

Discourse Four:

Thy Will Be Done On Earth As It Is In Heaven. Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread.

Health of Body and Soul

I have heard a scientific lecture by a physician on the nature of health that perhaps may not be irrelevant for our discussion regarding the good health of the soul. He specified that the abnormal variation of one of the basic elements in our bodies is the beginning and cause of disease. And on the contrary as well, he said that the cure of what causes sickness is the restoration of the natural balance of those elements that were disordered...

But what is my aim in this long introduction to the discourse? This speculation is perhaps not without purpose, nor is it far off the present subject. What lies before us for examination is the petition "Thy Will be done." The following considerations will make clear why we have recalled the above medical theory.

The intelligent part of human nature was once healthy because certain elements, I mean the movements of the soul, were ordered within us in equal strength. But when the desirous part became dominant, the opposite disposition known as continence¹ was suppressed by the former prevailing part. Consequently, there was nothing to check the movement of disordered desire toward improper things. From this fact human nature was subjected to the mortal sickness of sin.

The true physician of the soul's evil passions—He who entered into the life of humanity for the benefit of those who were sick—dissolves the cause of disease and leads us to spiritual health through the truths of the Lord's Prayer. The health of the soul is gained by following the right course of the divine will, just as again to fall away from the divine will amounts to sickness of the soul ending in death.

When we abandoned the healthy diet in paradise and saturated ourselves with the poison of disobedience, we became sick. And for that reason our nature was overpowered by this sinister and mortal disease - sin. Thus the true physician came and cured the evil through its opposite according to the law of medicine. Those who have fallen ill on account of evil, because they have been separated from the divine will, He again frees from sickness through union with the will of God. For the words of the prayer provide therapy for the sickness afflicting the soul. He who says, "Thy will be done," prays as if his soul is possessed by some painful ailments. The will of God is to restore the health and salvation of human beings.

The Power of God's Will

When therefore we stand to say to God "Thy Will be done also in me," it is entirely necessary first to condemn that manner of conduct which is lived outside the divine will and to fully own up to it in confession. What I mean is the following. Because the opposing will worked evil in me through my previous manner of life and I became a servant of the evil tyrant carrying out as it were the enemy's death sentence against myself as my own executioner for this reason, Lord, take pity on my lostness and grant at last that Your will be done in me.

just as the darkness vanishes when light is brought into dark caves, so also when Your will is done in me every evil and improper movement of my will vanishes into nothing. Prudence² will extinguish the unbridled and passionate impulses of the mind. Humility will consume vanity. Moderation will cure the sickness of pride. The blessing of love will dispel from the soul a great host of opposing evils. Indeed, at the

¹ exercising self-restraint

² acting with or showing care and thought for the future :

countenance³ of love, all evils withdraw hatred, envy, vengeful temper, wrathful emotion, angry disposition, treachery, hypocrisy, rancor, vindictive desire, enraged outbursts of the heart, and bitter outlook. The entire legion of such evils vanishes by the power of the disposition of love.

In the same way the action of God's will expels idolatry which I view as being twofold: one concerning the worship of idols, which the prophetic word called "the idols of the nations"⁴ (Jer 14:22), and the other concerning the mania⁵ for silver and gold. Therefore, let Thy will be done in order that the Devil's will may be extinguished.

But why do we pray that the power of will for doing good be granted to us from God? Because human nature, once enfeebled by wickedness, is weak with respect to the good. For man does not again return from evil to the good with the same ease as he turns to evil. This statement can be applied to physical bodies as well. What is healthy may become sick, and what is sick may become healthy, yet not in the same way, nor with equal ease.

A person going along in good health can frequently find himself in mortal danger on account of a single wound. A sudden assault of fever can dissolve all the body's strength. A mere taste of poison can kill completely, or produce this result very nearly. Sickness and death may immediately follow the bite of a serpent, or the sting of a poisonous creature, or come about from some slip or fall, or even from excessive eating, or from some other such thing. However, relief from any ailment is not achieved except through much care, difficulty and medical skill, if it can be achieved at all.

On the contrary, there is no need for a helper when the impulse toward evil takes hold in us. Evil fulfills itself in our will easily. However, if our inclination is toward the good, there is need for God to lead our desire into action. This is the reason why we say, "Because Your will is prudent conduct, 'but I am carnal, sold under sin'⁶ (Rom 7:14), may the will toward the good be accomplished in me by Your power, and similarly also may justice, piety and freedom from evil passions be accomplished." For the word "will" in the prayer embraces generally all the virtues. And all the virtues we identify with the "good" are embraced by the will of God.

³ admit as acceptable or possible

⁴ Are there any among the idols of the nations that can cause rain?
Or can the heavens give showers?
Are You not He, O LORD our God?
Therefore we will wait for You,
Since You have made all these.

⁵ an excessive enthusiasm or desire; an obsession

⁶ Romans 7:14-25 (New King James Version): For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. 15 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. 16 If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. 17 But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. 19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. 20 Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Earth and Heaven

But what do the additional words mean, "on earth as it is in heaven?" I have the impression that these words contain one of the deepest doctrines. They express a teaching of divine contemplation about creation itself. The following explains what I mean.

All rational creation is divided into the bodiless and bodily natures. The bodiless creation is the angelic nature, while the other kind consists of us human beings. The spiritual nature dwells in the heavenly realm because it is free from a heavy body, I mean in comparison with our hard body which gravitates to the earth. The angelic nature lives in unfettered and ethereal⁷ places, being of a light and agile nature. But the other, the bodily, is necessarily allotted to the terrestrial sphere because of the kinship that the body, a kind of clay sediment, has with the earth.

I do not know what the divine will intends by ordering creation in this fashion. God may desire to integrate all creation so that neither the lower realm should be bereft of the things of heaven, nor heaven should be wholly devoid of the things of the earth. A kind of mutual participation of elements of the two natures occurs through the creation of man. In this manner the spiritual element of the soul, which we view as having affinity and likeness to the heavenly powers, dwells in earthly bodies; whereas this earthly flesh at the restoration of all things will be transposed through the resurrection to the heavenly realm together with the soul. As the Apostle says, "We shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:17). Whether this or something other than this has been designed by God's wisdom, all rational creation is divided into this twofold life. The bodiless is allotted the bliss of heaven, whereas the bodily is inclined to the earth because of the flesh and its affinity to the earth. Now the desire of the beautiful and the good has been placed equally in the essence of both natures. And God as overseer of all has created in both natures an equal measure of free will, self-governing and unfettered from all necessity, so that all creatures honored with reason and thought can function with a certain autonomous, free choice. But the life above is entirely pure from evil and not a single contrary thing shares its existence; whereas the life below is attended by all manner of passionate impulses and dispositions in which humanity dwells.

Therefore, the inspired words of the prayer truly presuppose that the way of life of the heavenly powers is unmixed with evil and is pure from every stain of sin. In contrast all evil which came into being through a self-withdrawal and separation from the good has collected as dregs and mire in the womb of this earthly life. Thus humanity is stained by the darkness of evil and hindered from beholding the divine light of truth.

The transcendent life is passionless and pure, whereas the wretchedness of this life is engulfed by all kinds of sufferings and hardships. It is evident, then, that the heavenly way of life, pure from every evil, is accomplished by the good will of God. For where evil does not exist, every good must necessarily abound. But life on our side, having fallen from communion with heavenly blessings, has at the same time fallen from the divine will too. It is for this reason that we are taught in the prayer to purify our life from evil in such manner so that God's will may direct our lives without hindrance and in the likeness of the heavenly way of life. Thus one could say: "Just as Your will is done among thrones and principalities, lordships and all transcendent powers, where no evil whatsoever impedes the action of the good, so also may the good be perfected in us in order that all evil may be expelled and Your will may find success through all things."

But someone could raise the objection: how is it possible that the purity of the bodiless powers be achieved among those who have been allotted life in the flesh? How is it possible for this to be achieved while the soul is enmeshed in myriad cares on account of bodily needs? It seems to me that I must attempt to solve this perplexity. I need to clarify this apparent difficulty of our discussion as follows.

⁷ heavenly or spiritual - extremely delicate and light in a way that seems too perfect for this world

Daily Bread

The prayer ordains that we should ask for daily bread. I think that these words establish the principle that moderate conduct, and being content with little by being free from evil passions, must be put on the same plane as the angelic attribute of lacking nothing. For an angel in prayer does not ask bread from God because the angel possesses a nature in need of nothing material. But man was commanded to ask for bread because what becomes empty must by all means to be filled again.

Human life by nature is transitory and fleeting, always seeking after what is new in the place of what has already been done. He who is attentive only to what is needful according to nature, and does not chase after vain cares beyond what is necessary, will not fall much short of the angelic way of life, imitating their attribute of needing nothing. It is for this reason that we have been commanded to seek only what suffices for the preservation of our physical body.

When we say to God, "Give bread," we do not ask for delights, riches, and flowery robes. We do not seek the beauty of gold, the glow of precious stones, and vessels of silver. We do not request an abundance of land, the command of armies, superiority in war, and governance over nations. We do not desire horses, cattle, and herds of other grazing animals. We do not aspire to possess a host of slaves, pomp in the marketplace, and acclamation by setting up monuments or public portraits. We do not yearn for silk garments and musical ensembles. We ask for none of these by which the soul is distracted from the divine and noble cares. We pray only for bread.

Do you perceive the breadth of divine wisdom and the wealth of teachings contained in these brief words? It is as if the Divine Word cries aloud to His listeners all but the following: stop, O people, from pouring your desires into vain things. Stop adding to the causes of suffering on your own selves. Your obligation to human nature is only a small thing. To your flesh you owe food, a modest and easily accessible thing, if your purpose is to meet only a need.

Why do you multiply burdens on yourself? For what reason do you subject yourself to the yoke of so many debts? Why do you mine for silver and dig for gold and search after transparent stones? Certainly, because through these things to be able to procure enjoyment of the belly - this insatiable tax collector - to whom the only obligation is really bread which fulfills what is needed for the body.

You trade as far as India. You risk life in unknown seas and commit yourself to annual voyages to fetch products to season your food. You are not mindful of the fact that the pleasure of spices reaches no further than the palate. The same is true of whatever is lovely or aromatic or savory - it provides only some quick and fleeting sensation of delight. What passes beyond the palate is marked by no difference, since nature equally changes all things into a foul odor. Do you see the outcome of artful cookery? Do you see the final result of gourmet allurements?

Instead ask for bread to meet life's needs. You are obligated by nature to the body only in this regard. Whatever else is contrived by the minds of pleasure seekers, it belongs to the extraneous act of sowing weeds. The seed of the housemaster is wheat⁸ (Mt 13:3) and from wheat bread is made. But luxury is derived from the weeds that the enemy has sown among the wheat. Human beings have left aside what is necessary by nature and, as the Divine Word somewhere says, they are choked by the pursuit of vain cares⁹ (Mt 13:22). Thus they remain unfruitful because the soul is continuously engaged with useless cares.

⁸ Matthew 13:3-8 - Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. 5 Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. 6 But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. 7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. 8 But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

⁹ Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

Eve's Counselor

It seems to me that perhaps even Moses contemplates something similar by means of symbols. He presents the snake as counselor to Eve on the question of pleasurable taste. It is said of the snake that, if this beast inserts his head smoothly into a crack, those who grab it by the tail cannot easily pull it out because the scales on its back naturally resist the force of those pulling it. And while a snake's progress is unimpeded because it slides forward on its smooth skin, it is impossible to draw it out backwards because of the resistance of the scales which prevents it.

The biblical story shows, I think, that we must guard against sinful pleasure gaining entrance and crawling into the openings of the soul. We must block up as best as we can the joints of daily conduct. Only in this way can human life be preserved pure from the realm of beasts. However, if the inner harmony of our lives is broken and the serpent of pleasure gains some access and begins in this manner to lurk within, it will be difficult to dislodge it from the compartments of the mind because of its thorny scales.

In hearing about scales, you should understand symbolically the many kinds of causes that stimulate sinful pleasures. Generally speaking, the evil passion of lust is a single beast, whereas the various and manifold notions of pleasure, mixed with human life by means of the senses, are the scales on the snake's skin filled with various kinds of sinful appetites.

If you are disposed to avoid company with the beast, then guard against its head, that is, the first attack of evil. This is the symbolic meaning of the Lord's commandment: "He will bruise your heel and you will bruise his head" (Ex 3:15). Do not give access to the serpent to slither in more deeply and insert its entire body from the outset. Abide by what is necessary. Let this be the presupposition of your concern for livelihood: the fulfillment of needs by those things that are easily accessible.

It may be that Eve's counselor will also engage you in dialogue about what is good in appearance and pleasant to taste. Next to bread, you too may seek a tasty delight and whatever is enjoyed with delicate seasonings. If you allow your desire in this manner to be led beyond the limit of what is necessary, then you will see the serpent slyly creep immediately toward greed. For having slithered from the necessary food to delicate eating, it will move on to what is delightful to the eyes. It will seek after shining vessels and graceful servants. It will desire silver couches, soft bedding, transparent veils embroidered with gold, splendid chairs and tripods. It will crave for washing tubs, mixing bowels, drinking horns, coolers, pitchers, basins, candlesticks, censers and other such things.

In this fashion the desire of greed takes hold. Moreover, in order that nothing may be lacking from the above provisions, a supply of income is required to obtain them. Someone must weep, a neighbor must lament, and many others must be made wretched by loss of their properties, in order that the splendor of the greedy man's table may be magnified through their tears. When the snake coils itself around all these things and fills the belly with whatever it desires, then satiety drags it crawling to licentious frenzy, which is the worst of human evils.

Bread of Justice

In order that none of these things may occur, the Lord frames life by giving easy access to bread. The delight that He seeks is but what your very nature provides, namely and above all, a good conscience that sweetens the bread partaken in justice. If you want true delight of the stomach, let a state of need become your faire. Do not add satiety to satiety. Nor spoil your appetite with drinking bouts. But rather let your meal be preceded by the sweat of doing God's commandments. "In sweat and toil you will eat your bread" (Gen3:19).

Do you perceive the first delight prepared by the Divine Word? It is sufficient for you to let your mind be occupied with what is needful. Indeed, let your soul be bound to cares for bread only to the degree of need. However, to Him who "brings forth bread from the earth" (Ps 104:14), to Him who "feeds the ravens" (Ps 147:9), to Him who "gives food to all flesh" (Ps 136:25), to Him who "opens His hand and fills every living thing with joy" (Ps 145:16), say: "My life is from You. Let the provisions for life also come from You. You, Lord, give me bread, that is, let my bread come from just toils." For if God is justice, he who procures food by greed does not gain his bread from God.

You are the true director of your prayer if your abundance does not come from what belongs to others; if your income is not derived from tears; if no one goes hungry because of your satiety; if no one groans on account of your fullness. Indeed, this is the bread from God the fruit of justice, the stalk of peace, the bread that is pure and unmixed with the seeds of weeds.

However, if you till the land of others with unjust intent, and back up your unjust claim with documents, and then go on to pray to God, "Give me bread," the one who hears your voice is another, not God. For the fruit of injustice is derived from the opposite, evil nature. He who is attentive to justice derives his bread from God. But he who cultivates injustice is fed by the evil contriver of injustice.

Therefore, look to your own conscience. Bring your request for bread to God, knowing that there is no communion between Christ and Belial¹⁰. And if you offer gifts acquired by injustice, your gift amounts to the yelp of a dog or the pay of a harlot. Even if you increase your gifts motivated by love of honor, you will hear the words of the prophet who abhors the offerings of such people: "What to me," says the Lord, "is the multitude of your sacrifices? I am filled with holocausts of burnt offerings of rams. The fat of lambs and blood of bulls and he-goats, I do not desire. Incense," He says, "is an abomination to me"¹¹. He who sacrifices a bull, God accounts as one who instead kills a dog¹² (cf. Isaiah 66:3). But if you have your bread from God, that is, from just toils, then you are permitted to offer to Him of the fruits of justice.

¹⁰ In the New Testament refers to Satan when asked by St. Paul as to how Christ and Belial can agree. The passage in the Bible NIV states: "What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" (2 Cor 6:15).

In early Christian writings, Belial was identified first as an angel of confusion and lust, created after Lucifer. Some apocrypha credit Belial as being the father of Lucifer and the angel that convinced him to wage a rebellion in Heaven against God, and that Belial was the first of the fallen angels to be expelled.

¹¹ Isaiah 1:11: To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

Isaiah 1:13: Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

¹² Isaiah 66:1-3 - Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is My throne, and earth is the footstool of my feet. What kind of house will you build for Me? Or what kind is the place of My rest? For My hand made all these things, and all these things are Mine," says the LORD; "and upon whom will I show respect, but to the humble and peaceful and to him who trembles at My words. But the lawless man who sacrifices a calf is as he who kills a dog; and he who offers a grain offering, as he who offers he blood of a pig; and he who offers incense for a memorial, as he who is a blasphemer."

Bread for Today

Excellent as well is the addition "today" in the petition, "Gives us this day our daily bread." Here another wise teaching is found in order that, when praying these words, you may learn that human life is transitory. What belongs to each individual is the present alone. Hope for the future remains hidden. For we "do not know what a day may bring forth" (Prov 27:1). Why do we keep troubling ourselves about future cares? He says, "Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day" (Mt 6:34). By trouble He means the hardships. Why are we anxious about tomorrow? Through the word "today" which He commands, He prohibits you from worrying about tomorrow. It is as if He tells you precisely the following: He who gave you the day will also give you what is needed for the day.

Who makes the sun rise? Who makes night's darkness vanish? Who shows you the rays of light? Who turns the sky so that the sun comes over the earth? He who has given you so many and great gifts, does He then need your human power in order to fulfill what is lacking and needed by your flesh? What anxious thought does the nature of dumb animals take about its own existence? Where are the tilled fields of ravens or the storehouses of eagles? Is not the source of life's provisions the same for all, namely, God's will which holds all things together?

The ox or donkey or any other animal possesses self-taught wisdom by nature. It manages well the present and cares nothing about the future. But do we need counselors to perceive the mortal and transitory nature of life according to the flesh? Can we not learn from the sufferings of others? Are we incapable of coming to our senses in our own lives?

What profit did the rich man of the parable gain by great concern about being prepared for the future¹³ (Lk 12:16-21)? He engaged in vain thoughts and baseless hopes about bringing down and building up, gathering and enjoying. With foolish hope he imagined long life in his barns. Did not a single night destroy that entire fancied hope as some useless dream spun in vain?

The life of the body belongs to the present alone, whereas the life reserved for us in hope belongs to the soul. Human foolishness falters in the use of the one and the other. In the one case it places bodily life among the hopes of the future. In the other case it draws the soul into the delight of the present. It is for this reason that the soul, focusing on appearances, is by necessity estranged from the hope of true reality. But when the soul anchors its hope on groundless things, it comes to possess neither these nor the future reality.

Let us therefore learn from the counsel of the prayer what we must ask for today and what we must ask for the future. Bread is for our needs today. The Kingdom is for our blessedness in the future. By saying "bread," He includes all bodily needs. If these are what we ask for, it is obvious to whomever is praying that our concern here is with transitory things. However, if what we ask for pertains to a blessing for the soul, it is clear that our prayer envisions what is eternal and everlasting. It is this indeed that the Master commands those who pray to regard it as both the greater thing and fulfilling the first need as well. "Seek," He says, "the Kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Mt 6:33). In Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom be the glory and the dominion to the ages of ages.
Amen.

¹³ Luke 12:16-21 (New King James Version) - Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 21 "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."