

Will the Faith Community Answer This Prayer?

The Lord's Prayer is a familiar Scripture passage and also one that most Christians memorize.

Many churches include this model prayer frequently in their liturgies. As is often the case, familiarity breeds - well, maybe not contempt, but at least indifference.

We say the words so frequently (and often in the archaic King James Version) that we can become numb to the meaning.

As I try to apply the Lord's Prayer to our experiences as disciples, I find myself captured by the clause, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Most of us have encountered other translations of this portion of the prayer.

The exact meaning of "daily" is disputed. The Greek word sometimes is used for "today" and thus would mean "bread for the current day."

At times its meaning is associated with the actual components of the word itself, which literally means "necessary for existence." In that case it would mean "the bread we need to live."

Many scholars think it refers to "the following day - tomorrow." This meaning, "Give us today our bread for tomorrow," seems most likely to me.

If we ask only for today's bread, we will awake each morning with anxiety for that day's sustenance.

Each new day would have to begin with a petition for that day's bread, and the issue of our basic sustenance would always be a high level of concern.

This anxiety might well keep us focused on our dependence upon God, but I don't

think we could ever have the full and abundant life that Jesus promised if what's on today's menu is always an issue.

But think what it would mean for us to always have tomorrow's bread in hand today.

The assurance that our needs today were handled yesterday and our needs for tomorrow are already met sets us free to focus on life today as children of "our Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:9), as citizens of God's "kingdom" (Matthew 6:10), as devoted followers on earth of God's heavenly "will" (Matthew 6:10).

This relieves us of the need for storing up "treasures on earth" (Matthew 6:19). It resolves the tension between serving "God and mammon [wealth or money]" (Matthew 6:25).

It frees us like "the birds of the air" and "the lilies of the field" to set aside worry about food and clothing and to focus on seeking first God's "kingdom and righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

What a transforming experience we could have if we recognized that God gives us tomorrow's bread today.

But note something else about this passage. The Lord's Prayer is a prayer for a community of faith, not solely for individuals.

The only singular pronouns in the prayer refer to God. All the rest are plurals - "ours" and "us." We pray this prayer as a community of faith. "My" and "mine" are blended together into "our."

When God answers this prayer, I believe the prayer is answered in the plural and not in the singular. God gives us today our bread for tomorrow.

Jesus asserted that when forgiveness of trespasses, debts and sins is found within the community of faith (Matthew 6:12,14-15), the church members themselves will experience divine forgiveness (Matthew 6:14) and will store up treasures in

heaven (Matthew 6:20-21).

In a similar manner, I believe that God most often answers the “give us today our bread for tomorrow” through the community that shares together its abundance and supports each member who is in need.

In that sense, the prayer for our bread of tomorrow finds its answer first in the abundance found within the community of faith. Withholding abundance parallels the failure to forgive and has eternal consequences.

It was a liberating experience for me to discover in this prayer of promise that God will today supply my needs for tomorrow.

It was a disturbing experience for me to discover that the community of faith that prays this prayer has high accountability in answering the petitions in the prayer – especially when it is the universal church of which I am a member that prays the prayer and that expects us together to be God’s answer, providing tomorrow’s bread today from the abundance within God’s community of faith.

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