

Advent Sunday (28/11/04)

“thy kingdom come, thy will be done” (the Lord’s Prayer).

Of course we use the Lord’s Prayer at all seasons, but some of it is especially appropriate for Advent. This season of four Sundays is not about preparing for Christmas, but about the End - about the direction in which all Christian life is pointed. So a few pointers from the first half of the Prayer may help us to use it well in these next weeks. Quotations are from Charles Gore “Prayer and the Lord’s Prayer”. He was Bishop successively of Worcester, Birmingham and Oxford in the early 20th century.

Our Father “It makes the whole difference in prayer whether we in fact realise that God is our common Father.” “God who has created us, because He is also our Father, is bound to care for each of His creatures; bound to make the best of each”. “The God whom we approach is the Father of all, and accepts - nay desires to have pressed upon Him in prayer - the responsibility of His Fatherhood.”

Which art in heaven “The idea that we are intended to attach to God’s *heavenly* Fatherhood is, that He is infinitely raised above us in the height of His holiness and the largeness of His wisdom.” “It is only sin that kept earth, the abode of men, apart from heaven, the abode of God. Now the ‘kingdom of heaven’ is come; it is ‘within us’ or among us.” “Thus in appealing to ‘our Father which art in heaven’ we are appealing to one who is ‘closer than breathing’ and ‘nearer than hands and feet,’ to whom the slightest motion of the heart and will is audible.”

In earth as it is in heaven (Hebrew has very few prepositions available, so “in” both times is quite likely to be a fair translation of what our Lord said. The Greek of the New Testament and therefore many modern translations say “on” earth. This is not a problem to worry about.) I mention this clause out of order because it applies to all the three clauses which come before it.

Hallowed be thy name In all these clauses we ask God to establish on earth what is the case in heaven, so here to *make His name holy* - to vindicate Himself. “The matter of first and dominant importance is, that men should believe and hold what is true about the being and character of God, and believing aright, should let their belief be expressed in the reverence of their lives.” “*Hallowed be thy name* in the continual sanctification of the lives of Christians, that they may indeed by, in the Son and through the Spirit, a holy priesthood to God, even the Father.”

Thy kingdom come “The kingdom of God is an orderly constitution of all things visible and invisible, inanimate, animate and spiritual, each in its own place fulfilling the Divine will.” “The necessity for this prayer arises only because the rule of God in the world has been - not indeed banished, but obscured. So that from the point of view of sinful, alienated man, the kingdom of God, His manifested rule, must be treated as an absent thing to be desired and invoked.” The visible Church is the poor continuation of the Kingdom begun in Christ; there is so much more to come.

Thy will be done “This is the Divine ideal of the universe, that each creature - inanimate, animate, rational - should find its joy in realising its own function - that is, in being the thing that it is meant to be, in experiencing the joy proper to itself, and in seeing all the other creatures realising all their separate functions, while all together contribute to a common end.” “The prayer is a prayer against selfishness; it is equally a prayer against sloth.”

“Religion is to put heart and courage into us, both to work and to pray, to co-operate according to the Divine will both for the overthrow of the kingdom of darkness and the establishment of the kingdom of God.”