

DIVINE CALL AND HUMAN RESPONSE

Praying with the Word

IN CONTRAST with the Old Testament, which has Psalms and Lamentations, the New Testament does not have a book of prayers. Yet there are prayers scattered in the various writings which can be models for our own prayer.

The first place among these prayers must, of course, be accorded to the 'Our Father', which Jesus himself taught his disciples. In this connection we shall also mention Jesus's instructions on prayer. Besides 'Our Father', we find in the gospels prayers which, according to the evangelists, Jesus himself prayed on special occasions. Then, in the gospels and Acts, there are prayers attributed to other persons. In pauline literature we find the apostle's accounts of his own prayers, and the Apocalypse discloses hymns in honour of God and the Lamb sung by heavenly hosts and by the redeemed community. This list of prayers is not exhaustive, but it gives us a rough idea where prayers are to be found. Most of them have been incorporated into the office, the official prayer of the Church. Our hope here is to give some idea of their richness and to indicate how we can appropriate them.

Our Father, Mt 6, 9-13 par Lk 11, 1-4

In Matthew 6 and Luke 11, we find two versions of the 'Our Father' prayer. The lucan variant is shorter and appears to be, by and large, the more original of the two, whereas the matthean formula was adopted for and probably adapted to the liturgy of the Church. Since the latter version is better known and, in fact, contains all that we find in Luke's variant, we shall focus our discussion on it.

Matthew put the prayer in the sermon on the mount. According to him, Jesus told his hearers on that occasion not to pray as the gentiles do, heaping up phrases; for many words do not make a prayer more effective. He assured his listeners that the Father knows what they need even before they ask him. Prayer is thus not a matter of many phrases and repetitions. Jesus also told them not to pray as the Pharisees do: ostentatiously, to impress others with their piety. Such a prayer is hypocrisy. They should, rather, pray in private. But this does not mean that Jesus was against community prayers. In fact, the prayer 'Our Father' is a community, and a community-building, prayer.

The 'Our Father' has two parts, which are related to each other. In the first part, the prayer moves upward toward God. Its concern is God

himself, his glory, his kingdom and his will, even though this concern is expressed in the form of petitions. The second part of the prayer focuses on our needs on earth and moves downward. It, also, contains three petitions but these, joined by 'and', have the needs of the petitioner in sight, as the words 'us' and 'our' in each petition indicate. Let us now take up the prayer phrase by phrase.

The first petition: 'Our Father who are in heaven, hallowed be your name'. Jesus himself addressed God as Father. In the prayer in Gethsemane he said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible to you' (Mk 14,36). The Jews till that time never directly addressed God as Father, but always as *Adonai* Lord. The word, '*abba*' in Aramaic has an overtone of familiarity, of love, of childlike endearment. Hence we should hear 'dear Father' or 'Dad', 'Daddy', in this word. The last two words indicate a relationship which only a son or a daughter has to the father. Jesus as the Son of God thus takes us into his filial relationship with his Father. However, as Jesus's prayer 'all things are possible to you' suggests, the Father is also Lord. He knows all things and he can do all things. Hence the endearing word *Abba* also conveys utmost respect for God.

But the prayer which Jesus taught us begins with the word 'our'. The Christian is made aware that God is the Father of others as well. The petitioner becomes aware through this prayer of brothers and sisters in Christ, of those who, through Christ, also approach God as their Father. The prayer 'Our Father' is thus a community-building prayer. According to Paul, it is the Holy Spirit, Christ's gift to us, who teaches us and prompts us to say from our hearts '*Abba*' to God (Gal 4,6; Rom 8,15). In Paul's view the Spirit thereby testifies to our freedom as sons and daughters of God as well as to our ultimate destiny as co-inheritors with the Son.

The words 'who are in heaven' indicate that the one we call our Father is in heaven. We could equally well say 'Our heavenly Father'. In Luke 11,11-13, Jesus assures the disciples that the heavenly Father knows better than anybody what is good for his children, and is more generous than any earthly father.

'Hallowed be your name'. What is meant here by the expression 'name'? The noun 'father' is not the proper name of God. As we have seen above, this noun expresses a trusting and a childlike love of God on our part and, on God's part, a fatherly love and concern for us. The 'name', rather stands here for the innermost essence, identity and truth of God. It expresses who God is. But God is holy, which means that he is utterly transcendent and unfathomable. Hence, in human speech, God has no proper name — he is unnameable. In his vision and audition, Isaiah heard the cherubim acclaim God day and night, chanting 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory' (Isai 6,3). The petition 'hallowed be your name' in Our Father expresses the same thing, but in the form of a wish: may your name, Father, be holy on the lips of everybody.

The petitioner does not merely state the fact, or acknowledge, as the cherubim do, that God is holy; rather, being painfully aware that not everybody glorifies God, the petitioner expresses the wish that God be acknowledged as God, hence as holy, by all; that all might give glory to God. But, in a typical oriental and deferential fashion, the petitioner leaves it up to God himself to bring about his honour in the world, knowing that God can do anything. The phrase 'hallowed by your name' includes Mary's words 'My soul glorifies the Lord' (Lk 1,46), and Jesus's words 'Father, glorify your name' (Jn 12,28). A disciple of Jesus has the same concern as the master: that the Father be glorified by all; that God be all in all. The petitioner has a very personal concern to give glory to God in life as well as in death.

The second petition: 'Your kingdom come'. This petition not only has the same form as the preceding one but is also related to it. It explicates, namely, how the hallowing of God's name on earth should take place: God himself should reveal and establish his kingly rule on earth. This is the petitioner's prayerful wish and concern. It is also the central concern of Jesus, who preached the nearness of the kingdom of God. According to Mark 1,14, Jesus preached, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel'. He also called upon his disciples to preach the kingdom and to work for it. The kingdom of God, however, means on our part conversion in depth. It means our acknowledgment of God as God and the acceptance of the gospel of Christ. The latter implies faith in Jesus Christ as God's Son and as God's word of salvation. The kingdom also implies love and justice in our lives. Ultimately, the fulness of the kingdom means the resurrection of the dead, union of the blessed with the risen Christ and the abolition of sin and death forever. Only then will God be truly all things to all. Hence this prayer also includes the petition that Christ may come to complete his messianic rule. It calls for a new creation in every respect, for only then will God, in the words of the Revelation, truly assume his great power and begin to reign (Apoc 11,17-18).

The third petition: 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. This petition merely restates the preceding one. We do not find it in Luke's version of 'Our Father'. For the true disciple of Jesus the most intolerable thing is that God's will is not presently being done on earth. The petition is a wish that God's plan of salvation and God's rule may be fully realized. The will of God should be realized on earth as perfectly as it is realized in heaven. His will must come before our will. Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, 'Not what I will but your will be done' (Lk 22,42). In John 4,34 he says, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me'. It is also the will of the Father that none whom he entrusted to his Son be lost, as is clear from the words of Jesus, 'Such is the will of him who sent me that I lose none of those he entrusted to me . . . Yes, such is my Father's will, that whoever sees the

Son and believes in him, has eternal life and I will raise him on the last day' (Jn 6,39-40, cf 1 Thess 4,3-8; 5,15-18).

Jesus gathered around himself a community of those who wanted to do God's will as they heard it from him. They are those who have abandoned their former sinful self. He constituted them into a new family of repentant sinners. They have become his brothers and sisters. Hence the prayer that God's will be done is also a petition that this family of Jesus may grow and remain faithful and unblemished to the end. But again, man should not presume to do God's will single-handedly; consequently, the petitioner, in a reserved fashion, appeals to God to make this possible and to bring it about by his power and grace.

The second half

This half of the prayer 'Our Father', as we pointed out, deals with the needs of the petitioner which can be met only by the Father. However, the petitioner does not beg for exclusively personal favours, but has in mind the needs of others as well, as the repeated use of 'we' and 'us' indicates.

The first petition: 'Give us this day our daily bread'. Luke has at this point somewhat different wording, 'Give us *each day* our daily bread'. The expression 'this day' (Mt 6,11) is probably more original than Luke's. Whereas Luke's formulation has in mind our continuing need and hence asks that God keep giving us bread on a daily basis, Matthew's version focuses on *this* day, on the present day, on our most immediate and pressing need. We shall indicate the significance of this difference in a moment but first let us take up the words 'bread' and 'daily' which are part of this petition. In the Old Testament the word 'bread', besides its literal sense, also means food, nourishment in general. It is in this wider sense that Jesus uses it here. Hence we are to pray for our sustenance, for what we need lest we go hungry. The word 'daily' is an approximate translation of a seldom used greek word *epiousios* and could also be translated as 'necessary'.

Let us now, with this information in mind, look again at the difference between the expressions 'this day' and 'each day' in this context. Luke, by using 'each day', apparently does not have in mind here those who actually followed Jesus as he moved around Palestine, but the faithful of his own generation, who looked toward God to provide them with what they needed *every* day — relying on his providence and goodness. They appealed to God to keep providing them with what they needed. Matthew, on the other hand, has a narrower horizon. The bread for *today* is what one needs immediately, here and now. Perhaps we meet here, as some have suggested, the thinking of an oriental who does not look too far ahead. Or, perhaps, Matthew sees here the petitioner as a beggar, whose needs are most immediate and who cannot afford to look beyond the present day. Maybe this prayer expresses the counsel of Jesus in Matthew 6,34, 'Do not

be anxious about tomorrow. . . . Let the day's own troubles be sufficient for the day'. On the lips of the disciples, upon whom Jesus imposed the rule of poverty as he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom, this prayer acquires a sense of urgency. They have left behind everything: their family ties, their security, their provisions, relying only on the Father to open to them generous hearts, who would give them what they need for the day. When the Father answers this prayer, he thereby confirms Jesus's demand on the disciples. The petition, according to some, thus includes the wish that the Father may make such life possible; that the kingdom of God may be proclaimed with this original evangelical simplicity, selflessness and sincerity, in total reliance on God's providence.

The second petition: 'And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us'. The greek word for 'trespass' in Matthew's formula is 'debt', whereas Luke uses the word 'sins'. Matthew's wording appears to be more original than Luke's. The petition is uttered by the one who has already received God's forgiveness, who has become a son or a daughter of God. But we continue to need God's forgiveness. We should not however, presume to come before God asking for forgiveness when *our* hearts are unforgiving; hence this petition has a clause 'as we forgive those who trespass against us'. Of course, our act of forgiving does not *oblige* God to forgive us — his forgiveness is a sovereign act — but an unforgiving heart is not pleasing to God, as Jesus counsels (Mt 5,23-4). At this point we should also keep in mind the parable of the wicked servant (Mt 18,23-35). The words of Jesus, 'So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from the heart', are a warning to us. We, too, have been forgiven by the Father, and this calls for forgiveness on our part. Our praying for the kingdom of God is a petition for God's justice and judgment. We should, also, therefore keep in mind the parable about the timely balancing of accounts before it is too late (Lk 12,57).

The third petition: 'And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil'. This is the only petition in the negative form. What does the word 'temptation' mean here? And how does God lead us into temptation? We know that Jesus himself was tempted by Satan. Temptation is thus associated with Satan. On that occasion Satan tried to break Jesus's filial relationship with the Father, and tried to bring Jesus to a fall. This is what every temptation is about. Jesus warned his disciples to be vigilant in prayer, lest they succumb to temptation. He also spoke about the future messianic woes connected with the end of this age, a time of testing of the faithful. But God does not lead us into temptation, or bring evil about, or wish that we fall away. Evil has its own initiative and is constantly encountering us. But we also know that God will not spare us the test, even a martyr's death. We therefore pray that in and through these sufferings and dangers, which are our lot on earth, he may protect us from the greatest evil, from falling away from him. We pray that he may deliver us.

Jesus's instruction concerning prayer

Jesus taught his disciples how to pray by his own example and by talking about and suggesting the words of prayer. The tradition common to Matthew and Luke tells us about his forty-day prayer in the desert prior to his public ministry (Mt 4,1-11; Lk 4,1-13). Luke frequently mentions that Jesus, before the most important events and decisions during his public life, always prayed. He prayed at his baptism, when the voice from heaven acknowledged him as the beloved Son. He also prayed at the beginning of his public ministry, before selecting the twelve, at the transfiguration, before his passion, and before he expired. He was often alone when he prayed, but, on occasion, the disciples were not far away. On one occasion the sight of Jesus praying brought forth from the disciples a spontaneous request that he teach them to pray.

Jesus also talked about prayer. In the lucan context of the prayer 'Our Father' we find an instruction about prayer which Jesus delivered to his disciples in the form of a parable. It is about a man who, in the middle of the night, when he had a visitor, called upon his friend who was by then asleep (Lk 11,5-8). As the instruction in vv 9-13 indicates, the parable has two points: (1) it urges us to ask and to keep on asking, and (2) it points out the incomparable goodness of the heavenly Father toward us. Whereas, according to the parable, friendship may not be enough to move the man inside the house to grant his friend's request, the goodness of the heavenly Father toward us leaves no doubt that he would grant our requests. If an earthly father knows what is good for his child and gives what the child requests, how much more the heavenly Father. We should therefore approach our heavenly Father with utmost confidence. At the end, Jesus suggests that we should ask the Father for the gift above all gifts, the Holy Spirit, our greatest good.

In chapter 18,1-14, Luke records two more parables of Jesus about prayer. The first (vv 1-8) is about a widow who sought her right with a judge. This parable also has two points: (1) persistence in prayer (praying day and night), and (2) utter confidence that God in his goodness will surely answer our cry for help. But persistence is really not that necessary, for Jesus assured us that God will answer such prayer without delay.

In the second parable (vv 9-14), Jesus compares the prayer of a Pharisee and that of a publican. The Pharisee is presented as one who is convinced of his own righteousness before God and man and who despises others as unrighteous. He stands in the front in the temple — a telling gesture of his self-confidence before God. Jesus draws the lesson from the parable with a solemn pronouncement: 'I tell you, this man went home justified rather than the other'. Prayer is, therefore, not only for the righteous; it should not be a spiritual boasting before God, not merely a praise of God for the spiritual gifts we have received. We do have to thank God for these gifts, but we should avoid any spiritual pride as if these gifts were our own works.

Our prayer should, rather, express our humility and acknowledge our sinfulness before God. It should be a plea for mercy, for God will not spurn a humble and contrite heart.

On one occasion Jesus instructed the disciples when to pray (Mk 14, 37-40). In the garden of Gethsemane he asked them to pray lest they enter into temptation. They were about to be sifted by Satan, and their loyalty to Christ would be put to the test. But the disciples were too tired to heed this request and, when the moment of danger came, they fled, leaving Jesus alone to face his enemies. Peter, who, shortly before this, had boasted that he would be willing to go to death with the Lord, would, before long, deny knowing him.

Prayer in Luke's infancy narratives

Before taking up Jesus's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, let us look at two prayers in the infancy narratives in Luke's gospel, the prayers of Mary and of Zachary.

Mary's prayer (Lk 1,46-55) is her personal response to God at the greeting and blessing she received from Elizabeth. At that moment she acknowledges that the words of the angel, that she was to conceive by the Holy Spirit and bear a son, are being fulfilled. The first part of her prayer (vv 46-50) is her glorification of God for having chosen her. The phrase 'my soul magnifies the Lord' is a semitic reverential way of saying, 'I magnify the Lord', or 'I extol the Lord'. The next phrase, 'and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour', restates this with a slight variation. It indicates that Mary's glorification of God, her rejoicing in the glory of God, is a joyful outpouring of her spirit. The reason for this is her experience of God as her saviour. In v 48 she exclaims that what happened to her will be a source of blessing for all future generations. God has looked graciously upon her lowliness and has greatly favoured her. God is mighty; God is other — holy. Mary acknowledges him as such by saying reverently, 'Holy is his name' (v 49). In the next verse she recognizes this favour as a great act of mercy of God toward her as well as toward all who fear him, all who acknowledge him. Christ is not just God's favour to her, but to all. He is not God's gift merely for her time, but for all times. In the second half of the prayer (vv 51-55), Mary praises God for his gifts to others.

The Magnificat is a prayer of jubilation and a joyful glorification of God. It sees in the conception of Christ God's favour, not only to Mary, but also to Israel and beyond that to all peoples. It praises the mercy, the wisdom and the faithfulness of God in the Christ-event. We can make this prayer our own, praising God for sending us his Christ, who is his wisdom, his faithfulness and his mercy. We can thank him for having chosen us to share in the joy and favour which he granted to Mary. This prayer, no doubt, can help to make praying the office a joyful experience.

The second prayer in the infancy narratives is that of Zachary (Lk 1, 68-79). It, too, is inspired by the Holy Spirit. It comes from a heart which has learned obedience to the word of God. At the birth of John, Zachary sees the fulfilment of the promise of a son and, in anticipation, the coming of the Messiah, whom John is to announce.

The first part of the prayer, vv 68-75, is a praise of God for the coming of the Messiah and the redemption of God's people. The phrase 'a horn of salvation' means a power of salvation. Horn is a symbol and an instrument of power, like the horn of a bull or of a goat. This power of salvation is given to the house of David, for it is the davidic Messiah who is acclaimed here. The next verse (v 70) sees this as the fulfilment of the old prophecies, hence as the fulfilment of God's promises to Israel. It is an act of God's mercy in fulfilment of his promise and of the covenant which he had struck with Abraham (vv 72-73). It means deliverance from their enemies. This is a holy ideal of Israel: to be free for God. In the second half of the prayer (v 76-79), Zachary speaks about John and of his role as the precursor of the Messiah.

Zachary's prayer is basically Israel's praise of God for the Messiah. We, as well as the entire Church, can praise God together with Zachary for the gift of Christ, who gave us spiritual freedom in order that we can worship God. We can also pray for universal freedom, for peace, for righteousness and justice. These are all messianic blessings and we need them all. The coming of Christ is also, for us, an act of God's mercy and the fulfilment of God's promise of salvation. As John had been the herald, so we, also, can be heralds of Christ and point to him as the Saviour, who forgives our sins and brings light and peace into our lives and into the world.

Prayers of offering one's life to God

In this section we shall consider the prayer of Simeon (Lk 2,29-32), the prayers of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross (Mk 14,34-36 and Lk 23,34) and the prayer of Stephen (Acts 7,59-60).

According to Luke's account, when the parents brought their child, Jesus, to the temple, Simeon, enlightened by the Spirit, recognized the child as the Messiah. For him it was the moment he had been awaiting all his life. It was the fulfilment of God's promise to him through the Spirit. He took the child in his arms and acknowledged him as the saviour of all and as the glory of Israel. Filled with joy and fulfilled in spirit, he is now ready to depart from this life.

We can make the prayer of Simeon our own acknowledgment of God's mercy and salvation, of which we have become sharers through Christ. Whereas Simeon anticipated God's salvation, we look back on the Christ-event as our salvation. Christ gives meaning to our lives as well. He is our fulfilment. We can ask the Holy Spirit to move us to the same appreciation of Christ as Simeon had. The prayer of Simeon is, above all, fitting for the

dying, for it disposes them to depart from this life in great peace. It is a great act of faith and hope. It is on a joyous note like this that we, too, hope to depart from this life.

The prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane (Mk 15,34-36), is the prayer of the afflicted one. Mark tells us that Jesus was deeply distressed, his soul being sorrowful 'even to death'. In this struggle, Jesus lifted up his spirit to the Father, whom he called in a most personal way *Abba*. He acknowledged the Father's power to do all things and appealed to him to spare him from the impending end; but he submitted his will and his desire to live to the will of the Father (Mk 14,36). Jesus's prayer is a supreme effort of his spirit to bring his human tendencies, as he is facing death, into total union with the Father.

For the account of the prayer of Jesus on the cross we go to Luke's gospel. The evangelist records these words of Jesus, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (Lk 23,24). Jesus had not been touched by resentment or vengeance. He had fully forgiven his executioners and offered to the Father, as an excuse for them, their ignorance. His parting words on the cross (Lk 23,46) express Jesus's willing offering of himself to the Father.

Luke understands these last two prayers of Jesus as model prayers for a christian death, above all for a martyr's death. He placed them on the lips of the first christian martyr, Stephen. In Acts 7,59-60, Stephen, about to expire, prayed: 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit'. His last words were 'Lord, do not hold this against them'. According to the evangelist a christian martyr is to imitate Christ in forgiving his executioners and in offering his spirit to God. But since the hope of Christians is to be with the Lord, the martyr is to offer his spirit to Christ, who is seated at the Father's right hand. We find this desire expressed also by Paul who says 'My desire is to depart and be with Christ' (Phil 1,23).

These prayers are thus, above all, fitting for the dying. In imitation of Christ, the faithful should lift their spirit to the Father, acknowledging his power and affirming their willing submission to his will. The words 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit', unite the dying with the death of Jesus in the sure hope of the resurrection and union with Christ. Christians should depart from this life granting total forgiveness to all. Such magnanimous forgiveness is Christlike and pleasing to the Father, before whom we can but plead for our own forgiveness.

Prayers in the letters of Paul

In pauline literature we find prayers usually near the beginning of the letters, in thanksgiving sections and in doxologies (1 Cor 1,4-9; 2 Cor 1,3-5; Phil 1,3-11; 1 Thess 1,2-5; 2 Thess 1,3-4; Col 1,3-8; Eph 1,3-10). Exceptions to this rule are Romans 16,25-27; 1 Thess 3,11-13; 5,23-24. These are summary accounts of the apostle's more extensive and probably

more personal prayers. As Paul thanks God, he brings before God the interests of the community as well as his own concerns about the community. In so doing, he both affirms the faithful in their christian existence and shares with them his deepest spiritual fellowship. These 'prayers' pass almost imperceptibly into assurances, wishes and shared memories of experiences which led to faith.

The community in Cornith, for example, was proud of its charismatic gifts, but it had to be told to be humble in spirit, orderly in exercising its spiritual gifts, and loving. Paul anticipates some of these concerns in his prayer in 1 Corinthians 1,4-9. Here he thanks God for and rejoices over the manifold spiritual gifts which the faithful have received, together with the founding grace in Jesus Christ. The faithful are rich in spiritual knowledge as they await the final revelation, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle then, in vv 8-9, reassures them that God, who is faithful and who has called them into the present fellowship with his Son, will also sustain them blameless to the end. At this point Paul launches into admonitions, instructions and exhortations.

In Philipians 1,3-11 the apostle, writing from prison, joyfully thanks God for the beloved community's partnership in the grace of the gospel, in his imprisonment for and his defence of the word of God. He assures the faithful that God will keep them blameless until the coming of Jesus Christ. He prays that their love, together with their knowledge and discernment, may abound more and more, so that they may be blameless and may live according to the righteousness, the gift of Jesus Christ, to the glory of God.

The apostle's prayer in 1 Thessalonians 1,2-5 is one of profound gratitude to God that the faith, love and hope of this young flock under persecution were so miraculously preserved. The community not only kept its faith but, on its own, spread it in the entire province. To affirm the faithful, Paul recalls with deep gratitude their beginning in faith — how he came to them preaching the word of God and how they received the faith amidst many hardships. In 3,11-13 the apostle prays that the Father and the Lord Jesus may make it possible for him to visit them. He also prays that they may increase in love toward one another and that they may be blameless at the coming of Jesus Christ. We find similar prayers of thanksgiving elsewhere (cf 5,23-24; 2 Thess 1,3-4; Col 1,3-8).

These prayers of thanksgiving can be easily and profitably adapted for our own needs and concerns. By imitating these prayers we are led to deepen our own awareness of the gift of God, which we have received in Jesus Christ. We are led to recall our own beginning in faith, our conversion, our experiences of God's mercy, which should evoke in us thanksgiving and glorification of God. These prayers help us to discern the presence of God in our lives. We are then encouraged to be hopeful concerning our future in Christ. We know that God will see us through, for he is faithful and has been, in so many ways, present in our lives. Since

Paul's prayers always embrace the community, we, by following the apostle, become more community conscious. We are led to thank God for the gifts of the Spirit in the community, in the parish, in the diocese, in the Church. We rejoice over the faith and the love and the hope which are present among the faithful. But we also bring before God the deficiencies which we discern in our own lives as well as in the community. We pray that God may make us all blameless in his sight.

Besides the prayers of thanksgiving we also find in pauline epistles prayers of glorification of God. In 2 Cor 1,3-7 the apostle blesses God after having experienced God's power of salvation which rescued him from an affliction which brought him to the point of death. Having received God's help, Paul felt he was brought to life again, hence he praises the God who raises the dead to life. This event, the suffering and the salvation, deepened his experiential knowledge of the mercy and the consolation of God. Filled with a deep gratitude to God, he shares this knowledge with the corinthian community, calling upon them to praise God together with him. In this context the apostle refers to God as 'the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort'. He blesses him for the comfort he had given him in his affliction. He discloses to the community the pastoral value of his experience; he can now comfort, with the comfort which he himself had received, others who are afflicted.

In the prayer in Roman 16,25-27, Paul gives glory to God through Jesus Christ. He magnifies God, who is strengthening the faithful through the gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, and he praises him for having revealed the mystery hidden till now, and for having directed the prophets to make it known to all nations. The apostle thereby praises God for his own share in the proclamation of God's mystery.

The prayer in Ephesians 1,3-6 contains the praise and blessing of the Father for having blessed the community in Christ with every spiritual blessing, for having chosen it from the very beginning for a life of holiness, having so lovingly destined them to be his sons through Jesus Christ. This grace in Jesus Christ, the author realizes, is for the glory of God. It also enables the community to praise God.

These prayers provide us with a fitting basis for our glorification of God. The prayer in 2 Corinthians teaches us how to respond to God after an experience of his help in affliction. It, moreover, directs us to share our personal consolation with other faithful, so that they, together with us, can praise God for his goodness and mercy. The prayers in Romans and Ephesians suggest that we should glorify God for the gift of the gospel which shapes our christian existence.

Prayers in the Apocalypse

In this last book of the New Testament we find prayers of glorification and praise in 1,5-6; 4,8.11; 5,9-14; 11,17-18; 15,3-4; 19,1-8. With the

exception of 1,5-6 these prayers are related to the visions in heaven, or with the announcements and disclosures of the ultimate completion, the establishment of the kingdom of God.

The prayer in 1,5-6 is a glorification of Jesus Christ, who has been presented as the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead and the ruler of kings. In the prayer Jesus Christ is glorified for what he did for us: he loved us; he freed us from sins by dying for us; he constituted us to be his kingdom and his priesthood. The prayer ends with a wish that he be glorified and that he may rule forever.

The next two prayers (4,8.11 and 5,9-14) are spoken by various figures and groups in heaven. In the vision of the heavenly throne in chapter 4, we hear the incessant acclamation by the cherubim, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come'. This acclamation, which echoes Isaiah 6,3, expresses the utter transcendence of God as well as his eternal and dynamic presence. It evokes a worshipful response among the twenty-four elders in heaven and the entire heavenly assembly. When the Lamb in chapter 5 receives the scroll from the Almighty, the heavenly assembly again breaks out into a song along with the angels (v 12) and the entire creation (v 13).

The last three prayers (11,17-18; 15,3-4 and 19,1-8) are responses of gratitude and praise to God's establishing his end-time rule in the world. These prayers, which have been incorporated into the office, can also be made our own. We are invited to join in the spirit with the heavenly choruses to praise the creator and the Lamb through whom we have received redemption, who is now exercising his authority over creation, and who will bring about in the end-time the rule of God. As Christians we can anticipate the glorious conclusion, when sin will be no more and when death itself will disappear. We can even rejoice at God's vindication of the faithful, for this will be the establishment of God's justice in the world.

All these prayers teach us how to pray according to the mind of Christ and the inspiration of the Spirit. We can, with the greatest confidence, pray the Lord's prayer, as well as other prayers which Christ is recorded to have prayed or which Christians or heavenly beings prayed. Yet we should not forget that Christ also sent his Holy Spirit into our hearts, who teaches us how to pray, and who brings our most profound desires and concerns as our prayer to the Father. The Holy Spirit in us will make our prayer spontaneous and truly our own, not merely a repetition of other prayers, no matter how beautiful they may be. A Christian who relates to the Father as a son or a daughter will always find the right things to say. Finally, prayer is more than words: it is a lifting of one's spirit to God, and this can take place by being in the presence of God and of God's Son.

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