

The language difficulty is not really insuperable. Recitation of the divine Office does not, as a rule, attract the un-liturgically-minded. Those who habitually use the Missal will be to a large extent on the way to understanding Latin. If the psalms and the scripture portions of Matins are read in translation at first and later in Latin on alternate days, it is surprising how quickly understanding develops. The homilies and the lessons about the saints at Matins are difficult for even good Latinists, and here our Bibles will not help. Nevertheless, persistence in reading these, even if at first only a word here and there is recognised, will eventually be rewarded as the Latin becomes more familiar. If these cannot be followed with devotion, the intention can be offered. If we love the Church we will love her language and try to learn it. A Breviary in English is to be had, but is, I believe, not complete. In any case so much of the spirit of any work is lost in translation that the enthusiast for the liturgy will usually prefer to struggle on, learning as time passes. Manuals of, and courses in, Church Latin are available. Among the former the excellent *Legendo* (Rushworth & Draper, 6s.) helps to lay a good foundation of the necessary grammar in an amazingly short time. Lovers of the liturgy, especially those whose time is limited, will soon discover or organise such societies as that of the *Magnificat*, in which the Office can be shared by a group. There are many ways of approximating to a full participation in this official prayer of the Church, and the laity will benefit greatly from this very liturgical practice.

---

## THE LADDER OF THE LORD'S PRAYER

BY

HONORIUS OF AUTUN<sup>1</sup>

[Honorius of Autun c. 1125, a contemporary and fellow-countryman of Saint Bernard, calls himself '*ecclesiae presbyter et scholasticus*'. A seventeenth-century editor of his work '*Inevitabile*' prefaces it with the following eulogy:

'About the one thousand and eighty-seventh year from the passing of Christ our Saviour from this world to the Father, there flourished in the duchy of Burgundy a certain priest Honorius, worthy indeed to be crowned with glory and honour, and shining among the clergy as a planet among stars.

'He was deeply versed in the Sacred Scriptures and most learned in secular knowledge; a man deeply erudite, subtle of mind, lucid

<sup>1</sup> Migne, P.L. 172. Translated by R. Wildy.

in speech, one who had attained the rank of Scholasticus in Autun, the former capital and see of that region of Burgundy (*Aeduorum*), and who showed himself by his works and life to be a true Doctor and Luminary of the Church.

... He resigned from public offices, and, when opportunity arose, he retired to a solitude—either some hermitage or to a monastery—thus putting into practice what he had read the Master Himself had told His Disciples to do (when they returned and told Him all they had done and said, after He had sent them forth), namely that they should come apart with Him into a desert place and rest awhile. So he who had hitherto spent himself in teaching others, would now for the remainder of his life live to God alone, and give himself entirely to spiritual things. Because of this some call him "Scholasticus", others "Inclusus", and yet others even "Anachoreta" or anchorite'.

The epithet '*Solitarius*' is found in two epistles addressed to Honorius about his writings, one '*ad Honorium Solitarium de Imagine Mundi*' and the other '*Honorio Solitario*' on *Gemma Animae*.

This treatise on the Lord's Prayer is in a sermon on the Nativity of our Lord, and occurs in Part III of his works (*Speculum Ecclesiae*).]



BELoved, it is your duty to pray to God daily, early and late, and indeed whenever you can, beseeching in your prayers all those things which are necessary for this life, and also future joys. The Wisdom of God came to men in the flesh, and taught us a short prayer in which he wishes us to pray for all our needs, present and future. This prayer may be compared to a river in which a lamb may wade and an elephant swim. It is of such a sort that the simplest person can learn and understand it, and yet it is beyond the apprehension of the most wise. And although you all know it well, you shall now say it after me.

\* \* \* \*

Beloved, God himself composed this prayer, and by means of it, as by a ladder he teaches you to rise to heavenly joys.

The sides of this ladder are contemplative and active life, and the highest Wisdom has inserted in these sides seven rungs which are the petitions of the prayer.

You stand on the first rung, and you cry to the Lord, '*Our Father*'.

Give heed now, my brothers, to what you say. You call God 'Father'. God does not wish you to address him as Lord but as Father, that you may think of yourselves as brothers in him, and that you may love each other as brothers, and through this love may become heirs of his Kingdom. If God is your Father, then you are the brothers of Jesus Christ who is the Son of God, and if, as sons, you do works which are pleasing to your Father, without doubt you

shall, with Jesus, receive the inheritance from God.

Then you say '*Who art in Heaven*', for although God is everywhere, nevertheless he dwells more familiarly in his saints and holy ones who are called '*Heavens*'; for he purifies and illumines them more abundantly with his grace. By these words you should be reminded to pray that you yourselves may become heavens in which God will wish to dwell.

After this you say '*Hallowed be thy name*'.

The name of God has always been holy. And that name, by which your Father is called, you ask should be sanctified in you in such a way that on account of your good works you may be worthy to be called his sons. From the name of Christ also you are called Christians, and you pray that you may receive sanctification with him in the Kingdom of the Father, so that we may all be one body in Christ.

After this, having reached the second step, you say: '*Thy Kingdom come*'.

This means: that it may please God to reign in you by grace, and that he will make you worthy of his kingdom.

Then you ascend the third step and say: '*Thy will be done, as in heaven so in earth*'. And what you mean here is that—as he takes pleasure in the angels in heaven who have never sinned, so also he may make us equal to the angels as he has promised. By '*heaven*' also may be understood the just; by '*earth*' sinners. For you ask God that as his good will is done in the just, so in you also its doing may become well-pleasing to him, turning you from evil ways to justice.

These three pertain to God: the four which follow to the world. In three petitions you ask for heavenly things; in four for temporal. And so you climb the fourth step and cry: '*Give us this day our daily bread*'.

'Daily bread' is the food of our physical nature. You ask God that you may receive from him, without committing sin, that daily, natural sustenance without which frail human nature is not able to subsist. But also by '*Bread*' is to be understood the Body of Christ. So you pray that you may always be worthy to receive his Body; and that you may worthily receive it daily if not into your own mouth, yet through the mouths of the priests. By '*Bread*' also spiritual doctrine may be understood without which the mind can no more live than can the body without carnal refection. So you ask God that he will grant you this each day, lest human weakness on its journey to its heavenly fatherland may faint by the way for hunger of that word.

Then, reaching the fifth step, you say '*Forgive us our sins as we also forgive those who sin against us*'.

If you forgive those who trespass against you, God will forgive you

your trespasses against him. If you do not forgive, neither will God forgive you. And you condemn yourselves by these words, for you ask that God will not forgive you. But if you omit this petition, you do not say the Lord's Prayer, and therefore God will not hear you.

Pardoned, you cry on the next step '*Lead us not into temptation*'.

God tempts no man since he is the reader of the hearts of all men. Each man is tempted by the Devil, yet all the same, no one is so tempted unless it is permitted by God. And it is good for man to be tested in this way so long as he is not conquered by consenting to sin. For when he has conquered his own evil desires, he will receive a crown of life. And so you ask God that he will never allow you to be tempted by the devil so greatly that you cannot escape being overcome by consent to and desire for the sin; and that, if you do consent to it, you may quickly draw back from it again.

On the seventh step you pray: '*Deliver us from evil*'. That is, from hell, and from all things which lead us into the maw of hell.

Beloved, by this prayer the world is reconciled to God. Our body becomes the ally of the soul. For there are seven petitions in it which are divided into groups of three and four. By the group of three petitions is symbolized the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But by the group of four is symbolized this world which consists of the four elements, namely earth, water, air, fire. Three therefore pertain to the soul, four to the body. The soul is irascible because it rejoices ardently in good things. It is rational because it distinguishes good things from evil. But the body consists of the four elements. Man therefore, who is said to be a microcosm, is joined to God by this prayer.

You must take note, beloved, that we begin this prayer from the highest heaven—that is from God the Father, when (in the first petition) we call God our Father. We descend to the lowest depths when we end it with the petition '*Deliver us from evil*'. And it is because the Son of God descended for our sake from the highest heavens, (that is to say, from his Father) to the lowest depths that he has taught us to begin the prayer from the Father. But because we had fallen, and had drowned ourselves in the deep waters of sin, we have to ascend this ladder by these rungs until we attain to heaven. . . .

\* \* \* \*

(Of the last four clauses). These four belong to active life. The three which precede them to contemplative. Active life is to love your neighbour and to serve Christ in the poor and wretched by almsgiving. From this we ought to pass on to the contemplative life. The contemplative life is to tread under foot earthly joys for the love of

God; to pray constantly and with a pure devotion<sup>2</sup>; always to be occupied with the divine Office, to listen gladly to all that concerns God.

In this state we ought, with St Paul, to seek the third heaven. The first heaven is the Holy Spirit, the Son is the second, the Father the third. This may be seen in these three clauses.

'Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven' means 'Grant us, through the Holy Spirit, to fulfil your will since you wish us to be equal to your angels in heaven'.

'Thy kingdom come' means 'What your Son has taught us, do you cause us to fulfil that we may be worthy to rejoice in the Kingdom of your Son'.

Then coming to the threshold of the highest heaven we cry with a great cry, 'Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name'. And this means to say 'Do you who have made us heavens through your Son, in the Holy Spirit, make us by faith and works your sons, that through your Son, you may wish to dwell in us, and may allow us to reign in you'.

This ladder, beloved, the prophet—enlightened by the Holy Spirit—foresaw when he foretold that Christ would descend to earth by it, and that we, by the same ladder, should ascend to heaven. 'There will rest upon him', said he, 'the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, the Spirit of Council and Might, the Spirit of Knowledge and Piety, and the Spirit of the Fear of the Lord'. See how the prophet begins with Wisdom, because he sees that Christ will descend from the highest heaven to us. He ends with fear for he foresees that by fear we shall ascend from hell to heaven. For we stand on this rung of fear when we flee for fear of hell. We reach the rung of piety when we strive to do right. We place the foot on the rung of Knowledge when we learn to know the things of God and human knowledge. We tread securely on the rung of fortitude or strength when neither by flattery nor threats will we turn aside from the truth. We seek a foothold on the rung of counsel when not only we ourselves do not flinch from doing what is right, but also are urgent in giving good counsel to others. The rung of understanding is reached when we try to know with our minds heavenly and spiritual things. Then at length we rise on the step of Wisdom if, despising earthly things, we savour alone those that are heavenly, and the things of God.

The sides of this ladder are the two precepts of Charity. None can come to heaven unless they climb this ladder.

Now, beloved, you have said your prayer. So next you must say after me your Creed. For as the fish cannot live without water so no one can be saved without faith.

<sup>2</sup> *Assidue orare.*