

Item #21 (Some Wild Surmises on the “Our Father”)

On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer

JOHN KEATS

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
 And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
 Round many western islands have I been
 Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
 Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
 That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;
 Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
 Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
 Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
 When a new planet swims into his ken;
 Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
 He star'd at the Pacific—and all his men
 Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
 Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

Many years ago I read in a book on the “Our Father” (Matthew 6,9b-13; Luke 11,2b-4) that some medieval authors voiced the view that the “Our Father” was a prayer about the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church. The author of the book gave no references, and although I was attracted to the idea and felt it deserved some research, I did not pursue the matter further.

Recently I read Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI on the “Our Father” in his book *Jesus von Nazareth. Erster Teil. Von der Taufe im Jordan bis zur Verklärung* (Herder Spectrum Band 6033; Freiburg—Basel—Wien). On pp. 185-191 the author discusses “Give us this day our daily bread” (p. 188). He narrows in on the famous word ἐπιούσιος and claims that there are only two possibilities for translating this word: 1) “give us the bread we need for today” and 2) “give us the bread we need for the future, or following day”. Ratzinger chooses the conventional one: “give us today our daily bread”, though admitting that the word ἐπιούσιος is most unusual, agreeing with Origen in this (see p. 188). He infers that the choice of a word otherwise not used in the Greek language of the day implies an unusual meaning for bread not otherwise found in the times and says it refers to the Eucharist, with an appeal to the Manna tradition, as found in John 6 (pp. 190-191). This is all well and good, but is the Manna tradition really the formality under which the Eucharist is being referred to here? I

would surmise that what Jesus is referring to is His multiplication of bread (see Matthew 15,33). Jesus is telling His disciples they should pray for the bread we will need in the future. This use of the unusual word ἑπιούσιος was enough to persuade me that more texts worthy of surmises are hidden in the “Our Father”.

For example, take the phrase “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6,10b; the text is not found in Luke). Assuming that Matthew’s Gospel was written for Christians with a Jewish background (see the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew 1,1-17; it begins with Abraham) and that Luke’s Gospel was written for Christians with a Gentile background (see the genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3,23-38; it begins with Adam), one can ask what the will of God is that is to be done not only in heaven but on earth as well, that is relevant to Jews and not Gentiles? This omission of a phrase in a prayer that has become as universal in Christian use as the “Our Father” is begging for a wild surmise. As regards the priesthood it is enough to see the role of the Temple priesthood in the crucifixion of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel (see, for example, Matthew 20,27). As regards the Mosaic Law, in force at the time of Jesus (see Matthew 19,3-9). Jesus in Matthew makes clear that it was not God’s will that divorce was permitted under the Mosaic Law. Hence His suggestion to the disciples to pray for what God wanted (Genesis 2,24 as quoted in Matthew 19,5). My wild surmise is that a reformed priesthood and a reformed marriage as regards divorce are the two things that are likely alluded to in the petition of the Our Father “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6,10b).

Benedict XVI goes back to Exodus 3 to explain the petition “Our Father Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name” (pp. 169-179). This God is He who gives His name as “I am” when asked who is sending Moses. On this basis one can make a surmise: a new dimension is in play in the “Our Father” of Jesus, for the Law of Jesus and His Church is about to replace the Law of Moses. The name to be given to God in the Law of Jesus’s Church is “Our Father”. It is “Our Father” who is the ultimate authority for all that Jesus said and did, including the Church, and thus anyone who is a member of that Church has a right to appeal to Him if that person recognizes the duty to keep the Father’s name “holy” or “hallowed”. For that is God’s unique quality that He shares with Jesus and all those wish to participate in it. The petition is first in the “Our Father” because it is foundational. And just as baptism is the liturgical act that Jesus underwent to show it was foundational for all that Jesus said and did with the approval of the Father, so it is for those who are baptized, who are thus authorized to pray the “Our Father” as members of the Church (“*Our* Father”). Nor should the relative clause “Who are in heaven” be overlooked. The appeal

to God in His transcendental state contrasts with the Son who is speaking and in the Bread which will abide in this world until the end of time. The heavenly status of the Father sets the tone of legitimacy which pervades all that is contained in the “Our Father” and transmits it to the Son who is speaking.

The next phrase in the “Our Father” is “Thy Kingdom come”. Ratzinger notes (p. 179) that the “Kingdom” of God as preached by Jesus refers to the primacy of God in all things. Where this is lacking nothing can go well. When one notes the confusion in today’s world one can make the surmise that given the placing that Jesus gives to this petition in the “Our Father” (immediately following what I have surmised to be Baptism) would be the sacrament of Confirmation. For Confirmation confirms or strengthens what is given in Baptism—adherence to God and the things of God, for only in God is true holiness found. The fact that Jesus places the petition in the context of His recommendation distinguishes it from the other views of “the Kingdom” prevalent in His day and now.

The petition “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” is treated by Ratzinger on pp. 191-195. At the end he remarks (pp. 194-195) that Cardinal John Henry Newman’s observes that the guilt and suffering of men can be removed only by God’s gift of Self or of His Son, in contrast to His power of creation that required no such gift. In the context of a prayer that begins presumably with a request for Baptism and presumably includes the Eucharist and the Priesthood, the sacrament of Reconciliation can easily be surmised to be involved.

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One”. is the final petition. Ratzinger divides it into two, but the conjunction ἀλλά would seem to indicate that what follows is considered to be the positive equivalent of what precedes (see pp. 195-202). He puts the petition in the proper context by citing James 1,13 (which states that God tempts no one to sin) and Matthew 4,1 (which introduces the passage at the beginning of the public life of Jesus in which the Spirit leads Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4,1). As placed by Jesus in the “Lord’s Prayer” it occurs last, not first, for it concerns a sacrament that normally is found at the end of a Christian’s life. The wording of the second part would seem to have the connotation of freeing the Christian for once and for all from the power of Satan, this being the purpose of avoiding any initial exposition to the power of Satan as was the case with Jesus.

What has thus resulted from the wild surmises made above is as follows:

“Our Father Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name”: **Baptism.**

“Thy Kingdom come”: **Confirmation.**

“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”: **Matrimony, Holy Orders.**

“Give us this day our Daily Bread”: **Eucharist.**

“And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us”: **Reconciliation.**

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from he Evil One”: **Extreme Unction.**

Needless to say, all these wild surmises are tentative, no ocean having yet appeared so obviously the Pacific as to render them no longer surmises. Perhaps no ocean ever will. I would like to emphasize that my use of Ratzinger was not intended to imply that he favors the presence of the Pacific Ocean. But his approach was for me suggestive that I should. **(29 July 2019)**