

# Life of the Spirit

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## A PRAYER TO THE FATHER

BY

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The following prayer is taken from the Bodleian MS. Lat. th. d. 15, foll. 115 sqq, being a collection made by Robert Parkin of Erdwicke le Skete near Doncaster. The MS. is in Parkin's own hand and he entitles this prayer 'Prayers of Sir Thomas More' and concludes it with the words 'Compiled by Sir Thomas More sometime Chancellor of England with these additions following'—and he includes various other prayers, all of which have since been published. This beautiful prayer has apparently not yet been printed or at least is unfamiliar to the general public. The spelling has been slightly modernised.



HELPE me, dere Father, helpe me. Help me with thy mighty grace, succour me with thy most merciful favour, rescue me from the manifold perils that I am in, for unless thou wilt of thy infinite goodness releve me, I am but a lost creature. Thy strait commandment is that I should love thee with all my heart, with all my sowle, with all my mind and with all my power. And this wot I well, I do not, but am full short and wide therefrom, which thing I perceive by the other loves that I have had of thy creatures heretofor, for such as I entirely loved, I loved them so, that I did seldom forget them. They were ever in my remembrance and almost continually my heart was occupied with them, and my thought ever ran upon them as well absent as present, specially when they were absent and much desired their presence and to be there where they were, or else my heart was never at restful quiet. But alas, my dear Father, I am not in this condition towards thee, for I keep not thee in my remembrance, nor bear thee in my thought, nor occupy my heart with thee so oft as I should, but for every trifle that cometh to my mind, I let thee slip and fall out thereof; and for every phantasy that stirreth my heart I set thee aside and shortly forget thee. I suffer many a trifling thought to abuse my soul at liberty. But with thee, my dear Father, have I lightly done, and forthwith turn me to the

remembrance of thy creatures, and so tarry with thee but a short while. The delight of thy creatures so pulleth me and draweth me hither and thither, my wretched desires so blind me, the false world so deceeveth me that I forget thee, that art my most loving Father, and art so much desirous to have my heart and love. And what are thy creatures, but creatures made by thee! Thou madest both me and them of naught, and thou far incomparable passest all them. And what are my desires when they are set upon thy creatures and not in order to thee? What are they but wretched and sinful affections? And finally what is this world, but a miserable exile full of perils and evil, far unlike unto that glorious country where thou art resident, and showest thy most excellent majesty in wonderful glory. There art thou clearly seen to all thy blessed angels and saints of thy most triumphal court. They be ever there present before thy blessed face, and see thee face to face. O my dear Father, there should be my heart, there should be my desire and remembrance principally occupied; if it so were I loved thee with all my heart, I should long to have a sight of thy blessed face. I should earnestly desire to see thy joyous country and kingdom, I should ever covet to be there present within thy most glorious court. But this alas I do not, and therefore I sorrow my grievous negligence, I weep for damnable forgetfulness, I lament my foolishness, yea my very madness that thus for trifles and vanities forget my most dear and loving Father. Alas woe is me! What shall I do? Whither may I turn? to whom shall I resort for help? where shall I seek for remedy against this worldly and earthly dullwardness of my heart?

Whither should I rather go than to my Father? to my most loving Father, to my most merciful Father, to him that of his infinite love and mercy hath given me boldness to call him Father, whose son Jesu my saviour hath taught me thus to call him. And I think verily that he is a Father, yea and a more loving Father than is the natural father to his child. These are the words spoken unto the natural father of this world, 'when ye that are imperfect with evils, can liberally give unto your children good gifts, how much rather your heavenly Father shall give a good spirit to them that shall ask it of him'.

These words most gracious Father, are the words of thy most dear and best beloved son Jesu, wherein he teacheth us that thou art our veray father; and maketh this promise of thy behalf, that thou shalt give thy holy spirit unto them that ask it of thee studiously. Thou wilt that we should believe him and faithfully trust his words, for thou testifiedst of him that he was thy most

entirely well beloved son, and badest us hear him and give a full faith to his words.

Wherefore we may be certain of three things. The first that thou art our Father; the second that thou art a more kind and loving father unto us than are the carnal fathers of this world to their children; the third that thou wilt give to such as devoutly ask it upon thee thy most holy spirit.

We may be well assured, that for thy inestimable goodness and for the honour of thy name thou wilt not disappoint thy promises, for as much as they were made by thy entirely well beloved Son Christ Jesu, whom thou sentest into this world to teach us the certain truth and to confirm the same unto us by his most precious blood which he shed for us upon the cross.

O Father where shall I rather seek for help in my necessity than at [of] thee, which wilt have me call thee Father. This name Father is a name of much love and tenderness, of much delight and pleasure and forceth the heart to much hope and comfort, and to many other delectable affections, and if nothing else were but this only name it might suffice to make me trust that thou which hast commanded me to call thee by this name Father, wilt help me and succour me at thy need whensoever I show unto thee; but much rather because my saviour thy Son Christ Jesu hath assured me that thou art a more kind and a more loving Father unto me, than was my own natural father. This assurance made by thy most entirely well beloved son should specially move both thee and me.

First it should move me to have a hope and confidence that thou wilt deal with me according to the same promise. Secondly it should also move thee to perform this promise effectively and so to show thyself a kind and loving father: This petition most dear beloved Father is agreeable to the same promise made by thy most entirely well beloved son my saviour Jesu.

I ask no other thing but thy good and holy spirit which he promised to be given unto all them that ask it upon thee. I know most gracious Father, that thou art here present with me, albeit I see thee not, but thou both seest me and hearest me, and there is no secret of my heart that is hid from thee. Thou hearest that I now ask of thy holy spirit, and thou knowest that I now pray there for; and that I am very desirous to have the same. O dear Father with all the inforcement of my heart I beseech thee to give thy holy spirit to me. Wherefore unless thou wilt disappoint the promise of thy dear son Jesu thou canst not but give me this holy spirit. The cause why I do so importunately ask him is that I may

be fully relieved of that misery whereof I complained unto thee before, that is to wit, that albeit thou straitly commanded that I should love the will all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind and with all my power, yet I do not this which is to the great peril of my soul. But now if I may obtain thy most holy spirit he shall make me to love thee with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, with all my power, for he is the principal author of all good love, he filleth the souls in whom he is received with abundance of charity, he is the very furnace of charity, he is the very fountain of all gracious affections, and he maketh their minds sweetly to burn in all godly desires and giveth unto them strength and power courageously to follow all ghostly affections and specially towards thee.

Wherefore dear Father, when thou hast straightly commanded me thus to love thee with all my heart, and thus I would right gladly do, but without thy help and without thy holy spirit I cannot perform the same. I beseech thee shed upon my heart thy most holy spirit, by whose gracious presence I may be warmed, heated and kindled with the spiritual fire of charity and with the sweet burning love of all ghostly affections, that I may fastly set my heart, soul and mind upon thee, and surely trust that thou art my well beloved Father. And according to the same I may love thee with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, and with all my power. Amen.

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ERRATUM: A correspondent has pointed out that, in the article 'Tasting God' by Philip Barry, in our last issue (June, p. 543), the reference for the words 'By love he can be gotten and holden . . .' is to *The Cloud of Unknowing*, not to Mother Julian of Norwich.—  
EDITOR.