

# **Orientations of the Lord's Prayer for Shaping a Just and Peaceful World**

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Extremists of all religions and many fanatic politicians have misused their religious resources especially their scriptures to support and justify their communal attitudes and violent approaches to the so called outsiders or enemies. Thus extremists from Christian and Jewish traditions have misused the Bible also. In the Old Testament itself there are many instances of the misuse of the name of God to justify the fanatic attitude and violence inspired by the selfish agendas of the Jewish community. However, the Bible passages which can be used to promote justice and peace are numerous. The Sermon on the Mount (St. Matthew 5, 6, &7), the chapter of Love (I Corinthians 13) and the Kenotic passage (Philippians 2:1-11) are only a few such passages which have been used and which can be interpreted meaningfully to establish peace on earth. The Bible as a whole needs to be interpreted in the light of Jesus Christ, who inaugurated the Kingdom of love, justice and peace in history. This essay is an attempt to understand the Lord's prayer as a means of grace and encouragement for spreading the light of peace in a groaning world of injustice, conflicts and violence

## **Introducing the Lord's Prayer**

The prayer taught by the Lord Jesus Christ is recited by his followers from first century onwards. The prayer known as Lord's prayer mentioned in slightly different versions in the gospels (St. Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4) is a summary of the Gospel teachings. Many of the great ancient Christian writers like Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Maximus the Confessor have written commentaries about the Lord's prayer. In the Eucharistic services this prayer is recited by the faithful before receiving Holy Communion. In *Didache*, one of the earliest Christian writings other than the NT writings, it is mentioned that this prayer should be recited three times a day by the Christians.

Usually human prayers are expressions of physical concerns and needs and requests to solve some crisis or to overcome painful situations. But the first three petitions of this prayer known as 'Thou petitions' are concerning the fulfillment of higher divine goals centered around God's name, kingdom and will. It is by identifying with the Divine wishes as revealed by Jesus Christ that the followers are expected to say this prayer. After these three Thou petitions come three petitions about human needs in this transient journey – daily bread, forgiveness and protection from evil.

Meaning of Lord's prayer is inexhaustible and it seems to be impossible to give one final conclusive explanation for this prayer. This is an attempt to analyze the Lord's prayer to understand its hidden insights for establishing peace and harmony in our world where communalism, conflicts, violence, injustice, and war, occur on a regular basis everywhere.

## **A Few Peace focused themes**

### **1. Abba Consciousness and Peace**

*Abba* is the Aramaic Syriac term used in the salutation of this prayer for Father. The salutation 'Our Father who art in heaven' is unique. The term 'father' has been used in Old Testament, Indian spiritual writings like Bhagavad-Gita, Upanishads etc and also in ancient Greek literature to depict God. The famous Greek literary giant Homer has frequently referred to Zeus as "Father of gods and men" in his *Iliad*. However, it was Jesus who taught us to address God as *Abba* which is not just the beginning of this prayer but the very foundation of this prayer. But Jesus, most of the times has used *Abba* to refer to or address the Ultimate source and provider of life. The first Cause, The Unmoved mover, Creator, Almighty, Most high, Supreme One, Infinite One, Ultimate reality, Lord, Benefactor, Brahman etc are a few words that have evolved in human imagination to address God. Each of these designations indicates some element of truth and understanding. The uniqueness of "Our Father" is that it reveals joy of family union, warmth, love and intimacy. Alexander Schememann has rightly observed that "In its deepest and original sense Christianity is the religion of fatherhood, which means that it is not founded on intellectual ideals or philosophical deductions, but on the experience of love which floods our whole life, on the experience of personal love."<sup>1</sup>

a. *Abba* Consciousness and Global Family Vision

As Father is a uniting principle of a family, God the Ultimate source of life can be understood as the ground of the unity of the whole world. Even if the human imagination about multiverse is not proven true beyond all doubts, there is still an incomprehensible unity of all. James Lovelock's 'Gaia Theory' and similar theories visualize the whole universe as one organism. Modern science is fully convinced about the unity of the whole universe and also unity of mankind. The image of one body and different organs can be used to portray the unity of the universe as well as unity of mankind. Fatherhood of God beautifully explains the universal brotherhood. In spite of our religious, racial, linguistic, national, cultural, and gender differences all the inhabitants of this earth, a small planet in the vast universe, belong to one family and as earth citizens we need to celebrate this familial fellowship. When this consciousness of global family or community of communities not only of individuals but also of communities is deepened, there will be respect for each other's dignity and restraint from manipulating other lives and from denigrating other communities. Not merely Father, but "our" also points to each one's relationship with all in this world family. St. Cyprian of Carthage wrote in his commentary on the Lord's prayer: "Our prayer is public and common. When we pray, we pray not for one but for the whole people, because we, the whole people are one. The God of peace and the teacher of concord, who taught unity willed that one should thus pray for all, even as He himself bore us all in one"<sup>2</sup>

b. *Abba* Consciousness and Freedom from Anxiety

The vision of God as father imparts a confidence in His care and providence. In the midst of human struggle in this world of sufferings and miseries the trust in a God who takes care as a father is an unusual comfort and support. Jesus' exhortation is to be free from anxiety by putting whole hearted trust in God and he showed its

methodology and benefits through his own life especially when he was going through undeserved horrible sufferings. Planning for each one's life and also the service of the Kingdom of God in this world is good and necessary but it should be free from ruining anxiety and uncontrollable tensions. Jesus told his followers that even if they would leave him alone in the time of his sufferings he was confident that he would not be alone then. Jesus's reasoning for this is a recurring experience he used to enjoy: "the Father is with me"(St. John 16:32). Immediately after this Jesus says "I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In this world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." His words and life inspire to struggle for the peace of the world with a peace of mind through painful experiences and sufferings. It is noticeable that the way of the cross is proven successful by the resurrection of the Lord which is a unique encouragement for struggling for establishing the Kingdom of God in this world. So in our survival struggles and the endeavors to spread the light of the kingdom of God we can be peaceful by putting our trust in God as a child depends on its mother or father and feel weightlessness and comfort. The idea of a provident Father and freedom from anxiety is very powerful in Jesus' Gospel (Luke 12: 29-32). This conviction itself is foundational to peace and hope.

c. Abba Consciousness and the Joy of Intimate Relations with the Ultimate Love

When Jesus used the word Abba which is equivalent to Dad or Papa/ Ma'am, his intention was for all to have an intimate and loving relationship and union with God. When the human potential to enter into the presence of God and have communion with that Divine Presence who holds all things radiantly together is not fulfilled properly, the inner vacuum will create an insatiable thirst for power, possessions, domination and sex. This dissatisfaction and consequent perversions also contribute to various injustices and violent conflicts. Those who have realized this truth as children of God spend time in worship and prayer at different levels, which is not so easy in a secular world today.

d. One of the root causes of the increasing environmental crisis today is a narrow world- view developed by secularism and scientism which tries to emphasize the autonomous and self-sufficient nature of creation. Once Abba is ousted only Man and nature remain, resulting in the loss of a sacred sensibility about the world in humans and enhancement of their greed to exploit the creation for self-gratification with least botheration about the rest of the eco system and all the victims of ecological degradation.

e. "Who art in heaven" in the salutation refers to the transcendence of God. God is near to us with His paternal affinity and kindness and at the same time He is beyond the death and decay of this world. He is transcendent in the sense that he is not confined to a particular place or community or church or religion but is beyond all human borders and limitations. This salutation "Our Father (Abba ) who art in heaven" draws our attention to the heavenly one who is the ultimate

source of harmony and inspiration for fellowship and the one who enlightens us to transcend peace-negating limitations

## 2. Humility generating Thou petitions and Peace

The first three petitions- hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, and thy will be done on earth - focus on God's name, kingdom and will. These three petitions are identical in meaning and are in passive voice. The meaning of these petitions can be clarified by adding the words 'by your grace through us'. We seek Divine help to glorify His name, to serve His kingdom and to do His will.

The first three petitions are helplines to overcome egotism of individuals and communities by acknowledging the centrality of God. These prayers are enlightening to shift the focus from my name, my kingdom and my will to God's name, kingdom and will. Idolatry of self and narcissistic obsession with the self-interests is the dominant mark of our 'me-first' culture today. Widespread consumerist culture, communalism and major conflicts and violence everywhere are founded on this egotism. So these petitions are shedding light to overcome this egotism and to be humble enough to promote harmony making. The spiritual light of these three petitions which leads to peace generating humility, is dazzling.

When we pray **Hallowed be thy name** we mean let God's name be hallowed in us and by us. Hallowed be your name is a kind of praise and thanks giving to God. God's name is praised literally in Jewish, Christian, Hindu and Islamic religious traditions. Jesus was well acquainted with daily recital of the Shema in the Synagogue worship in which it is said "blessed be his name whose glorious Kingdom is for ever and ever." But this glorification of God's name need not be confined to words of praise only. Let His name be hallowed by our acts pleasing to God

A name stands for the whole person and when Jesus told that his mission was to reveal the name of the heavenly Father (St. John 17: 6 & 26) what he meant was to reveal the compassion, holiness and justice of God through his enlightening words and bold acts. On another occasion Jesus clarifies how humans have to manifest and glorify God's name thus: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). It is the vocation of all humans who are appointed, to be the presence of God in this world, which means to be like Christ. Those who have proclaimed their commitment to this vocation through baptism have a special obligation to glorify God's name. In other words, this is a reminder to lead a life as the children of God who is holiness, love and peace. St. Gregory of Nyssa in fourth century while explaining this petition said, "If I pray Hallowed be Thy Name, I ask that these words may affect in me things such as these: May I become through Thy help blameless, just and pious, may I abstain from every evil, speak the truth and do justice. May I walk in the straight path shining with temperance, adorned with incorruption, beautiful through wisdom and prudence."<sup>3</sup> This explanation to glorify God's name through our virtues remind us of Jesus' exhortation to be perfect as His Heavenly Father (Matthew 5:48).

In order to understand the prayer **Thy Kingdom Come** it is necessary to have a look at Jesus' kingdom of God ministry. Kingdom of God is a prominent and recurring theme in Jesus' teachings. His primary mission was to inaugurate and spread the kingdom of God. Majority of His Jewish audience was over concerned about the liberation of Palestine from the grip of Roman Empire and to establish a Jewish Kingdom centered in Jerusalem. Jesus' major concern was not in tune with their Messianic expectation. Jesus invited people to submit to the rule of God and to follow the will of God so that they can experience joy and fulfillment and peace. It was a call to repent and experience the joy of the Kingdom of God and to be agents of a new world order in accordance with the God's expectations.

Most of the early Christian interpreters of the Lord's prayer have observed that this second petition refers to our sanctification by the elimination or annihilation of the dehumanizing passions in our heart. Rule of passions like anger, hatred, greed, jealousy, distorted lust need to be replaced by the rule of God leading to the joy of freedom. It must be noted that Maximus the Confessor in his treatise on the Lord's prayer emphasizes the fact that elimination of lust and anger prepares the ground for the victory of the Kingdom of God.<sup>4</sup>

In his universal explanation to this petition St. John Chrysostom presents two kingdoms in the world, that of God and that of the devil and he thinks that here we ask that the Kingdom of God remain and that the latter be removed.<sup>5</sup> Every day disappointing news about painful experiences come to us from different corners of the world: news about corruption, crimes, cheating, communal violence, caste discrimination, wars, environmental exploitation and pollution, child labor, poverty related issues, domestic violence, terrorism, ethnic violence, natural as well as man-made calamities etc. Can we think that all such issues can be fixed by scientists, politicians, soldiers and police only? Work of the Kingdom of God includes all endeavors and struggles for freedom, peace, justice, alleviation of the miseries of the poor, dignified human relationship, support to the weak, healing to the sick and the joy of Divine communion. So the Kingdom of God is a new joyous world order to be experienced in the present. But we can understand from Jesus' life and ministry that it is not a baseless utopian fantasy.

A lot of people migrating from developing countries to the developed countries has become a fashionable trend today all over the world. This is a movement to more comfortable and better life situations. But Jesus' incarnation was a move to a place of sufferings, evil and violence and injustice in order to make it a better place by spreading the light of love, reconciliation and communion with God. The Gospel was communicated to the poor and the victims of sin and injustice and thus the Kingdom of God was inaugurated by God's love in Jesus Christ. However the Kingdom of God has not yet been fully visible in history. We pray that we could be empowered to be agents of this Kingdom to hasten its coming. This petition gives us hope to participate in the struggles of history to establish peace. As Leonardo Boff observes rightly "The Kingdom must be understood as a process: it is already emerging, it is becoming present in the very person of Jesus, in his words, in his

liberating practices, and at the same time it is open to a tomorrow when its absolute fullness will finally arrive. ....The kingdom of God is constructed in opposition to the kingdom of Satan and to the presently existing diabolical structures. Thus conflict is inevitable; and a crisis cannot be avoided. We are urged to make a decision. The prime target is the poor. ....Jesus with his kingdom wants to put an end to their degrading situation. The kingdom comes through the poor and in opposition to poverty, which will have no place in it.....The kingdom is a joyful state, celebrated in the present, but at the same time it is a promise that is to be realized in the future. It is a gift and a task”<sup>6</sup>

When the early Christians were a tiny powerless community, they had to go through many trials and tribulations in the mighty Roman Empire. When they were forced to offer worship to the Roman gods or Emperor, with the power of this new kingdom they openly declared that their ultimate allegiance was to God the king of kings. In spite of the pressure to say Caesar is Lord (*Kurios Caesar* ) they boldly proclaimed that it is a lie, Jesus is Lord. They were ready to give due respect to the administration of the Empire. However, when they were intimidated and forced to go against their faith and conscience they challenged it by the power of the Kingdom of God. Kingdom of God means power to the victims of oppression and the poor. So this enhances courage in the face of political and administrative violence in the name of discipline, uniformity and superiority of majority. As St. Paul says “The Kingdom of God is not just talking; it is living by God’s power.” (I Corinthians 4:20).

Violence is a basic methodology for Empire building which is against the ethos of the Kingdom of God. Instead, kingdom of God is an attempt to enlighten the hearts of the people and invite them to experience the its joy. So it is a freely chosen experience. Empires or kingdoms have clearly marked borders whereas Kingdom of God extends beyond all borders. All major Empires and kingdoms in history have perished whereas the kingdom of God is an experience which will grow in history and go beyond history to eternity. The petition ‘Thy Kingdom come’ is a prayer of hope in history and beyond.

The petition **Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven** further explains the meaning of the prayer ‘Thy Kingdom come.’ Jesus Christ is the standard of human being and he by doing the will of God radically (John 5:30, John 15:10) he showed us the fullness of humanity. The gist of the will of God as taught by Jesus Christ is love only which includes forgiveness, commitment to peace making, to alleviate the miseries of the poor and the marginalized, justice etc. Through his words and deeds He revealed this will of God which is a new lifestyle of the Kingdom of God. Cyprian of Carthage defines the will of God as ‘that which Christ both did and taught.’ He interprets this petition as our seeking God’s help to obey God’s will in all things as Christ did.<sup>7</sup> It must be noted that those who took the will of God as revealed by Jesus seriously have contributed tremendously to make our world peaceful and just, a better place to live in. The best example is Mahatma Gandhi who used to meditate on the Sermon on the Mount on a regular basis and tried to practice it. God’s will is oriented to the welfare of all. Submitting to the will of God by understanding the

limitations and pitfalls of the self-interests of individuals and communities is self-renunciation. This cross bearing which is an expression of the true love of God, as Jesus teaches, leads to abundant life and joy (Luke 9:23, 24; Matthew 7:14; John 14:23).

Most of the ancient Christian interpreters of Lord's prayer understood heaven in this prayer as signifying angelic beings who were fully ready to do the will of God. So through this petition we the earthly beings are seeking Divine help to do His will with hundred percentage dedication like the angels. In the language of the Middle East and the Bible the words "heaven and earth" are used to indicate the totality of God's creation (Matthew 5:18, 24:35). Thus God is "Lord of heaven and earth" (Matthew 11:25) and the Risen Christ has authority over heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). In this light the Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff says, "To pray thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven means: to do the will of God everywhere and always. .... Today we are especially sensitive to structural sin and social injustice, this is of essential importance in realizing holiness in social relationships and in economic, political and cultural mechanisms. There is no area of space that is to be closed off from the transformation intended by the Kingdom of God..."<sup>8</sup>

Origen's comment on this petition is noteworthy: "If the will of God were done on earth as it is in heaven, earth would no longer be earth ... we would then all be in heaven."<sup>9</sup> Not only this but all these petitions give us an orientation to make our earthly life paradisiacal. Thus we are also reminded that Kingdom of peace and joy is not only a gift but also a task.

### **3. 'Our Daily Bread' and Insights of Peace**

Bread in the petition "Give us this day our daily bread" is a symbol of our sustenance; everything that sustains our life. We acknowledge God as the ultimate provider of bread for our body, mind and spirit. Without distinguishing the physical and the spiritual, body and soul, we are expected to put our whole hearted trust in God for our living. This 'bread' includes, food, shelter, health, healthy environment, air, water, job and purchasing power, entertainment, information, wisdom, spiritual nourishment etc. But in this life struggle, this petition equips us to put our wholehearted trust in God without being anxious.

A lot of people like farmers, laborers, harvesters, transporters, shopkeepers, cooks etc have labored for the food we consume. Not only human labors, Nature also plays a role in the formation of farm products which is later converted to food. The soil which produces grains, fruits and vegetables is miraculous. Our own hard earned money is also needed to purchase food materials. The job which sustains us is also connected to a lot of people and processes. So this prayer helps to appreciate the grace behind all these and requests to bless all these processes and people without which our sustenance is not possible.

We pray "give us" and not 'me' alone. We are supposed to pray this in solidarity with human family especially by being sensitive to the victims of poverty, hunger and malnutrition.<sup>10</sup> According to reliable sources, around nine million people die every year of hunger and hunger related diseases. A child dies from hunger every ten seconds. How to

achieve the huge challenge regarding the UN sustainable development goal of zero hunger by 2030 need to be the most important spiritual question also. If the Russia -Ukraine war had ended through proper dialogue some percentage of the money wasted for the war could have been used to alleviate the miseries of the hungry and the hunger deaths could have been stopped. Since all the members of our world family are not getting proper food and other means of sustenance, this petition and the corresponding actions in tune with this prayer are very relevant today. Spiritual exercises like fasting and prayer need to be understood in the light of divine instruction to “share your food with the hungry” (Isaiah 58:7).

In this petition, ‘daily’ is the translation of the Greek word *epiousios* which is a strange word in Greek and as Origen hints perhaps coined by the Apostles. According to Gregory of Nyssa *epiousios* means that which is necessary. This is a prayer to be satisfied with a moderate life without being distracted by the vanities and luxury of this world. The challenge of the gospel is to lead simply a simple life which makes us capable of sharing our bread with the needy. The greed based consumerist culture is the biggest threat to this need based peaceful life. St. Basil the great has written extensively about the insensitivity and injustice of the rich to the poor due to the luxurious life style of his time. He wrote in fourth century addressing the rich “You gorgeously array your walls, but do not clothe your fellow human being; you adorn horses, but turn away from the shameful plight of your brother or sister, you allow grain to rot in your barns, but do not feed those who are starving; you hide gold in the earth, but ignore the oppressed!”<sup>11</sup> For Basil those who are financially capable but refuse to support the poor and the marginalized can also be counted as murderers and robbers.<sup>12</sup> As a summary statement of his vision of social justice he says, “if we took only what was necessary to satisfy our own needs, giving the rest to those who lack it, no one would be rich, no one would be poor and no one would be in need.”<sup>13</sup>

Humans are not only getting nourished from this visible world but also from the transcendent source of life. It is noticeable that Jesus introduced himself as bread of life (St. John 6). As a full human being Jesus Christ confessed that he was on unceasing nourishment from his heavenly father and exhorts us to feed on him (John 6:57). Nourishment through Holy Eucharist is just one part of this spiritual nourishment. Being the bread of life He nourishes us through his teachings also.

#### **4. No Peace without Forgiveness**

Like bread, forgiveness is also another existential necessity of humans. We ask God for forgiveness of our debts /sins. The petition given in St. Matthew’s Gospel is “Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors.” This prayer becomes meaningful only to those who have realized their sins and failures and show an interest to be free from the guilt and damages caused by their sins. They seek Grace to start a new phase of life by being ready to change their dealings and approaches. But our modern culture has changed a lot to accommodate everything including the most selfish acts as acceptable and glorious. Sometimes evil is glorified to avoid guilt or belittle evil as a psychological problem only. Only in the light of divine wisdom do we realize our sins which ruin our own life and that of the community and the nature associated with us. Actually there is no private sin, every sin has social impact also. Our hope is that our Abba is compassionate to the wicked and the sinful. Already



Jesus Christ, the Son of God has taken the punishment upon Him for our sins and his death is linked to the forgiveness of sins. In each Eucharistic worship, His followers remember this forgiving love of God when the celebrant repeats the words of Jesus Christ in the Last Supper: "...this is my blood ...poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). Jesus also gave a picturesque description of this amazing forgiveness of God to those who take initiative for a renewal through repentance in his famous parable about the Father who lavishes his extravagant love on the son who realized his deviations and came back. By sensing his son's sincere intention, the father in this parable, being filled with compassion ran to the son and put his arms around him and kissed him and arranged a celebration to mark the occasion of his return (Luke 15:11-24). As Jacob Theckanath observes rightly "Acknowledgement of our sinfulness is an explicit sign of our return to the source of love from which we choose to move away"<sup>14</sup>

This prayer emphasizes that a person must actually forgive his/her debtors if God's forgiveness is to become real for him /her. Jesus' exhortation is to reflect forgiving love of God in our dealings with those who wronged against us. At the zenith of his sufferings also Jesus practised this teaching by praying for his persecutors. Jesus Christ who was close to his heavenly Father introduced him as a merciful father to the wicked and the ungrateful and requested humans to be the children of this God of love and forgiveness. Great leaders like Gandhiji who followed this message resisted injustice without hating the perpetrators of such injustice. Forgiving love was part of such strong non-violent resistance methodology. Inspired by this, South African leaders like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu upheld forgiveness and restorative justice instead of punitive and retributive justice or tit for tat justice. Mandela, who suffered a lot personally by being imprisoned for twenty-seven years under the apartheid regime, contributed a lot to build a just and peaceful South Africa, through his forgiveness and reconciliation approach. In his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, he writes, "...I saw my mission as one of preaching reconciliation, of binding the wounds of the country, of engendering trust and confidence."<sup>15</sup> The title of a famous book of Bishop Desmond Tutu- *No Future without Forgiveness*- amply explains the truth that along with justice, forgiveness is also essential for the peace of the world. Since forgiveness comes from fore-giveness (given before) it refers to a love given even before that person or community deserves it.

By receiving forgiveness from God and reciprocating by giving forgiveness to those who have wronged us or those who failed to treat us properly, we are purified and thus our ability to love will be enhanced. Thus we become agents of peace and reconciliation. Ancient Christian fathers have used harsh words against those who fail to forgive and reconcile. For example according to Cyprian of Carthage even martyrdom will not save such people: "The quarrelsome and disunited and he who has not peace with his brethren .....even if he has been slain for the name of Christ shall not be able to escape the crime of fraternal dissension because as it was written, 'he who hates his brother is a murderer(I John 3:15) and no murderer attains the kingdom of heaven, nor does he live with God."<sup>16</sup>

Debtor is one who has not given fully as he or she is supposed to give. This definition is applicable to communities also. Debt and sin or commission and omission from others can lead to bitterness and hatred which can affect adversely our vision, union with God, peace of mind, ability to love and even our physical health. As Herbert Jai Sing says in his concise and enlightening interpretation of the Lord's prayer, "Broken relationships embittered by years of muted resentment are healed when people have the grace to forgive and accept one another."<sup>17</sup> He goes on to mention other fruits of forgiveness as well : "Through forgiveness human lives are rehabilitated..... Forgiveness brings peace and repose in otherwise disturbed and tormented lives."<sup>18</sup>

## **5. Power to Overcome Evil**

"Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one."

This petition follows the petition for forgiveness of sins. Jesus seems to connect the petition for forgiveness of sins and this petition to help to avoid or overcome temptation. As Philip B Harner rightly says "First we pray that God will forgive the sins that we have already committed and then we pray that he will help us avoid any further wrong doing."<sup>19</sup> Biblical scholars interpret this as a prayer seeking Divine protection so that we should not be a prey to temptations or in other words we should not fall during the temptations and trials. It must be noted that Jesus spoke of the devil as "the evil one" (Matthew 13:38) indicating the power and impact of evil against which a struggle is essential and we seek grace for this struggle.

One major implication of this prayer is that God is the ultimate protector and deliverer in the midst of evil. Human struggle in this transient world is not just for physical survival but for overcoming evil. In the struggle against evil both the light to see the deceitful traps as well as power to resist and overcome it are essential. Jesus Christ has depicted evil spirit as a spirit of deception and father of lies (St. John 8:44). Only those who can see the hidden dangers and destruction behind the glittering promises of evil and vanities of this world will be able to hate evil. The divine call is to "hate what is evil and hold fast to what is good" (Romans 12:9). Because of ignorance how many people and communities are embracing such evil and become victims. At the altar of power, money and pleasures how many are sacrificing their faith, values and conscience. As a first step in human struggle against evil what is needed is divine wisdom which can enlighten human minds to see the hidden traps and dangers attached to evil. Jesus is presented as "the true light which gives light to everyone" (John 1:9). He also promised the Holy Spirit as spirit of truth which leads to all truth to enlighten humans. So what is to be sought first is the grace to distinguish truth and deception or good and evil. When evil is glorified as evil and opted by majority and recommended by influential people and close friends and relatives, it is extremely essential to have constant enlightenment with divine wisdom or gospel. This petition is for our continuous enlightenment to identify the harmful ideas, ideologies and actions which ruin the beauty of a peaceful life on earth.

Just an awareness of the tragic consequences of evil is not enough. When St. Paul says that “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Romans 7:19) it is an expression of despair of human mind about the helplessness before the power of evil. However, the chapter ends with a hopeful and thankful note about God’s loving action in Jesus Christ to save such humans. There is no need of belittling the human ability to resist evil in an attempt to highlight the glory of God. But it is a fact that in order to say no to powerful temptations and also to get out of the enslaving obsessions and unjust structures as well as to commit to a welfare society, we are in need of immense power. Jesus was going through different kinds of humiliations, sufferings and isolations and towards the end he had to face the joint power of mighty Roman Empire and the Jewish religion which tried to torture and destroy him forever. In such situations humans will lose faith, values, peace of mind and communion with God and naturally love will dry up. As a human being Jesus faced this horrible test through prayerful communion with his heavenly father and passed it successfully. When Jesus was thus suffering alone and all the force of temptation fell on him he spent time in prayer in the garden and an angel came from heaven and strengthened him (Luke 22:43). As Alexander Schememann says “It is about this same mystical assistance that we pray, so that in the face of evil, suffering and temptation our faith would not waver, our hope not weaken, our love not dry up, that the darkness of evil not reign in our hearts and become itself the fuel for evil. Our prayer is that we can trust in God as Christ trusted him, that all the temptations would be smashed against our strength.”<sup>20</sup> This is why Jesus’ advice to his disciples to “pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Matthew 26:41) is also an exhortation to all and his followers of all times practice it almost every day through this petition of the Lord’s prayer.

This petition reminds us to be vigilant to maintain peace and harmony in all families, communities and our world as a whole. The temptation to give up our faith, hope, love and integrity at the time of provocations and crisis is tremendous. Religious fanaticism and communal clashes are promoted by small sparks of hate speeches and humiliating remarks. Then we will be tempted to ignore our commitment to the Kingdom of God in the light of the first three petitions of the Lord’s prayer. Eternal vigilance and unceasing prayers are necessary to restore and maintain peace and justice.

## **Conclusion**

‘In the Gospel of Jesus Christ, love, forgiveness and reconciliation are the last words. Hatred, murder, war, revenge and contempt have only temporary place in the ultimate history of humankind.’<sup>21</sup> This prayer of prayers is the summary of the gospel teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Intimate relationship with God, peace and joy of being with God, dedication to live as the beloved children of God to serve and spread the Kingdom of God which ensures a dignified and peaceful life of all on earth; obligation to meditate on the teachings of Jesus which convey the will of God and thus to be filled with the divine wisdom; whole hearted trust in God and freedom from anxiety; solidarity with all regardless of class, caste, religious, gender differences;

special sensitivity to the poor and the hungry, calling to share resources with the needy; seeking forgiveness from God for own sins and wrong doings which ruin the peace of many; forgiveness like that of Jesus Christ; initiative to reconcile, urge to overcome the temptations which adversely affect the spiritual life as God's own children and the just and harmonious existence of all, hope about the ultimate victory over evil by the grace of God and the final triumph of love, are a few prominent themes of this unique prayer. Seeking grace by addressing God as Father and acting as His children by being committed to His Kingdom in this world are mutually enriching insights of this prayer. Even when an individual recites this prayer, s/he is supposed to pray this by stretching the borders of compassion to include all. Union with God who is love, truth, righteousness and peace is also a boosting to fulfill our potential to be like Him. This prayer helps us to transcend the chasm between secular and sacred and physical and spiritual with an holistic vision of reality. We can also repeat the exclamatory words of Tertullian thus "In summaries of so few words, how many utterances of the prophets, the gospels, the apostles, how many discourses, examples, parables of the Lord, are touched on! How many duties are simultaneously discharged! ...what wonder? God alone could teach how he wished Himself prayed to."<sup>22</sup>

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Alexander Schememann, *Our Father*, (NY: SVS Press, 2003) p.21

<sup>2</sup> Cyprian, *On The Lord's Prayer*, 8, in *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 36 (NY: 1958) p. 132

<sup>3</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Lords' Prayer* in *Ancient Christian Wisdom* No.18 Tr. By H.C. Graff (London: New Man Press, 1954) p. 50

<sup>4</sup> *Maximus the Confessor, Selected Writings* (NJ: Paulist Press, 1985) p. 107

<sup>5</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies in the Gospel of St, Matthew*, NPNF Vol X 1978, p. 135

<sup>6</sup> Leonardo Boff, *The Lord's Prayer The Prayer of Integral Liberation*, tr. By Theodore Morrow (Indore: Satprakashan 1983) p. 82, 83

<sup>7</sup> Cyprian, *On the Lord's Prayer*, ANF V p. 451

<sup>8</sup> Leonardo Boff *The Lord's Prayer The Prayer of Integral Liberation*, tr. By Theodore Morrow (Indore: Satprakashan 1983) p. 100

<sup>9</sup> Leonardo Boff, *The Lord's Prayer the Prayer of Integral Liberation*, tr. By Theodore Morrow (Indore: Satprakashan 1983) p.101

<sup>10</sup> The Global Report on the Food Crisis 2023 estimated that between 691 million and 783 million people in the world suffered from hunger in 2022. It also projects that almost 600 million people will be chronically undernourished in 2030

<sup>11</sup> *On Social Justice*. tr. By C. Paul Schroeder. (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009) p.47

<sup>12</sup> He explains this insight in his treatise *I will Tear Down My Barns*

<sup>13</sup> *On Social Justice* p.69

<sup>14</sup> Jacob Theckanath, "Forgiveness the Key to a Reconciled Community", in *The Lord's Prayer and Its Emerging Concerns* edited by Assisi Saldanha (Bangalore: ATC, 2008) p. 112

<sup>15</sup> Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (London, 1994) p. 612

<sup>16</sup> Cyprian *On the Lord's Prayer* ANF V p. 454

<sup>17</sup> Herbert Jai Singh, *The Lord's Prayer* (Bangalore: ISPCK, 1985) p. 40

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid* p 40 & 41

<sup>19</sup> Philip B Harner, *Understanding the Lord's Prayer* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) p.109

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Schememann, *Our Father*, (NY: SVS Press, 2003) p.80, 81

<sup>21</sup> Donald W Shriver. Jr., *The Social Ethics of the Lord's Prayer* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society,1980) p.73

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<sup>22</sup> Tertullian, *On Prayer*, ANF Vol III p. 684