

REFLECTIONS ON THE LORD'S PRAYER Bro. GIOVANNI LOMBARDO

The language spoken by Jesus was Aramaic. Nevertheless the gospels are all written in Greek and only afterwards translated into Latin in the *Vetus Itala*, then re-examined by Saint Jerome, the author of the famous Vulgata. Therefore, for the exegesis of the texts it's necessary first of all to make reference to the Greek text. For this task the work of Mathew,¹ the most complete and officially accepted by the catholic liturgy was consulted, which was reproduced in the bilingual edition by Merk.²

* * *

From an initial observation, it can be seen that the Lord's prayer is made up of two parts. The first contains the identification of divinity, its essence and its actions in this world; the second pertains to the relationship that lies between man and his behavioural methods.

Our father thou art in heaven, begins by invoking God, by following the substantive form of the adjective "our", that is "of all of us". The use of the adjectives is extremely significant, because it underlines the universal communion between all creatures. This interpretation is reinforced by the following preposition in the plural form: "thou art in heaven", or, better, in the "skies".³

Why? Even those not directly involved in astrology, as with the undersigned, have come across the use of this terminology in other occasions. I remember that in the Divine Comedy, the structure of heaven is formed by nine spheres, or "skies", that take the name of the already known planets, together with the "sky" of the Sun, the Moon and that of the Fixed Stars; all these skies are contained in the *Primum Mobile*, that pulls them in motion; in the end the Empire.

In traditional astrology the planets and the stars are considered not only for themselves, but what they stand for and the roles they play for man and the environment; indicating the "skies" we therefore intend to make reference to that harmonizing factor, present in the divinity of every aspect of the creation, considered unitarily, opens up a theophany: *coeli enarrant gloriam Dei*, sings the Psalmist,⁴ that is nature, the world and the entire universe praise the glory of God, of which they are an emanation. It would be superficial to identify this concept as "pantheism", I believe instead that it is more precise to define it as "panentheism", *pan en theò*, all is in God.

Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done. If the Latin translation leaves us somewhat perplexed, the Italian one, even more so. The form of the verb used in the Vulgata is the exhortatory subjunctive, where in Greek the passive aorist imperative form is used. The aorist tense (past tense) - *aoristos chrònos* - indicates action taken place in an undefined period of time; the word "aorist" etymologically signifies "without limits", *a-orizein*. A particular form for this tense, used to indicate an action extra temporal, is that of the "gnomic" aorist, from *gnome*, sentence: it was used to confer authority to a given subject, indicating a truth or a standard, legal or of life. The Greek language is very rich in overtones, which often renders the use of periphrasis in translation, as the students well know. All this signifies that the actions to which the prayer refers, don't necessarily have to happen in the future, but rather that they've already been carried out once and for all in an eternal timeless dimension, in the time without time!

The Italian translation "thy will be done" is absolutely misleading, here it seems nearly as if it were the job of the preacher to operate and co-operate for this goal. The Latin term *feri* as with the Greek term *ghighnomai* principally mean "to be", "to be born", "to become", "to end". Furthermore in the Greek text the verbal action is expressed in the singular second person form: or rather, the subject that has carried out an action, therefore in this context the same Father to whom we refer, can be understood with the intention that He wanted that his name be hallowed, his kingdom to come and his will to be done!

As in heaven as on earth. This time "sky" is singular, in contrast to "earth" in order to highlight the concept of verticality, the plumb line of the Great Architect, the *sūtrātmā* of the Hindi tradition, the "axial" symbol of the manifestation which unites the variform expressions of the Being and

¹ Mt. 6, 9-13

² A. Merk S. J., *Novum testamentum graece et latine*, ed. X, Roma 1984

³ In Greek *ourano's* means both "sky" and "heaven". The former is however more appropriate.

⁴ Ps. 89, 6. In English: *And the heavens shall praise thy wonders, o Lord*

temporarily converges them to the Superior Principle, from which they have come and to which they will harmoniously re-converge.

Give us this day our daily bread. In the Latin text of Mathew, the adjective “daily” is not used, but rather *supersubstantialem*, that is “over and above the substance”, therefore spiritually; in the Greek text *epiòusion*, past participle of *epeimi*, meaning “to turn up”, “to arrive”, in this context “daily”; but also *epeimi*, which means literally: “above: *epi* - the being: *eimi*”. The adverb *sémeron* means “today”, “every day”, thus totally expressing the idea of daily. I’ll venture upon the following translation of: give us our spiritual nourishment, as being very different from loaf. Maybe though, both translations are correct: it all depends on the spiritual evolution of those who ask.

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Also with this point, there is something to say. First of all the translation of “we forgive” as with the Latin *dimittimus* is wrong: in the Greek text it is cited as *afékamen* which is the verb form of the present perfect tense: therefore we must translate as “we have forgiven”. We must not forget that Jesus in fact was a Jew and as such had a strong sense of justice: you cannot ask for yourself more than you have already given to others. But is that all? I believe that we can add something else.

First of all, the substantive *ofeleimata* was precisely translated as “debts”, but it could also have highlighted “obligations”. An “obligation” is that which “binds us” (*ob-ligo*). There is a difference, in that debt being a consequence of an obligation. “Forgive” is the translation of *áfes*, which literally means “take far away; remove”. Quite correctly then, Arnold Bittlinger proposes a psychoanalytic interpretation: take away all that binds us (negative), one from each other, that is the bitterness that corrodes from within us, making us live badly and make us waste energy.⁵

It’s a well known concept to Buddhists who teach the value of meditation, which serves to purge to mind from negativity which causes us frustration and suffering. Furthermore, recent studies in the medical field have demonstrated the link that exists between the illnesses of the “soul” and tumours, due to the internal corrosion provoked by the former alters the biological renewal process of the cells that remain exposed to the risk of tumour degeneration. In this sense, to forgive appears as something different to that proposed by the oppressively politically correct: you can forgive, you can remove the “bond”, without opening the jail’s doors to those who have not given any proof of sin for the past and of repentance for the future.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. This translation also leaves us unsatisfied, if not completely puzzled. We will never be able to understand how the greatest expression of love can cruelly play with us, his imperfect creatures, tempting us to see if we are taken aback and maybe rejoicing. From a similar divinity, we don’t even feel the need.

In reality, *peirasmòn* signifies “test”; the verb *peiràzo* means “put to the test”. The test is conceptually different from temptation, in that there is no push towards evil; Job was put to the test, Eve was instead tempted by the serpent; the subject put to the test always conserves the right to choose between good and evil, without receiving requests in one way or another.

The “evil” of which we speak is only metaphysic? Or it is not even that state of being “tired of living”, imposed from our daily existence that can make us think that we have been abandoned by the Lord to our destiny? The doubt is legitimate: in the Apocalypse the eschatological battles are preceded by catastrophic events such as war, plague, famine etc., that touch human conditions. You can’t even exclude that the mind of Jewish Jesus was sub-consciously weighed down by the memories of the humiliation effected on his people in Egypt, by the suffering of the Babylonian exile; obviously nothing in comparison with Shoah which came about after nearly two thousand years. Even without adding these facts, we know however that life offers countless examples of tests that on the long run, can compromise and make our psychophysical irreparable. Therefore it would have been suffice that these tests had been spared from us, or at least if sufficient support to overcome them had been given, if not in the body, at least in the mind.

As initiates, it is exactly this I believe we should ask to the Great Architect. Conscious that our being is part of a universal being, we must pray to find the necessary strength within ourselves in order to avoid losing this awareness, to always be supported by the good will to carry-on, even if three thousand obstacles and even more threats bar our way on the long, painful but always conscious and fruitful walk towards the radiant Temple that encloses the eternal values of harmony and universal love.

⁵ A. Bittlinger, *Padrenostro*, Red ed.