodness.

There is a need to analyse the concept of "Goodness", and the deep-rooted convictions of people about it. Goodness and virtue can be traced to the grace of God. The usual list of goodness includes health, long life, wealth, power, prestige, etc. For those who understand goodness in this way, illness, poverty, neglect in the society, insult, persecution etc. will appear as evil.

In that case, the prayer "save us from evil" might mean absence of illness, poverty and neglect. But we have to ask if this is really what Jesus meant when taught us to pray "deliver us from evil"? Those who regard wealth, health and power as goodness, need to bear in mind the teachings of Jesus. One must begin with the Beatitudes listed in the Gospels. (Mt 5, 3-12; Lk 6, 20-26). For example, "*Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God...But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation*" (Lk 6, 20.24). What can we say about the rich man who was building huge barns for the future without realizing that his end could be near (Lk 12, 16-21) and about the rich man who ignored the man who was starving at his doorstep (Lk 16,19-31)? One has to meditate deeply on these parables and also the exhortations about discipleship and the Kingdom of God (Lk 9, 23-27. 57-62; 18, 18-25).

Whatever appears to be good need not have to be good and likewise, whatever we think to be evil might not be intrinsically evil. Wealth might have been acquired through

unfair means. Again, wealth which is not shared can become a source of harm. Loss of health can lead to repentance, and there is nothing like untimely death. *“But the righteous man, though he die early, will be at rest... There was one who pleased God and was loved by him, and while living among sinners he was taken up. He was caught up lest evil change his understanding or guile deceive his soul. For the fascination of wickedness obscures what is good, and roving desire perverts the innocent mind. Being perfected in a short time, he fulfilled long years; for his soul was pleasing to the Lord, therefore he took him quickly from the midst of wickedness” (Wis 4, 7-14).*

Approval of the society cannot be considered as a sign of God’s blessing or goodness. Ultimately only God is good. Jesus reminded the man who came asking about eternal life, *“Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone” (Mk 10, 18)*. If only God is good because He is the source of goodness, whatever brings us close to God will be good, whereas evil will be whatever creates division among people, destroys relationships and distances us from God. Ultimately there is only one thing to consider as the norm of good or evil. Living according to the Will of God is good and whatever forces us away from God is evil.

Therefore, the words under discussion can be translated in various ways, though they carry the same meaning. However, ‘evil’ involves a choice and results in a state of evil, whereas ‘the evil one’ point to an external force. Several things projected as “good” are really evil as they originate from Satan, the force of evil. Therefore, we pray for the wisdom to discern what is really good and evil, and the power to reject the evil and seek God’s protection, always doing His Will.

# Conclusion

*Lex orandi – lex credendi – lex vivendi*

*“The law of prayer, the law of faith, the law of life”*. This is a saying in Latin with a deep implication. It teaches us the importance of prayer and its great influence on our lives. My prayer is a reflection of my faith, while, at the same time, my faith influences my prayer. My prayer depends on what I believe. Those without faith cannot pray to God. Similarly, my prayer would influence my faith and mould my life.

Prayer, faith and life are intrinsically related to one another. My experiences in life, desires and hopes are reflected in my prayer. It is Faith which governs my life and gives shape to it. Prayer and Faith operate as complimentary elements. What we pray and how we pray is important because they influence our life.

The guidelines Jesus gave us concerning prayer are contained in the “Lord’s Prayer”. When Jesus said, “*Pray this way*”, He was not telling that we should use the same words, but that this should be the model of our prayers.

The slight differences in the two versions of the Lord’s Prayer in the two Gospels need not have to be cause of any concern. Jesus spoke and taught in Aramaic while the Gospels were written in Greek. Today we say the Lord’s Prayer in our mother tongue. The form of the Lord’s Prayer

we have today has undergone several translations. When a text is translated from one language to another, the content cannot be expressed in one word in another language. Often, we may have to employ several words. This would certainly apply to the translations of the Lord's Prayer.

In the Lord's Prayer we can see the foundation and at the same time a simple, concise and comprehensive presentation of Christian faith. The words used to address God shed light on the uniqueness our faith. It draws our attention to its depth and to the influence faith should have in building a just society. God is the Father and all people are His children. This makes us all brothers and sisters to one another. The way of addressing God and the faith it conveys, strike at the very root of all discrimination and the culture of hatred.

Every petition which follows is an expression of this faith. The first three petitions begin with the preface "Thy", but the next four petitions begin with the preface "Our". This highlights the fact that when relationship between God and man is right, relationship among people will also be right. The import of the first petition is that God would reveal His holiness and we are not to place any obstacle in the way. All would come to know the true nature of the Father through the life of God's children.

God must rule over the earth and that would make the "Kingdom of God" a reality. This again directs our attention to the relationship between God and man. Paul has given a definition of the Kingdom of God. "*For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*" (Rom 14, 17). The various facets of the "Kingdom of God" have been explained by Jesus. The



rule of God should attain its perfection as soon as possible. This is the second petition. Its various aspects are covered in the third petition.

All the needs of humanity are included in the theme of “bread”. Bread covers material, spiritual, personal and social needs of man. It is also prefaced with “Our”. This would liberate us from the prison of selfishness and make us happy through sharing with all those in need. Bread primarily represents a gift. It also implies a task which urges man to produce and to share it, while safeguarding everything, including Nature and Universe.

For community life, forgiving love is essential. We pray for mutual forgiveness so that we might receive the forgiveness of God. This is the fifth petition, which covers a social concern, involving mutual love and forgiving the faults and wrong-doings of one another. A Community that prays stays united. Only if we are prepared to forgive, we would receive forgiveness from God.

We are put through various temptations which prompt us to reject God and to carry out our wishes, to submit to the power of evil instead of to the Will of God. We might not always discern temptations because good is shown as evil and evil as good. It is not easy to recognize our erroneous thinking and the temptations proffered by Satan, the evil power. We need the wisdom to recognize temptations and the power to reject them and accept the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. This is the sixth petition.

There is a power in the Universe which leads man to commit evil by disguising evil as good. This is clearly seen in the Bible. It aims at distancing man from God while driving him to eternal damnation. We have inherited a

human nature which is prone to sin. We require God's help to resist evil tendencies and to stand on the side of good. Though God has given us freedom, we are likely to misuse it. We are, therefore, praying God to protect us from the power of evil.

Prayer is primarily an expression of Faith. At the same time, prayer helps us to understand the doctrines of our Faith in their fullness and depth. Besides, knowing what we are praying for would help us recognize who we are. This is why Jesus taught us the Lord's Prayer, which is a summary of Christian Faith expressed in a simple, comprehensive form. In addressing God, "Our Father in Heaven" we affirm our Faith which would strengthen us, give us hope and guide our path. Accordingly, setting aside all our differences, let us call out in one voice:

*Abba*

*Our Father in Heaven!*