

From personal gratification to mutual delight

Our image of God affects how we view and treat others. If we think God aloof, judgemental, punishing, then we are more likely to mistreat, disregard and undervalue others whilst prioritising our personal desires and ambitions. Others become means and objects for our personal gratification.

If on the other hand a deepening awareness of God's love grows within us, we come to see the people and things around us as gifts; worthy of respect with whom we share mutual a delight.

From this perspective Jesus' teaching of the disciples makes more sense. It both challenges us to be careful in how we treat others, and invites us to fashion a society in which all can flourish and no one is taken for granted or discarded.

The three areas addressed by Jesus in today's gospel help us to think about this in very practical terms. First, because we are strong our anger is capable of provoking violence and inflicting damage on others and on nature. So it is to our mutual benefit to be on our guard against anger.

As well as being strong creatures we are also capable of great love but we compromise this gift when we regard others as a means for our personal gratification. Doing this shuts us off from the comfort and solace we find in mutually loving personal relationships.

Thirdly, we are truth seeking creatures. The downside to this is pride; when we imagine we have a total grasp on truth. If we recognise the world as God's gift we don't need to reinforce their language with exaggerated claims of our own intellectual prowess. There is no need to swear oaths, our word is our bond. We can be trusted when our lives are lived in gentle humility, relying on God's providence ahead of our own ego.

So, by opening the eyes of our minds to see life as gift and the earth as our mutual home we can let go of the anxieties that arise from having to rely on ourselves alone, so that sharing earth's resources more fairly we enjoy living in harmony.

This is the vision I have come to associate with the Brazilian writer Rubem Alves, who I've referred to several times before. He has done his own working out of who God is and how we regard ourselves and each other in the light of this new sense of God.

In the light of this he composed his own version of the Lord's Prayer. It draws on a lifetime of becoming more and more at ease with the things of God and the beauty of life. He has reworked again and again his own image of God and finds himself liberated from the joy sucking images that blight so many lives; leaving him able to take enormous delight in the simple pleasures and relationships of everyday life.:

Our Father who art in heaven

Father... Mother... of tender eyes,
I know that you are invisible in all things.

Hallowed be thy name

May your name be sweet to me, the joy of my world.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven

Bring us the good things that give you pleasure:
A garden, fountains, Children, Bread and wine,
Tender gestures, hands without weapons,
Bodies hugging each other...

I know you want to meet my deepest wish,
The one whose name I forgot... but you never forget.
Bring about your wish that I may laugh.

May your wish be enacted in our world,
As it throbs inside you.

Give us this day our daily bread

Grant us contentment in today's joys:
Bread, water, sleep...

**And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us**

May we be free from anxiety.
May our eyes be as tender to others
As yours to us.
Because, if we are vicious,
We will not receive your kindness.

**And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil**

And help us
That we may not be deceived by evil wishes
And deliver us from the ones who carry death inside
their eyes. Amen.

(Homily OTA6 2020)

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