

Surrender your life to love, not fear

By Father Joseph Breighner

If I were on my death-bed right now, what would be my final prayer? Personally, having already had strokes and pulmonary embolisms, I'm not expecting to have a great deal of time to compose any lengthy prayers. What would I say?

My first choice in prayer would be: "Jesus, remember me." These were the words of the 'good thief' on the cross: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus' reply was: "This day you will be with me in paradise!" If the 'good thief' could steal heaven, maybe there's a chance for me as well!

My second prayer would be: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." This was the prayer of Jesus dying on the cross! It's hard to improve on God! This was also the prayer of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Christians are not only called to live as Jesus lived, but to die as Jesus died.

All of Christian prayer is summed up in the Lord's Prayer, in the Our Father. The Our Father is not just a prayer but an attitude toward prayer. Given enough time, this would be a third prayer. Allow me to offer a short meditation on the prayer.

For us to say: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name" is to forever name God as our Father. We don't live and die as slaves of God but as children of God. Any sense of inadequacy is erased by the word Father. We are made in God's image and likeness. Could God reject himself?

"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven". This is essentially to: "Let go and let God!" In life, we surrender to the presence of God, so God can work through us. In death, we surrender to that same presence. We surrender to love.

"Give us this day our daily bread" is our assurance of God's protection. God gave manna in the desert. God gives us the Eucharist, the bread of life and the bread of

eternal life. We have food for the journey of life and food that will sustain us in eternal life.

“Forgive us our trespasses” is our plea for forgiveness. If Jesus could hear the lonely cry from the cross, will He not hear our plea? When we ask for forgiveness we are forgiven.

“As we forgive those who trespass against us.” God’s forgiveness frees us of guilt. Our forgiveness of others frees us from bitterness and resentment. On our death-beds, none of our petty grievances and grudges will have any meaning. We will be freed by death. Why not free ourselves in life by forgiving others as God forgives us. Jesus gave us the command to forgive. He also gives us the power. As I’ve said before, if you don’t want to forgive out of love for the other, forgive out of love for yourself. You set yourself free from all those negative feelings.

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” I’ve never needed God to lead me into temptation. I’m good at finding those myself, with a little help from the devil! The more literal meaning of this phrase meant something different for the first Christians. They were praying that they would not be subjected to the trials at the end of time. They prayed to be spared of the pain of the end of time. On our death-beds we may have many trials as well – worry, fear, pain, doubt, regret. Turn to the Lord in those final moments and God will lead us through all those valleys of darkness. Remember, we are surrendering our lives to love, not to fear.

Copyright (c) June 8, 2012 CatholicReview.org