

Talk on the Our Father (7/5/24)

[with a lot of material taken from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*]

So, I've been given the task of talking for around forty-five minutes on the Our Father. It's a bit of a task for me, as I'm a man of few words, more inclined to be straight to the point and brief, rather than padding things out. I know that when I first arrived, I without realising created a slight problem for the Children's Liturgy, because, apparently, I don't preach for as long as Fr David, so they suddenly found that they had less time to get everything done, and when there was no Gloria during Advent the time was even shorter. One option would be for me to do what one lecturer used to do when I was training for the priesthood: his lectures tended to be 25% lecture course content, and 75% digression. You had to spot at which point to put your pen down and just listen. "And there's another thing: Catholic schools..." I think he wanted to form us, not just in the subject material, but also in some of the wider areas pertaining to priestly life and ministry. I'll try not to do that too much. Another option would be for me to do what one preacher was accused of doing: preparing a four minute homily, and delivering it so slowly it took eight minutes. But I digress...

The Our Father. It's a prayer we can say parrot-fashion if we're not careful, not really thinking about the words, and sometimes we have a bit of a grasp of what it's about, but we aren't aware that there is even more hidden beneath the surface. It's just like the rest of the scriptures. You might think you've read every commentary that's worth reading, but then at some point someone surprises you with something new. So I don't know whether what I'm about to say will be old hat, a reminder of things forgotten, something new or a mix of all of these. I'll just break things down and deal with different parts of the prayer, line by line.

First, the word "Father" (I'll come back to "Our" afterwards). There's a very important point in the Catechism, which also links to contemporary society. Sometimes people have a problem with the word "Father". Given the breakdown in society, dysfunctional behaviour among fathers, and that some people have never known their fathers, or not known them very well, some say that the whole concept of "father" is rather troublesome. But the same can be said of "mother" as well. Some people may have difficulty in relating to Our Lady if maybe their own mother was cruel, or manipulative, or even absent. The same can be true with the idea of father, or for that matter, even the word "parent". So what we have to do when we come to the Our Father, is to allow our understanding and our relationship with our heavenly Father to be shaped and purified by how Christ has revealed Him, rather than relying firmly on cultural ideas of fatherhood, or what our own experiences might have been. Otherwise, we create an idol. The same can be true with Christ. If you want another talk, I have some material pre-pared from a talk I gave to the Legion of Mary some years ago. Some people think that no-one, or very few people, go to hell and that, anyway, Jesus didn't say much about it. I did a few hours of work going through the Gospels, and He actually said quite a lot. Jesus was not a teddy bear, and at times said some rather fiery things to the religious authorities of His time. He also wasn't a polite Englishman. He actually invited Himself round to Zacchaeus' house. Of course, in days gone by, priests used to go round visiting and turn up unannounced. On one of my pastoral placements, the parish priest gave me a list of parishioners and told me to go round and visit. One person I think was hiding. And after ringing the doorbell once or twice, I think she used her mobile phone to ring her landline, to give the impression that no-one was in. But yes, the point I'm making is not to distort the image we have of almighty God by letting other ideas override what's in the scriptures, otherwise we create an idol and are not worshipping the true God.

Calling God "Father" is also an act of gratitude on our part. Through Christ's Death and Resurrection, we have been re-born in baptism to a family relationship with the Most Holy Trinity. There's always a balance to be struck in our relationship with God. On the one hand, God is totally "other" and mysterious, and we need to have appropriate respect for Him. But on the other hand, this has to be balanced with the idea of a family relationship – we are adopted sons and daughters through baptism,

so we should also have that sense of closeness with our heavenly Father, and not view Him as a strict headmaster: “Speak only when you’re spoken to!” “What was that, boy? Go and stand outside my office. I’ll deal with you later!”

Given that we are adopted by God in baptism as a member of His family, it means that our love for the Father leads us to want to become like Him. We have been created in His image, we are restored to His likeness by grace; and we must respond to that grace.

St Cyprian said: “We must remember...and know that when we call God ‘our Father’ we ought to behave as sons of God”.

St John Chrysostom said: “You cannot call the God of all kindness your Father if you preserve a cruel and inhuman heart; for in this case you no longer have in you the marks of the heavenly Father’s kindness”.

Secondly, the other thing that needs to flow from our relationship with the Father is a humble and trusting heart that enables us to turn and become like children. St John Cassian said that by contemplating God alone, and through the warmth of His love, through which our soul is moulded and directed to love Him, our souls speaks to the Father with special devotion. I quote:

“Our Father: at this name love is aroused in us ... and the confidence of obtaining what we are about to ask. What would he not give to his children who ask, since he has already granted them the gift of being his children?”

If we put together the “Our” with “Father” then, recognising our deep and warm relationship with the Father, the phrase becomes a blessing of adoration, before it being a phrase we use when we are asking for something. So the context is a bit different from when a child says: “Mom?” and the child’s mother replies: “What now?”

Next, let’s look at the word “Our”. Note that we pray “Our Father”, not “My Father”. It is a prayer that unites Christians. Just the same as when we celebrate Mass, we are united with Catholics all over the world, and all the angels and saints in heaven, so when we pray “Our Father” we are united with the prayer of people all over the world. Our faith is a communal faith. We are not saved as isolated individuals. Christianity has both communal and individual elements, and both need to be in place. Things are rather out of balance if we go to Mass but never pray at home, or if we pray at home but never go to Mass – obviously being housebound doesn’t apply to that, but you know what I mean; in normal circumstances this is how it works.

The word “Our” doesn’t denote any possession of God. Some people have fallen out with God because they think that, now they’ve done all this for God, God owes them, and they get annoyed when they don’t get what they asked for. We do not control God with a magic wand. Martin Luther railed against the Church saying that he thought the sacraments were exactly that, but he was wrong. Jesus gave us the sacraments, on His terms. We can’t change them out of all recognition to suit ourselves. So we can’t use crisps and Coca-Cola for Mass because it might make it “more relevant” for children, neither can substitute rose petals for water in a baptism just because we think it’s “nice”. We can’t worship God in our way; we have to worship Him in His. Was that a digression?

There’s also the dimension that if we are praying “Our Father” and we recognise that we are praying together with others, then we are also praying for others; we are not just bringing our own needs and concerns, but other people’s worries, troubles and problems to the Father as well. This idea is expanded in the Divine Office of the Church, the praying of the psalms which has its origins in the monks and nuns of the Church, but is prayed in a simplified way by priests, and lay people are

encouraged to pray it as well. When the Divine Office is prayed, you are praying for the whole Church, and the world as well. I often think of monasteries as being like power stations, located sometimes in far-off locations, but providing spiritual power that is transmitted far and wide. In fact, to use a more exotic example, when a priest performs what is called a simple exorcism, it is, if you like, his individual power that is being used, whilst when an exorcist has the approval of the bishop and performs a solemn exorcism, he uses the prayer power of the whole church to blast the demons out.

Christ, by dying on the Cross for us, has won the victory. But that victory is in the process of being implemented, and when He returns in glory, then all will be completed, and He will be “all in all”. I think I referenced it in a homily here before, but it may have been in my previous parish. There’s a priest who was the convert son of the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson, writing over a hundred years ago, and he wrote, among his other works, two books about the end times. One was called *Lord of the World* in which Protestantism has fizzled out and the only two contenders are Catholicism and secularism, and with the rise of the Antichrist, at different points in the book it seems as if the Church’s goose is cooked, but victory happens in the end. In his second book, *The Dawn of All*, he begins by saying that some people found his first book rather depressing, so in his second book he develops things in a different trajectory, where, fifty years on from writing, the Catholic Church is ascendant, not just in England, but rapidly across the rest of the world as well, although socialism is putting up a fight. It sounds a bit of a strange title for a book, but I guess *The Dawn of All* refers to the dawn of Christ being all in all, the dawn of Christ’s victory in the world. So when we pray “Our Father”, it’s a prayer that reflects work in progress: that in the future lays God’s ultimate victory, where, as it says in Revelation 21:7 “and I will be his God and he a son to me”, and that applying to everyone across the new heavens and the new earth.

Now a bit of Trinitarian theology for you: when we pray “Our Father”, we are not praying to the Father in isolation from the Son and the Holy Spirit. Just as we pray united with all members of the Church across the world in praying the Our Father, so too we are united in the prayer of the Son to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is praying in us. We adore and glorify the Father together with the Son and the Holy Spirit. We join in with the prayer of the Son and the Holy Spirit, rather than being independent of it.

I mentioned all members of the Church praying this prayer. Often we can use the word “Church” to mean the Catholic Church, but there are also ecumenical implications of this prayer. It is a prayer said by all Christians, and also by those who are preparing for baptism. So it’s also a reminder for us to pray for full Christian unity, so that our imperfect communion with each other may become more perfect, and as Christ prayed, that all may be one.

Christians disunity came about in part through fallings-out and division. So praying “Our Father” is also a reminder to be reconciled generally with everyone, to exclude no one and to pray that our divisions and oppositions be overcome.

Praying “Our Father” not only reminds us of Christ’s Death and Resurrection, which has led to our baptism and adoption as God’s sons and daughters, but also all those for whom Christ died. So it also reminds us to pray for the salvation of all, and for the work of evangelisation.

Next: “who art in heaven”. We can think of this as referring to an address, like The Presbytery, Brook Lane, Thame, Oxfordshire, UK. But rather it’s referring to God’s way of being. As the Catechism says (para 2794):

“it does not mean that God is distant, but majestic. Our Father is not ‘elsewhere’: he transcends everything we can conceive of his holiness”. It is precisely because he is thrice-holy that he is so close to the humble and contrite of heart.”

In this vein, St Augustine has the following to say:

“ ‘Our Father who art in heaven’ is rightly understood to mean that God is in the hearts of the just, as in his holy temple. At the same time, it means that those who pray should desire the one they invoke to dwell in them.”

We sometimes talk about “heaven on earth”. The comedians Hale and Pace did a song called *Northern Calypso* back I think in the eighties or nineties, and you can find it on the internet if you take a look. It began with these words, but I’ve taken a bit out to avoid any possible offence:

“North of Watford's an 'eaven on Earth
but may be unknown to you...
There's Dales 'n hills 'n cotton-mills
And we've got Edwina Curry too”.

The song ends up by admitting that life “up north” isn’t really that good actually. But having God in our heart can make the most drab existence heaven on earth; conversely, not having God can make the most seemingly wonderful life hell on earth.

So the petition “who art in heaven” also reminds us that our lives as Christians are what is sometimes known as “now but not yet”; we already live something of the life of heaven here on earth, but there is still much more to come.

“Hallowed be thy name”: an alternative presentation of this line which helps us to understand it is: “May your name be held holy”. It’s a prayer against blasphemy of God’s name and all concerned with Him. But first, what is blasphemy? In certain parts of the Muslim world, if you are considered to have spoken against Mohammed or in some way disrespected the Koran, you can be put to death. In the secular world, there are certain things which are now being given the status of gods, and if you speak against them, or make fun of them, you can effectively be accused of blasphemy, and forms of punishment or excommunication can happen to you (demotion, pay cuts, fines, losing your job, being “cancelled”). In the Catholic context, what is blasphemy? The *Catechism* defines it this way:

“*Blasphemy* is directly opposed to the second commandment. It consists in uttering against God – inwardly or outwardly – words of hatred, reproach, or defiance, in speaking ill of God, in failing in respect toward him in one’s speech, in misusing God’s name. ... The prohibition of blasphemy extends to language against Christ’s Church, the saints, and sacred things. It is also blasphemous to make use of God’s name to cover up criminal practices, to reduce peoples to servitude, to torture persons or put them to death. The misuse of God’s name to commit a crime can provoke others to repudiate religion.

Blasphemy is contrary to the respect due to God and his holy name. It is in itself a grave sin.”

So there’s certainly a bit of it about! When we pray “hallowed be thy name” we are praying for appropriate respect for God, for holy places, people and things, and not just for ourselves, but the whole world. So this petition also obliges us to pray for others, including those who might be considered the enemies of the Faith.

The next petition is “Thy kingdom come”. In one sense, this refers to the return of Christ in glory; it’s a bit like the prayer “maranatha” or “Come, Lord Jesus”. At the end of time He will put everything

right, and then, God will reign. But it's also a prayer for the here and now: we pray that God may reign increasingly in our world. It's once again this idea of "now and not yet", that God reigns now in our world, but not yet fully; we pray that He may reign more fully now, and also that He may return soon and bring His reign to completion.

And what would that reign look like? *The Dawn of All* is a bit of a work of fantasy, of course, and some readers have been surprised by some of the ideas the author had of what that would look like. In the process of growing towards a more Catholic world, one of the things that emerges once again is the punishment of death for blasphemy. This is something imposed, not by the Church, but by the state, as the state sees challenges to the faith as an attack on good governance and the security of the state. In the book, as the nations grow more Catholic, and the Pope comes to be seen as something of an international ruler, with international powers, one of the things he does is to nullify all laws punishing blasphemy with death. As states have tried to grow closer to Christ and the Catholic faith, they have taken a bit of a wrong turning, and they all have to acknowledge the Pope's intervention.

Similarly, in the real world: attempts to make the world more Catholic have their twists and turns, and there are disagreements about politically how things should be done. When we pray "hallowed by thy name" we pray for the Holy Spirit to send His light upon to help us see the way forward, and to avoid dead ends and distorted reasoning.

This now leads us to the next petition, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven".

In this petition, we pray that God's will may be done in all its aspects. We don't make any reservations, saying: Thy will be done, but not in this area.

The most important area where it applies is the salvation of souls. God "desires all ... to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:3-4). That is what we live for as Catholics. We want all to come to know the Lord, and to live as He wants us to. That is how we create a form of heaven on earth. As human beings we are imperfect, and if everyone became a Catholic, we would still have to deal with our imperfections and sinful tendencies. I mentioned on Sunday about Evelyn Waugh being pulled up by his hostess for being rude. In case you were asleep at that point, in the perhaps slightly embellished story she said to him: "How can you behave so badly – and you a Catholic!" Waugh replied: "You have no idea how much nastier I would be if I was not a Catholic. Without supernatural aid I would be hardly a human being."

So, yes, our world is in so much need of prayer for its conversion, and we ourselves too, so that we reveal Christ more perfectly to the world, without too many imperfections getting in the way.

Another area for God's will to be done on this earth is social justice issues. At Vatican II, a document was produced called *Gaudium et Spes*, which translates literally as Joy and Hope, but is often given the title "The Church in the Modern World". One of the many things it did was respond to the Communist challenge that claims that religion is the "opium of the people", in other words, it stops them getting on with their work by making them think about other things instead. So in response, *Gaudium et Spes* said that focusing on the next life should also mean that we want to better this life as well. This, of course, not only refers to technological progress, healthcare etc. but also people's working conditions, their pay and so on. So an important dimension of praying "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" is also that people are paid an appropriate wage, that working conditions are safe, that unjust structures are challenged, that people are able to attain their potential, that the poor are not shoved to the bottom of the pile and exploited, and so on.

If we are focusing on social justice issues, then pro-life issues are social justice issues as well. So the petition also includes those as well, praying for a culture of life and against the culture of death. It

also includes environmental issues. We pray for a more sustainable use of the earth's resources, for the reduction of waste and a growing sense of responsibility for the earth etc. etc. But we also pray that we may avoid some of the more extreme neo-malthusian ideas, such as working for a reduction in the earth's human population. In general we are praying for the transformation of society and for a more just society; we are praying that God's will may be done in all its different dimensions.

Sometimes, of course, we can be part of the problem, rather than the solution. If our will is opposed to God's, then something needs to change, and God is unchanging, so guess who needs to change? Change isn't always easy, but as we pray "thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" we ask indirectly that we may be united to the Son and given the power of the Holy Spirit, so that we can surrender our will to the Lord and do what the Son has always chosen: to do what is pleasing to the Father.

St John Chrysostom summed up a lot of this when he said:

"Consider how [Jesus Christ] teaches us to be humble, by making us see that our virtue does not depend on our work alone but on grace from on high. He commands each of the faithful who prays to do so universally, for the whole world. For he did not say 'thy will be done in me or in us' but 'on earth', the whole earth, so that error may be banished from it, truth take root in it, all vice be destroyed on it, virtue flourish on it, and earth no longer differ from heaven."

We're now half-way through the Our Father, and that brings us to: "Give us this day our daily bread".

English seems to be one of the few languages where it is considered rude to ask for something directly. In many languages, if you want someone to pass you something whilst at table, you say: "give me", as in "give me the butter" or "give me the fruit". But in English you have to say something like "Could you pass me the butter?" or "May I have the fruit?" Jesus was not an Englishman, and so we are told to say "Give us this day our daily bread", and it's not considered rude towards the Father.

The phrase "Give us" is a beautiful phrase, one of children who depend on everything from their Father, a Father who is all good. This phrase "glorifies our Father by acknowledging how good he is, beyond all goodness" (CCC 2828).

Who are the "us" it is referring to? Firstly, is it, literally, "us", those who are praying, those of us who are part of the family of the Church. But it also refers to the fact that the Father is father of everyone, and so we pray for the whole world, for all their needs and sufferings.

"Our bread": what is this bread we are praying for? The Father cannot but want to give us the things that we need, all goods and blessings, both spiritual and material. In this prayer, Jesus wants us to avoid extremes and have a balanced approach to the Father. We are not to be idle, just expecting everything to be given us on a plate. But neither are we to be worrying constantly about everything and to lose our peace. We entrust everything to the Father in our prayer, for Him to take care of it all. Furthermore, though, praying does not excuse us of all responsibility. One of the important principles of interpreting Scripture is that we take it as a whole. So we are to pray for the needs of the world, including those who have no bread, but we are also to do something ourselves about it. Praying the Our Father does not render the parable of the rich man and Lazarus invalid, nor does it shield us from the Last Judgement, and the separation of sheep and goats.

There are also further dimensions to "our bread". "Our" bread is a loaf to be shared. We are to share our material and spiritual goods with others out of love for them, to relieve them in their suffering. St Theresa of Calcutta used to say that the spiritual poverty in the West is worse than the hunger of those dying in the streets of Calcutta. She also spoke of the great loneliness of the elderly in care

homes, where no one comes to visit them, and they too are people crying out for bread of a different kind, the bread of human warmth and compassion.

We are to pray and to work to relieve the various forms of hunger in our society. But even when we have done that, the food we receive is still a gift from God. This reminds us of the importance of saying grace before meals.

This leads us now to another, spiritual, bread. “Man does not live by bread alone, but ... by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). In this petition, we pray, once again, for the work of evangelisation and also call to be strengthened for that task ourselves. As the prophet Amos said, there is a famine on earth, “not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11). And from word we move to Eucharist. In this petition we pray too that the Eucharist might be always available for us; therefore it is an implicit prayer for vocations to the priesthood, and also for freedom to celebrate the Mass.

“This day” expresses a certain sense of urgency. It also links in with the idea of not worrying about tomorrow – each day has enough trouble of its own. It also implies that the Our Father should be prayed each day; note it says “this day” not “this week” nor “this month”.

“Our daily bread”: this also then refers to the daily celebration of the Eucharist, and that at each Mass we have different readings to nourish us spiritually as well. With the Mass, both word and sacrament are important; we can’t be guilty of treating the readings as unimportant. In days gone by it was said that if you arrived late for Mass and missed the Gospel, then you didn’t fulfil your Sunday obligation and had to attend Mass again. A complete celebration of Mass always involves all of the Mass, not just the second half, as it were.

Pre-Vatican II, it was unknown for priests to concelebrate a Mass as they do today. If there were two or more priests at a Mass, then one would be the priest, if you like and the other might serve or read, or just “sit in choir” as it was called. Each priest was to celebrate Mass each day. In a big parish that wasn’t a problem, as you might have more than one Mass each day. But when it came to monastic communities, it created a practical problem. If you go to Ampleforth Abbey, which was built before the Council, they have the main church upstairs, but downstairs there is the crypt, with various different side altars, so each monk-priest could say his own Mass. So what would happen was that all the monks would celebrate their individual Masses, and then at the community Mass, one priest would celebrate and the rest sit in choir. So, in a sense, the Mass, which was the high-point of unity, had a slight element of division with the priests saying their own individual Masses.

When things changed, not everyone found change easy, and some found concelebration difficult to accept. Some might even have wondered if it was valid. One priest from a religious community told me that when he was young, they had concelebrated the community Mass, and then a few moments later he found one of the friars who had been at the community Mass was celebrating a private Mass. He mentioned it to another friar, and he added that the other priest must have been celebrating it at a rate of knots, as he was already at the Sanctus, the Holy, Holy, Holy. But he was told that this priest took the approach that he had already heard the readings at the community Mass, so he would begin his private Mass at the Offertory. Nowadays that wouldn’t be seen as good Eucharistic theology, as the celebration of the Mass includes all elements: the Introductory Rites, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Concluding Rites.

“And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us”: this is an interesting petition. Asking for forgiveness, yes, we can understand that, but it doesn’t just say that. The crucial word is “as”: “forgive us our trespasses *as* we forgive those who trespass against us”. We are asking to be forgiven in the same way and to the same degree that we forgive others. Us forgiving others is

the condition for our own forgiveness. This is not some pernicky point I have made up or something I have over-thought and got the interpretation wrong, for in Matthew's account of the Our Father, Our Lord continues: "Yes, if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours; but if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failings either". That is from the mouth of the Lord Himself. And it's consistent with other parts of Scripture too. St John writes, in 1 John 4:20:

"Anyone who says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, is a liar, since a man who does not love the brother that he can see cannot love God, whom he has never seen."

And then we can compare this with the parable of the unforgiving debtor, who was let off that ridiculously large debt by his master, only then to go and throttle someone who owed him a much smaller debt, and refused to give him time to pay off the sum. As the *Catechism* explains: "In refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father's merciful love; but in confessing our sins, our hearts are opened to his grace" (CCC 2840).

For many of us, this teaching may not seem particularly challenging, but then, we may not have been put to the test. I have occasionally come across people who find it difficult to forgive, and even to pray this line of the Our Father for that reason, because of a serious crime that has been committed either against them or someone that they love. The trouble with being caught in this condition is not only the question of God's forgiveness, but also the fact that lack of forgiveness eats you up inside, destroys your peace, and in a sense, the other person has a certain control over you. There are a few books you can read to help go through the stages to help unlock you from this prison, but in summary it's worth noting just a few points.

People often talk about "forgiving and forgetting" but the two are not the same thing, neither do they always have to go together. Lest you be scandalised by what I just said, when something is quite small it's easy to forgive and easy to forget. But some very serious matters are so deeply engrained into the memory that you might never forget them for the rest of your life. The important thing to know is that forgetting is not a condition for forgiving. Forgiveness is to say that yes, the other person has harmed me, and in this case, very seriously indeed, but I'm not going to try to get even. I'm not going to try and reclaim the debt, or get my own back in some way. I'm going to be the one who breaks the cycle of hurting others and being hurt in reply. When Our Lord was on the Cross, He knew the sins of the people before Him, and the sins of the whole world were pressing upon Him. The theologian Scott Hahn said, that if it had been him on the cross, he would probably have zapped a few of the people mocking him, to show them some respect. But Jesus doesn't do that. Instead, He says, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". We are called to be concerned for everyone's salvation, and if we find it hard to forgive, then we need to ask for God's help and perhaps take advice and help from others. Time can also be a good healer, but by itself it doesn't always provide complete healing.

"And lead us not into temptation": a while ago someone was concerned about whether we were going to start using new words for the Our Father. I think it was in Italy that they had changed the translation of the Our Father because it was thought that this line could be misinterpreted. God does not tempt anyone, but He does allow us to be put to the test to help us grow in virtue, thinking particularly of self-control. The Spanish version translates roughly as "do not allow us to fall into temptation", in other words, do not allow us give in and buckle under the strain or false allure of temptation. Sometimes, people can be troubled by temptation and think there is something wrong with them because they have certain thoughts. They might also wonder if they are sinful, or bad sinners for having those thoughts. We need to distinguish between being tempted and giving in to temptation. Christ Himself was tempted in the desert, but He did not give in. As long as we reject the temptation

and refuse to mull it over and act on it, then we are safe. It's if we allow it entry then we are in trouble. It's a bit like if you were fasting on Good Friday, and a very annoying person gets a hot dog and keeps on putting it in front of your face. "Come on, eat!" the person keeps on saying to you. It's fine if each time you gently push the offending hot dog away; it's breaking your fast if you take a bite, and then eat the whole thing.

To be strong against temptation requires prayer and the sacraments. St Paul writes (1 Cor 10:13): "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, so that you may be able to endure it". I think that sometimes, our temptations approach the limit of what we can bear, and we give in under the strain. Maybe there is a changing of the will and we like what the temptation seems to offer, a bit like the hot dog. But then there can be guilt afterwards...

"But deliver us from evil": this last petition doesn't just mean deliverance from evil in general, but also from the evil one, the devil, a fallen angel, the one whom Scripture describes as a murderer from the beginning, a liar and the father of lies. He is also, in Greek the *dia-bolos*, the one who throws himself across God's plan and His work of salvation in Christ.

It's worth remembering a few principles here: firstly, God is stronger than the devil. St Augustine said that, if it wasn't for God's protection, the devil would have killed us all by now. Secondly, it is God who limits his power, and what he is able to do is only with God's permission. The "rules of the game", if you like are that if we try to do things simply by our own steam, then we are bound to fail.

And it's also worth remembering that the devil isn't a machine, in that, things do not always work in a logical way, the same way, each time. He is someone with a superior intelligence to us, although completely inferior to God. When he tried to lead Christ into sin in the wilderness, he even twisted Scripture to get Him to go along with his ideas. In the same way, there is the need for vigilance, and at times the experience of others in knowing what is the correct path, as at times the devil can make himself appear as an angel of light, he can try to make good look like evil and evil look like good. Look at in society how various serious sins are made to appear to be good, healthy, an affirmation of ourselves and others, whilst virtue is described as somehow bad for us, or even hateful of ourselves and others. We need God's revelation, revealed to us through the Church. Otherwise the devil can run rings round us, sometimes without us even noticing. "Deliver us from evil."

Those of you who have watched certain exorcist films or generally looked into this area may have noticed the use of the crucifix as part of claimed exorcism rituals. This is because it is Christ who has conquered the evil one through His passion and Death. The Gospel of St John, unlike the other Gospels, doesn't contain any exorcisms; instead, the crucifixion itself is presented as a grand exorcism:

"Now sentence is being passed on this world;
now the prince of this world is to be overthrown.
And when I am lifted up from the earth,
I shall draw all men to myself" (John 12:31-32).

Christ's Death has reconciled us to the Father and delivered us from the kingdom of death. Once again, though, it's a case of "now, but not yet": there is still more work to be done, and it requires our cooperation and our calling on the assistance of almighty God.

The *Catechism* adds (para 2854): "When we pray to be delivered from the Evil One, we pray as well to be freed from all evils, present, past and future, of which he is the author or instigator. In this final petition, the Church brings before the Father all the distress of the world... [and] she [also] implores

the precious gift of peace and the grace of perseverance in expectation of Christ's return." This leads us nicely to the "embolism" as it is called, during Mass, the bit that follows after we say the Our Father together:

"Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ."

The people's response is then a prayer that Catholics don't normally consider to be part of the Our Father, but Protestants do. This extra bit was added to the Mass after Vatican II, perhaps as an ecumenical gesture, but if you look carefully, in the English translation, the translation of this doxology is different to the Our Father. We have retained the "old" version of the Our Father, with words such as "art" and "thy" and so on, but the doxology is in modern English, perhaps also showing that, in the Mass, it is a liturgical response, just like "Thanks be to God", or "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ", rather than being part of the Our Father. When I was at seminary studying ancient Greek, we were told that one of the theories is that this doxology began as a note in the margin, making a reference to a part of the Old Testament, and at some point a scribal error meant it was incorporated into the main text. But it's a good prayer anyway.

Perhaps, then, we can finish, by praying the Our Father together: Our Father...