

express it, we are bound to him; so that it is one blood of life that circulates in him and in us; and that it is one spirit of life that animates us and him unto life. Yea, that as little as the head can be moved from one place into another, but the foot, the hand, the eye and the ear go with it—so also every vital movement of our King of itself stirs also in us, and puts us into motion with him. Thus Christ is our King, because of itself and of necessity the members follow the body, and the body goes wherever the head directs it.

“LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY.”

If the temper of the soul were harmonious, you would never feel nearer unto God than in prayer, and in prayer you would never be far away from God. To pray and not be near unto God, rightly interpreted, is impossible. And yet what prayer is not made each day in every city and village, yes, we may say in every house, again and again in which the soul never for a moment comes under the overwhelming impression of standing before the face of God. Sin weakens our inner life in all sorts of ways. Hence the mainspring of the life of the soul can not properly operate as we should ardently wish it might. Then we feel that we can not pray. Yet we do not want to neglect prayer. So we fold our hands and stammer our petitions. But when the Amen has been said, we feel discouraged by the lack of elevation and inspiration that has marred our devotions.

Apart from leading others in prayer, every one must and can pray, and yet to pray well is an

exceedingly difficult art, or rather it is a sacred action, which demands the utmost clearness, urgency and readiness of soul. But to pray well must never become art, or else it ceases to be prayer. The disciples realized this, and when they had witnessed once again the sacred act, that Jesus, having gone a little distance from them, had separated himself in prayer to the Father, they were so impressed with the sense of their own inability to pray that, on the return of Jesus, one of them said unto him: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1).

An over-spiritual child of God, in our days, would perhaps have turned away such a request with a rebuke. For everyone must pray of himself, and what value can a memorized prayer have before God? But Jesus was not so over-spiritual. He never prayed otherwise than of himself. But he understood how difficult true prayer must be for us who are sinners, and though his disciples were to be the teachers and leaders of the church in all ages, he appreciated the request that he should teach them how to pray, and so he gave them to pray the Our Father in his own heavenly language.

He did not say: "Pray after this manner." He did not give them the Our Father as an example, how to pray. No, the Lord expressly said: "When ye pray, say." John, too, had evidently given his disciples such a formulary prayer. And so Jesus also gave his disciples a prayer in a fixed form, a prayer evidently intended and appointed to be prayed by them all together. For the form is in

the plural: Our Father, our daily bread, our trespasses.

In all ages, in all her forms, the Church of Christ has been true to the Our Father. And in our liturgy our fathers also have not only adopted fixed prayers for public worship, but have always ordered the use of "Our Father" in the congregation of believers. But since the eighteenth century this has been discarded. Particularly from Scotland the influence has come in, to put everything aside that had the appearance of a fixed form, and to prescribe in church none other than the free prayer of the leader. This aim was high. But was it not too high, and has not over-spirituality worked all too grievously an injury to the spiritual?

Undoubtedly, the highest end is attained when, independent of every aid, from the free impulse of the Spirit, the soul lifts itself up to God, and on the wings of the Spirit, spreads itself before God in sacred, devotional language. Such glorious moments are not infrequent in the prayer-life. And it is plain that in such moments even the Our Father is not sufficiently concrete to direct the soul in its utterance before God. But in all seriousness, how many among the great and small in the congregation have risen to these sacred heights. And, if there are such, how many are the moments of a long day, when they are in such sacred and exalted moods? We must needs reckon with reality. And think not only of yourself, but have a tender consideration for the poor sheep in the church and in your own home, whose spiritual standing is still low, and who yet needs must pray, and for whom it is no less glorious

than for you, when in prayer they come a little nearer unto God, and may perceive something of his holy presence. How much higher did not the apostles of Jesus stand than we, and yet for them Jesus deemed a memorized prayer so little aimless or superfluous, that he himself gave them one.

It is true, every written prayer leads to abuse. But would you think that Jesus has neither foreseen nor known, to what abuse even the Our Father would lead? And yet he gave it to his disciples. Nothing can be so holy, but our infirmity and sin will turn it to abuse. Baptism is abused. The Lord's supper is abused. The Scripture is abused. Must everything then be condemned because of this? Prayer also places a painful choice before us. Say that only the Spirit's prayer from one's own soul is acceptable before God, and forsooth, there will be no more abuse. But, then, there will also be thousands of families where no more prayer will be said, and all remembrance of it will gradually be lost. But restore the use in its fixed form, and of necessity the muttering with lips will ensue, in which the soul has no part. Not in every case, praise God, but with many, and thus many a prayer is profaned.

Standing before this choice, many incline to say: "In that case let the rest go without prayer, provided there are a few who pray aright. In any case cut off the work of the lips, in which there is no heart." And yet we may not say this. What Jesus spake to his disciples excludes this. Let us be more humble. Let us acknowledge, that even the congregation of the Lord occupies too low a viewpoint for what is so deeply spiritual,

and that, if prayer is to be maintained, if it shall continue to be a power in the whole church, in every home, for every member of that home, for great and small alike, both must be practiced; as well the prayer from one's own soul, as the written prayer which all can pray, because all have been instructed in its use.

Our praise in hymn and psalm would also be of an higher order if every one of us were born poets and if we never sang hymns from a book, but always from our own inspiration and impulse. But this we do not do. We can not. We are no poets. And no public praise would be possible if the same hymn were not sung together. This also leads to abuse. Hymn upon hymn is sung by more than one person in the congregation with the lips, in which the soul has no part. But who will for this reason banish hymns and psalms from worship in God's house? This would be a reaching out after overspirituality which would mean death to public worship.

But there is still a more significant reason. Do we not know from experience that when the soul seeks to draw near unto God, nothing at times is more helpful than to repeat to oneself some inspired verse from the Psalms, which we have learned when a child, and which by its devotional language of itself takes us out of our ordinary world of thought and lifts up the soul to God? When we wanted to pray, and prayer would not come, has not the Our Father frequently been the grateful means of bringing us into the prayerful mood? The Scripture also is a formulary, and always remains the same. And is not reading of Scripture before prayer continually the means that

not only enables us to pray, but to pray in such sacred terms as to carry the soul with them?

A twofold cause here operates. First, language. Prayer and praise have a language of their own. This language does not rise of itself from every soul. There have been those who were specially gifted with this. Is it not natural that they, who sing after David, and who pray in the words of Paul, feel that this helps and elevates them, and brings them further than of themselves they ever could have come? But there is still something more. Words of prayer, and elevations of praise, which from youth have been with us in life, impart to our utterance of soul a steadiness which strengthens, and makes us inwardly devout. And when in addition to this we realize that these wonderful words of prayer and elevations of praise are not only familiar to us, but that they are now, and have been in all ages, the language of God's children, it is as though some portion of the precious ointment of Aaron has been poured out upon it all, the sweet fragrance of which refreshes the heart.

The aim of the seeking always is to experience under it all the blessed nearness of God. Well, then, the Our Father also, when it is quietly, restfully and solemnly said, opens the gate of heaven to the soul. Psalm language of itself carries the soul upward. Everything that lends our wandering, and frequently impotent soul the support of the sacred Word, lifts us up into a higher mood. Moreover, everything in prayer and praise that makes us experience the communion of all God's saints and fellowship with our own more godly past, places a protecting power by the side of the

power of the world that aims at keeping us far distant from God.

The benediction also at the close of public worship might easily be composed by each preacher for himself. That this is not the case, that in the benediction at least a fixed form has been maintained, is a gain to be thankfully acknowledged. Now the preacher can put nothing into it of himself. He is forgotten thereby, but just because he steps into the background, the benediction affects us as a gentle dew of grace which comes to us from God.

“AS IN HEAVEN.”

For the soul “to be near unto God” implies, that we lift up ourselves with mind and heart from our everyday surroundings into the sphere of the Divine Majesty. This is what, in language of Scripture, the *Sursum Corda* has become, namely: the impulse to lift up soul and mind unto God and to appear in the audience-chamber of his holiness. In his infinite compassion God truly comes down to us, to dwell with us, and with his rod and staff to comfort us. This by itself brings God near to us, but by no means always brings our soul near unto God. The seeking love of God can for long times be near unto our heart, and can even be within it, while the heart is unconscious of it. An infant can be carried by God’s nearness, and have no sense whatever of the Divine Majesty. In conditions of sickness, which darken our consciousness of self, God’s nearness to his child is not removed. Even when in dying