

Talk 4 “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”

O Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, You are everywhere present and fill all things.

Treasury of blessings and Giver of life: come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Gracious Lord!

“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10).

Of all of the petitions this one seems to be the simplest and most understandable. Indeed, if a person believes in God, it would seem that he or she submits to God’s will and accepts it, and desires that it should be accepted all around them on earth, as supposedly it is in heaven. In reality, however, this is the most difficult petition.

I would have to say that precisely this petition, “Thy will be done” is the ultimate yardstick of faith - it sorts out profound from superficial faith, profound religiosity from a false one. Why? Well, because even the most ardent believer all too regularly, if not always, desires, expects and asks from the God he or she claims to believe in, that God would fulfil precisely his or her own personal will, and not necessarily the will of God. The best

proof of this is the Gospel itself, the account of Christ's life.

Isn't Christ from the outset followed by nameless crowds of people? And aren't they following him because he is accomplishing *their* will? He is healing, helping, comforting... However, as soon as he starts speaking about the essentials, about the fact that a person in order to follow Him has to deny themselves if they want to follow him, about the need to love one's enemies, and to lay down one's life for one's sisters and brothers, as soon as his teaching becomes difficult, exalted even, a call to sacrifice, a demand of the seemingly impossible - in other words, as soon as Christ starts to teach about what is really the will of God, people immediately begin to abandon him, and, moreover, turn against him with anger and hatred. Remember the eerie shouting of the mob, "Crucify him, crucify him" (Luke 23:21) - it is because Christ did not fulfil the will or desires of the people.

They only wanted help and healing, while he spoke of love and forgiveness. They wanted him to liberate them from their enemies and grant victory over them, while Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God. They wanted him to observe their traditions and customs, while he defied them by eating and drinking with publicans, sinners and prostitutes. Doesn't the root and cause of Judas' betrayal lie precisely in this sense of disappointment in Christ? Judas anticipated that Christ would fulfil his will,

but Christ willingly gave himself to judgement and death.

This is all described in the Gospels.

And subsequently, over the next two millennia of Christianity, do we not witness the same drama? What do we, together and individually, really desire from Christ? Let's admit it - the fulfilment of OUR will. We desire that God would assure our happiness. We want him to defeat our enemies. We want him to realise our dreams, and that he would consider us to be kind and good. And when God fails to do our will we get frustrated and upset, and are ready over and over to forsake and deny him.

“Thy will be done” - but in fact we are thinking “our will be done”, and thus this petition of the Lord's Prayer is first of all a kind of judgement on us - a judgement of our faith!

Do we really desire that which is from God? Do we really desire to accept that difficult, that seemingly impossible demand of the Gospel?

And this petition also becomes a kind of verification of our goals and direction in life: what is it that I want, what is it that forms the main and highest value of my life, where is that treasure about which Christ said "that where it lies, there our hearts will be also" (Matt 6:21)?

If the history of religion, if the history of Christianity is filled with betrayals, then these betrayals are not so much in the sins and failures of people, for the sinner can always repent, the person who is a failure can always correct themselves, the ailing can always be restored. No, rather the worst betrayal lies in this constant substitution of our will, our *self-will*, for the will of God. On account of this betrayal even religion itself becomes our egoism, which therefore deserves the accusations it endures from its enemies. It becomes a pseudo-religion, and there is nothing on the face of the earth more frightening than a pseudo-religion. For it is precisely a pseudo-religion which killed Christ.

It was those who considered themselves most deeply religious who condemned him to death and crucified him, who mocked him and sought his destruction. Some of them perceived in religion a kind of national apotheosis, for whom Christ was a dangerous revolutionary who talked of love for one's enemies; others saw in religion only the miraculous and powerful, for whom the bloody and helpless Christ hanging on the cross was a disgrace to religion; while still others were disappointed in him because he taught things they did not want to hear. And so to this day people continue to think the same way, which exactly underlies the importance of this petition, "Thy will be done".

"Thy will be done". This means first of all: grant me strength, and help me to understand what is

your will, help me to overcome the limitations of my own reasoning, of my heart, my own will, in order to discern your paths, even if they are unclear at first. Help me to accept that which is difficult and seemingly unbearable, or impossible in your will. Help me, in other words, to desire that which you desire.

And so here begins this narrow path which opens out in front of each one of us. A path spoken of and trodden by Christ.

Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power, and idle talk.

But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to Thy servant.

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions, and not to judge my brother or sister, for blessed art Thou, unto ages of ages.
Amen