

# ST. THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE OUR FATHER



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in conjunction with Legatus

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The Phoenician  
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Camelback Salon H

**St. Thomas Aquinas**  
**Commentary on the Our Father (selections)**

**THE FOURTH PETITION “Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread.”**

Sometimes it happens that one of great learning and wisdom becomes fearful and timid; and, therefore, it is necessary that he have fortitude of heart lest he lack necessities: “It is He that giveth strength to the weary, and increases force and might to them that are not.” The Holy Spirit gives this fortitude: “And the Spirit entered into me, . . . and He set me upon my feet.” This fortitude which is given by the Holy Ghost so strengthens the heart of man that he does not fear for the things that are necessary for him, but he trusts that God will provide for all his needs. The Holy Spirit who gives us this strength teaches us to pray to God: “Give us this day our daily bread.” And thus He is called the Spirit of fortitude.

It must be noted that in the first three petitions of this prayer only things spiritual are asked for--those which indeed begin to be in this world but are only brought to fruition in the life eternal. Thus, when we pray that the name of God be hallowed, we really ask that the name of God be known; when we pray that the kingdom of God may come, we ask that we may participate in God’s kingdom; and when we pray that the will of God be done, we ask that His will be accomplished in us. All these things, however, although they have their beginning here on earth, cannot be had in their fullness except in heaven. Hence, it is necessary to pray for certain necessities which can be completely had in this life. The Holy Spirit, then, taught us to ask for the requirements of this present life which are here obtainable in their fullness, and at the same time He shows that our temporal wants are provided us by God. It is this that is meant when we say: “Give us this day our daily bread.”

In these very words the Holy Spirit teaches us to avoid five sins which are usually committed out of the desire for temporal things. The first sin is that man, because of an inordinate desire, seeks those things which go beyond his state and condition of life. He is not satisfied with what befits him. Thus, if he be a soldier and desires clothes, he will not have them suitable for a soldier, but rather for a knight; or if he be a cleric, clothes fit for a bishop. This vicious habit withdraws man from spiritual things, in that it makes his desires cleave to transitory things. The Lord taught us to avoid this vice by instructing us to ask for the temporal necessities of this present life as they are in accord with the position of each one of us. All this is understood under the name of “bread.” And so He does not teach us to pray for that which is luxurious, nor for variety, nor for what is over-refined,

108but for bread which is common to all and without which man’s life could not be sustained: “The chief thing for man’s life is water and bread.” And: “Having food and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content.”

The second sin is that some in acquiring temporal goods burden others and defraud them. This vicious practice is dangerous, because goods thus taken away can be restored only with difficulty. For, as St. Augustine says: “The sin is not forgiven until that which is taken away is restored.” “They eat the bread of wickedness.” The Lord teaches us to avoid this sin, and to pray for our own bread, not that of another. Robbers do not eat their own bread, but the bread of their neighbor.

The third sin is unnecessary solicitude. There are some who are never content with what they have, but always want more. This is wholly immoderate, because one’s desire must always be measured by his need: “Give me neither beggary nor riches, but give me only the necessities of life.” We are taught to avoid this sin in the words, “our daily bread,” that is, bread of one day or for one time.

The fourth sin is inordinate voracity. There are those who in one day would consume what would be enough for many days. Such pray not for bread for one day, but for ten days. And because they spend too much, it happens what they spend all their substance. "They that give themselves to drinking and that club together shall be consumed." And: "A workman that is a drunkard shall not be rich."

The fifth sin is ingratitude. A person grows proud in his riches, and does not realize that what he has comes from God. This is a grave fault, for all things that we have, be they spiritual or temporal, are from God: "All things are Thine; and we have given Thee what we received of Thy hand." Therefore, to take away this vice, the prayer has, "Give us" even "our daily bread," that we may know that all things come from God.

From all this we draw one great lesson. Sometimes one who has great riches makes no use of them, but suffers spiritual and temporal harm; for some because of riches have perished. "There is also another evil which I have seen under the sun, and that frequent among men. A man to whom God hath given riches and substance and honor, and his soul wants nothing of all that he desires; yet God doth not give him power to eat thereof, but a stranger shall eat it up." And again: "Riches kept to the hurt of the owner. "We ought, therefore, pray that our riches will be of use to us; and it is this we seek for when we say, "Give us our bread," that is, make our riches be of use to us. "His bread in his belly shall be turned into the gall of asps within him. The riches which he hath swallowed, he shall vomit up; and God shall draw them out of his belly."

Another great vice is concerned with the things of this world, viz., excessive solicitude for them. For there are some who daily are anxious about temporal goods which are enough for them for an entire year; and they who are thus troubled will never have rest: "Be not solicitous therefore, saying: "What shall we eat, or What shall we drink, or Wherewith shall we be clothed?" The Lord, therefore, teaches us to pray that to-day our bread will be given us, that is, those things which will be needful for us for the present time.

One may also see in this bread another twofold meaning, viz., Sacramental Bread and the Bread of the Word of God. Thus, in the first meaning, we pray for our Sacramental Bread which is consecrated daily in the Church, so that we receive it in the Sacrament, and thus it profits us unto salvation: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven." And: "He that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment to himself."

In the second meaning this bread is the Word of God: "Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." We pray, therefore, that He give us bread, that is, His Word. From this man derives that happiness which is a hunger for justice. For after spiritual things are considered, they are all the more desired; and this desire arouses a hunger, and from this hunger follows the fullness of life everlasting.

#### **THE FIFTH PETITION: "And Forgive Us Our Trespases As We Forgive Those Who Trespass Against Us."**

There are some men of great wisdom and fortitude who, because they trust too much in their own strength, do not wisely carry out what they attempt, and they do not bring to completion that which they have in mind. "Designs are strengthened by counsels." It must be known that the Holy Ghost who gives fortitude also gives counsel. Every good counsel concerning the salvation of man is from the Holy Ghost. Thus, counsel is necessary for man when he is in difficulty, just as is the counsel of physicians when one is ill. When man falls into spiritual illness through sin, he must look for counsel in order to be healed. This necessity for counsel on the part of the sinner is shown in these words: "Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to thee, and redeem thou thy sins with alms." The best counsel, therefore, against sin is alms and mercy. Hence, the Holy Spirit teaches sinners to seek and to pray: "Forgive us our trespases."

We owe God that which we have taken away from His sole right; and this right of God is that we do His will in preference to our own will. Now, we take away from God's right when we prefer our will to God's will, and this is a sin. Sins, therefore, are our trespasses. And it is the counsel of the Holy Spirit that we ask God pardon for our sins, and so we say: "Forgive us our trespasses."

We can consider these words in three ways: (1) Why do we make this petition? (2) How may it be fulfilled? (3) What is required on our part?

### **WHY DO WE MAKE THIS PETITION?**

It must be known that from this petition we can draw two things that are necessary for us in this life. One is that we be ever in a state of salutary fear and humility. There have been some, indeed, so presumptuous as to say that man could live in this world and by his own unaided strength avoid sin. But this condition has been given to no one except Christ, who had the Spirit beyond all measure, and to the Blessed Virgin, who was full of grace and in whom there was no sin. "And concerning whom," that is, the Virgin, "when it is a question of sin I wish to make no mention," says St. Augustine. But for all the other Saints, it was never granted them that they should not incur at least venial sin: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." And, moreover, this very petition proves this; for it is evident that all Saints and all men say the "Our Father" in which is contained "Forgive us our trespasses." Hence, all admit and confess that they are sinners or trespassers. If, therefore, you are a sinner, you ought to fear and humble yourself.

Another reason for this petition is that we should ever live in hope. Although we be sinners, nevertheless we must not give up hope, lest our despair drive us into greater and different kinds of sins. As the Apostle says: "Who despairing, have given themselves up to lasciviousness, unto the working of all uncleanness." It is, therefore, of great help that we be ever hopeful; for in the measure that man is a sinner, he ought to hope that God will forgive him if he be perfectly sorry for sin and be converted. This hope is strengthened in us when we say: "Forgive us our trespasses."

The Novatiani destroyed this hope, saying that one who has sinned but once after Baptism can never look for mercy. But this is not true, if Christ spoke truly when He said: "I forgave thee all the debt, because thou besought Me." In whatsoever day, therefore, you ask, you can receive mercy if with sorrow for sin you make your prayer. Both fear and hope arise from this petition. For all sinners who are contrite and confess their guilt, receive mercy. Hence, this petition is necessary.

### **THE FULFILLMENT OF THIS PETITION**

Concerning the second consideration of this petition (viz., how it may be fulfilled), it must be known that there are two factors in sin: the fault by which God is offended, and the punishment which is due because of this fault. But the sin is taken away in contrition which goes with the purpose to confess and make satisfaction: "I said: I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord. And Thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin" One has no need to fear then, because for the remission of a fault contrition with a purpose to confess is sufficient.

But one might say: "If sin is thus taken away when a man is contrite, of what necessity is the priest?" To this it must be said that God does forgive the sin in contrition, and eternal punishment is changed to temporal, but neverthe-

less the debt of temporal punishment remains. If one should die without confession, not out of contempt for it but prevented from it, one would go to purgatory, where the punishment, as St. Augustine says, is very great. When you confess, the priest absolves you of this punishment in virtue of the keys to which you subject yourself in confession. When, therefore, one has confessed, something of this punishment is taken away; and similarly when he has again confessed, and it could be that after he has confessed many times, all would be remitted.

The successors of the Apostles found another mode of remission of this punishment, namely, the good use of indulgences, which have their force for one living in the state of grace, to the extent that is claimed for them and as indicated by the grantor. That the Pope can bring this about, is sufficiently evident. Many holy men have accomplished much good, and they have not greatly sinned, at least not mortally; and these good deeds were done for the common use of the Church. Likewise the merits of Christ and the Blessed Virgin are, as it were, in a treasury; and from it the Supreme Pontiff and they who are by him permitted can dispense these merits where it is necessary. Thus, therefore, sins are taken away not only as regards their guilt by contrition, but also as regards punishment for them in confession and through indulgences.

### **WHAT MUST WE DO?**

Concerning the third consideration of this petition, it must be known that on our part we are required to forgive our neighbor the offenses which he commits against us. Thus, we say: "As we forgive those who trespass against us." Otherwise God would not forgive us: "Man to man reserves anger: and doth he seek remedy of God?" "Forgive and you shall be forgiven." Therefore, only in this petition is there a condition when it says: "As we forgive those who trespass against us." If you do not forgive, you shall not be forgiven.

But you may think, "I shall say what goes first in the petition, namely, 'forgive us,' but that 'As we forgive those who trespass against us,' I shall not say." Would you seek to deceive Christ? You certainly do not deceive Him. For Christ who made this prayer remembers it well, and cannot be deceived. If therefore, you say it with the lips, let the heart fulfill it.

But one may ask whether he who does not intend to forgive his neighbor ought to say: "As we forgive those who trespass against us." It seems not, for such is a lie. But actually it must be said that he does not lie, because he prays not in his own person, but in that of the Church which is not deceived, and, therefore the petition itself is in the plural number. And it must also be known that forgiveness is twofold. One applies to the perfect, where the one offended seeks out the offender: "Seek after peace." The other is common to all, and to it all are equally bound, that one offended grant pardon to the one who seeks it: "Forgive thy neighbor if he hath hurt thee; and then shall thy sins be forgiven to thee when thou prays." And from this follows that other beatitude: "Blessed are the merciful." For mercy causes us to have pity on our neighbor.

### **THE SIXTH PETITION: "And Lead Us Not Into Temptation."**

There are those who have sinned and desire forgiveness for their sins. They confess their sins and repent. Yet, they do not strive as much as they should in order that they may not fall into sin again. In this indeed they are not consistent. For, on the one hand, they deplore their sins by being sorry for them; and, on the other hand, they sin again and again and have them again to deplore. Thus it is written: "Wash yourselves, be clean. Take away the evil of your devices from my eyes. Cease to do perversely."

We have seen in the petition above that Christ taught us to seek forgiveness for our sins. In this petition, He teaches us to pray that we might avoid sin--that is, that we may not be led into temptation, and thus fall into sin. "And lead us not into temptation."

Three questions are now considered: (1) What is temptation? (2) In what ways is one tempted and by whom? (3) How is one freed from temptation?

### **WHAT IS TEMPTATION?**

Regarding the first, it must be known that to tempt is nothing other than to test or to prove. To tempt a man is to test or try his virtue. This is done in two ways just as a man's virtue requires two things. One requirement is to do good, the other is to avoid evil: "Turn away from evil and do good." Sometimes a man's virtue is tried in doing good, and sometimes it is tested in avoiding evil. Thus, regarding the first, a person is tried in his readiness to do good, for example, to fast and such like. Then is thy virtue great when thou art quick to do good. In this way does God sometimes try one's virtue, not, however, because such virtue is hidden from Him, but in order that all might know it and it would be an example to all. God tempted Abraham in this way, and Job also. For this reason God frequently sends trials to the just, who in sustaining them with all patience make manifest their virtue and themselves increase in virtue: "The Lord your God tries you, that it may appear whether you love Him with all your heart and with all your soul, or not."

Thus does God tempt man by inciting him to good deeds. As to the second, the virtue of man is tried by solicitation to evil. If he truly resists and does not give his consent, then his virtue is great. If, however, he falls before the temptation, he is devoid of virtue. God tempts no man in this way, for it is written: "God is not a tempter of evils, and He tempts no man."

### **HOW IS ONE TEMPTED?**

The Temptations of the Flesh.--Man is tempted by his own flesh, by the devil and by the world. He is tempted by the flesh in two ways. First, the flesh incites one to evil. It always seeks its own pleasures, namely, carnal pleasures, in which often is sin. He who indulges in carnal pleasures neglects spiritual things: "Every man is tempted by his own concupiscence."

Secondly, the flesh tempts man by enticing him away from good. For the spirit on its part would delight always in spiritual things, but the flesh asserting itself puts obstacles in the way of the spirit: "The corruptible body is a load upon the soul." "For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members." This temptation which comes from the flesh is most severe, because our enemy, the flesh, is united to us; and as Boethius says: "There is no plague more dangerous than an enemy in the family circle." We must, therefore, be ever on our guard against this enemy: "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation."

The Temptations of the Devil.--The devil tempts us with extreme force. Even when the flesh is subdued, another tempter arises, namely, the devil against whom we have a heavy struggle. Of this the Apostle says: "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in high places." For this reason he is very aptly called the tempter: "Lest perhaps he that tempts should have tempted you."



The devil proceeds most cunningly in tempting us. He operates like a skillful general when about to attack a fortified city. He looks for the weak places in the object of his assault, and in that part where a man is most weak, he tempts him. He tempts man in those sins to which, after subduing his flesh, he is most inclined. Such, for instance, are anger, pride and the other spiritual sins. "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goes about seeking whom he may devour."

How the Devil Tempts Us.--The devil does two things when he tempts us. Thus, he does not at once suggest something that appears to us as evil, but something that has a semblance of good. Thereby he would, at least in the beginning, turn a man from his chief purpose, and then afterwards it will be easier to induce him to sin, once he has been turned away ever so little. "Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light." Then when he has once led man into sin, he so enchains him as to prevent his rising up out of his sin. The devil, therefore, does two things: he deceives a man first, and then after betraying him, enthralls him in his sin.

Temptations of the World.--The world has two ways of tempting man. The first is excessive and intemperate desire for the goods of this life: "The desire of money is the root of all evil." The second way is the fears engendered by persecutors and tyrants: "We are wrapped up in darkness." "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." And again: "Fear not those that slay the body."

How Is One Freed from Temptation?--Now we have seen what temptation is, and also in what way and by whom one is tempted. But how is one freed from temptation? In this we must notice that Christ teaches us to pray, not that we may not be tempted, but that we may not be led into temptation. For it is when one overcomes temptation that one deserves the reward. Thus it is said: "Count it all joy when you shall fall into diverse temptations." And again: "Son, when thou comes to the service of God, . . . prepare thy soul for temptation." Again: "Blessed is the man that endures temptation; for when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life." Our Lord, therefore, teaches us to pray that we be not led into temptation, by giving our consent to it: "Let no temptation take hold on you, but such as is human." The reason is that it is human to be tempted, but to give consent is devilish.

But does God lead one to evil, that he should pray: "Lead us not into temptation"? I reply that God is said to lead a person into evil by permitting him to the extent that, because of his many sins, He withdraws His grace from man, and as a result of this withdrawal man does fall into sin. Therefore, we sing in the Psalm: "When my strength shall fail, do not Thou forsake me." God, however, directs man by the fervor of charity that he be not led into temptation. For charity even in its smallest degree is able to resist any kind of sin: "Many waters cannot quench charity." He also guides man by the light of his intellect in which he teaches him what he should do. For as the Philosopher says: "Everyone who sins is ignorant." "I will give thee understanding and I will instruct thee." It was for this last that David prayed, saying: "Enlighten my eyes that I never sleep in death; lest at any time my enemy say: I have prevailed against him." We have this through the gift of understanding. Therefore, when we refuse to consent to temptation, we keep our hearts pure: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God." And it follows from this petition that we are led up to the sight of God, and to it may God lead us all!

#### **SEVENTH PETITION: "But Deliver Us from Evil. Amen."**

The Lord has already taught us to pray for forgiveness of our sins, and how to avoid temptations. In this petition, He teaches us to pray to be preserved from evil, and indeed from all evil in general, such as sin, illness, affliction and all others, as St. Augustine explains it. But since we have already mentioned sin and temptation, we now must consider other evils, such as adversity and all afflictions of this world. From these God preserves us in a fourfold manner.

First, He preserves us from affliction itself; but this is very rare because it is the lot of the just in this world to suffer, for it is written: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Once in a while, however, God does prevent a man from being afflicted by some evil; this is when He knows such a one to be weak and unable to bear it. Just so a physician does not prescribe violent medicines to a weak patient. "Behold, I have given before thee a door opened, which no man can shut; because thou hast little strength." In heaven this will be a general thing, for there no one shall be afflicted. "In six troubles," those, namely, of this present life which is divided into six periods, "He shall deliver thee, and in the seventh evil shall not touch thee." "They shall no more hunger nor thirst."

Second, God delivers us from afflictions when He consoles us in them; for unless He consoles us, we could not long persevere: "We were pressed out of measure above our strength so that we were weary even of life." "But God, who comforts the humble, comforted us." "According to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart, Thy comforts have given joy to my soul."

Third, God bestows so many good things upon those who are afflicted that their evils are forgotten: "After the storm Thou makes a calm." The afflictions and trials of this world, therefore, are not to be feared, both because consolations accompany them and because they are of short duration: "For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, works for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory."

Fourth, we are preserved from afflictions in this way that all temptations and trials are conducive to our own good. We do not pray, "Deliver us from tribulation," but "from evil." This is because tribulations bring a crown to the just, and for that reason the Saints rejoiced in their sufferings: "We glory also in tribulations, knowing that tribulation works patience." "In time of tribulation Thou forgives sins."

### **THE VALUE OF PATIENCE**

God, therefore, delivers man from evil and from affliction by converting them to his good. This is a sign of supreme wisdom to divert evil to good. And patience in bearing trials is a result of this. The other virtues operate by good things, but patience operates in evil things, and, indeed, it is very necessary in evil things, namely, in adversity: "The learning of a man is known by his patience."

The Holy Spirit through the gift of wisdom has us use this prayer, and by it we arrive at supreme happiness which is the reward of peace. For it is by patience we obtain peace, whether in time of prosperity or of adversity. For this reason the peace-makers are called the children of God, because they are like to God in this, that nothing can hurt God and nothing can hurt them, whether it be prosperity or adversity: "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God." "Amen." This is general ratification of all the petitions.

### **A SHORT EXPLANATION OF THE WHOLE PRAYER**

By way of brief summary, it should be known that the Lord's Prayer contains all that we ought to desire and all that we ought to avoid. Now, of all desirable things, that must be most desired which is most loved, and that is God.

Therefore, you seek, first of all, the glory of God when you say: "Hallowed be Thy name." You should desire three things from God, and they concern yourself. The first is that you may arrive at eternal life. And you pray for this when you say: "Thy kingdom come." The second is that you will do the will of God and His justice. You pray for



this in the words: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The third is that you may have the necessities of life. And thus you pray: "Give us this day our daily bread." Concerning all these things the Lord says: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God," which complies with the second, "and all these things shall be added unto you," as in accord with the third.

We must avoid and flee from all things which are opposed to the good. For, as we have seen, good is above all things to be desired. This good is fourfold. First, there is the glory of God, and no evil is contrary to this: "If thou sin, what shalt thou hurt Him? And if thou do justly, what shall thou give Him?" Whether it be the evil inasmuch as God punishes it, or whether it be the good in that God rewards it--all redound to His glory. The second good is eternal life, to which sin is contrary: because eternal life is lost by sin. And so to remove this evil we pray: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." The third good is justice and good works, and temptation is contrary to this, because temptation hinders us from doing good. We pray, therefore, to have this evil taken away in the words: "Lead us not into temptation." The fourth good is all the necessities of life, and opposed to this are troubles and adversities. And we seek to remove them when we pray: "But deliver us from evil. Amen."



*California*

## About Thomas Aquinas College

Thomas Aquinas College was founded in 1971 in California to reestablish genuine Catholic liberal education. In the years since, it has developed a solid reputation for academic excellence. With a growing demand for its unique program, the College opened a second campus in New England in the fall of 2019. On both campuses, students pursue the same, fully integrated curriculum. Instead of reading textbooks, they engage firsthand with the greatest minds in Western civilization – the authors of the Great Books. And rather than listening passively to lectures, they engage in rigorous classroom discussions with their peers in all the major disciplines: mathematics, natural science, literature, philosophy, and theology. The academic life of the college is conducted under the light of the Catholic faith and flourishes within a close-knit community, supported by a vibrant spiritual life.



*New England*

Genuinely committed to upholding civic virtue and leading lives of service, Thomas Aquinas College graduates enter a wide array of fields, where they are a powerful force for good in the Church and in the culture. Well-versed in rational discourse, they become leaders in law, medicine, education, journalism, public policy, business, technology, and military service. In addition, a steady 10 percent of alumni go on to the priesthood or religious life.