

# Give us today our daily bread

Matthew 6.15-15

Rev Dr Jos M. Strengholt

We are the children of God. We call him 'our Father'. Today we think about this prayer, 'give us this day our daily bread'. What can be more childlike than this petition in which we pray for our daily bread. With the confidence of children who have a loving Father, we say to Him: "Please, give us today what we urgently need.'

Not less. We need bread. or we die. And also not more. Jesus does not teach us to pray for luxury.

And this prayer for our food, only comes after we have prayed for God's name to be hallowed, for his kingdom to come, and for his will to be done.

Our priorities are clear. First, we worry about God and his honor. We seek his kingdom. And only after that, we begin to focus on our own needs.

## 1. Eucharist

You would think that this petition of the Lord's Prayer, 'Give us today our daily bread', cannot lead to any misunderstanding. The reality is, that interpreters have offered some very different interpretations.

These different views are related to that small word 'daily', in 'give us today our daily bread'. The word that is used in the Greek text seems to have been invented by Matthew. It is not found in other Greek literature of that period. It is the word 'epi-ousion'. This word means "above the essence" or "supersubstantial" or "supernatural".

And this is why many of the Early Church Fathers believed that this prayer was really about the Eucharist. "Give us today our supernatural bread".

This was not only a view of many of the Fathers of the Early Church. The Orthodox Study Bible, published first in 1993, says that it is not just "bread for this day, taken for sustenance of life," but "bread for the eternal day of the Kingdom of God, for



sustenance of our immortal life." So, it is a picture of the Eucharist. Many Roman Catholic theologians share this viewpoint.

We pray that God gives us access to his Holy Eucharist every day. For most Church Fathers this was the obvious meaning of the prayer. And I think this idea is good.

Jesus calls himself the Bread of Life, and therefore some have taken this prayer to mean, that every day we may feed on Him who is the Living Bread. It is easy to then also immediately think of Holy Eucharist, where we feed on the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

The idea of asking God to supply us with bread also reminds us of how God gave Israel manna in the desert. God takes care of his children in their journey through life. And again, this story of God giving manna in the desert was used by Jesus to show how He personally was the true Manna, the true Bread.

He is the one who helps us in our journey through life, and He is most present when we celebrate Holy Eucharist.

The earliest liturgies of the early church insisted that the Lord's Prayer must always be said when celebrating Holy Communion. My own experience in this regard is, that when I stand behind the altar and we pray together 'God, give us our daily bread', that I want to pick up the plate and lift up the bread.

God has already given us Jesus; He has given us Holy Eucharist. God takes care of your needs. We pray, and even before we finish our prayer, He already point us to Jesus: He is the Bread of Life; He is present here; you can enjoy Him and He sustains you.

You remember the words of Jesus, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, and everything will be given to you." We can trust the generosity of the heavenly Father. If we seek his Kingdom, He will provide the necessary sustenance for your journey in life.

And we do seek his Kingdom, don't we? In the Lord's Prayer we pray for it each time: 'Lord, make your Kingdom come!' If we pray for his name to be hallowed, for his kingdom to come, for his will to be done, and we personally align our life with that, then "everything will be given to you."

## **2. Bread**

But when Jesus said, "all these things will be given to you", He was really speaking of what to eat and how to dress. It is so easy to be worried about those very concrete and tangible things that we truly need.

I believe that it is right to think of Jesus, our Spiritual Bread, and Holy Eucharist, when we ask God to feed us. But we must not be so spiritual that we forget that in the Lord's Prayer, we also pray for our normal food. Food for the body.

God cares for our bodies. Jesus showed us that; He spent so much time healing sick people. And when thousands of people in the desert were hungry, He miraculously gave them food. Normal bread.

Often that normal bread was a pointer to more spiritual things, but that does not mean that God is not interested in helping us to eat. We need the calories. Man cannot live by bread alone, but without bread at all, we also cannot live.

The Lord's Prayer as we use it in church, is basically the version that we have from the Gospel of Matthew. In the Gospel of Luke, that strange word 'epi-ousion', or 'supernatural' bread is not used. Luke says: 'Give us each day our daily bread.' The bread that we need now. Just as Israel in the desert had to eat the manna day by day.

That manna was a pointer to how God cares for us in Jesus Christ, but for those Jews in the desert, it meant their daily food in the first place.

To pray for our food day by day teaches us to live one day at a time, and not to worry and be anxious about the distant and the unknown future. It teaches us to trust in God each day.

St John Chrysostom, a wonderful preacher in the fourth century, said that this word 'daily' is important:

It is not for riches or frills that we pray. It is not for wastefulness or extravagant clothing that we pray, but only for bread. And only for bread on a daily basis, so as not to worry about tomorrow.

John Chrysostom, The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 19.5

To pray for our daily food helps us to be moderate with our use of food and material things, away from the extremes of opulence on the one hand, and dying of hunger on the other hand, as God already taught in the Old Testament, for instance in the book of Proverbs:

Give me enough food to live on, neither too much nor too little.  
If I'm too full, I might get independent, saying, 'God? Who needs him?'  
If I'm poor, I might steal and dishonor the name of my God." (Prov 30:8, The Message).



We are not told to pray for daily cake. We may be grateful, of course, when cake is given. But we may only legitimately pray for bread, that is, for necessities. 'Daily bread' indicates necessity. What we need. In that sense, the prayer obviously also includes the clothes we need, and more.

Martin Luther taught that when we pray for bread, we are praying at the same time for “everything necessary for the preservation of life, like food, a healthy body, good weather, house, home, wife, children, good government, and peace - and that God may preserve us from all sorts of calamities, sickness, pestilence, hard times, war, revolution, and the like.” SM, 147.

### 3. Give us

And note that Jesus did not teach us to pray: "Give me my daily bread." He taught us to pray: "Give us our daily bread." If you let that sink in deeply, it has revolutionary power.

As a community of Christians, we pray with Jesus, that we will have enough to eat. That we, together, as a community of followers of Jesus, have enough.



If a father in a family prays to God, ‘gives us our daily bread’, he prays it for his whole family. And when he gets a loaf, he feeds us hungry children. The Lord’s Prayer is a prayer of and for the whole community.

This prayer, says the Anglican theologian William Barclay,

“...teaches us never to be selfish in our prayers. It is a prayer which we can help God to answer by giving to others who are less fortunate than we are. This prayer is not only a prayer that we may receive our daily bread; it is also a prayer that we may share our daily bread with others.” William Barclay, *Matthew*, pp. 215-219

We must be realistic; I assume most of us have never gone hungry; our fridge is full and running over.

This prayer for our daily bread should make us, wealthy Christians, grateful people. We will not be able to pray this petition for our daily bread without saying immediately, “Thank you very much, you have provided abundantly more than what I need.”

At the same time, we cannot pray this prayer without a measure of guilt, maybe. Not because we have so much. That is fine. But the problem is that we enjoy this bread so abundantly, and we store it up for years to come, while such a large number of people in the world live miserably. They need bread today.

Hence this petition causes us also to pray “I am very sorry,” and “Please show us what to do,” and “Please help all those who bring bread to the world.” This petition forms a thorn in the flesh for its all too comfortable petitioners.

How can there be Christians who go to bed hungry? Does God not answer their prayers? God does. He has given us our daily bread, but we as the Church of God have forgotten to spread our wealth among us. We are like a father in the family who keeps his food under his bed while his children go to bed hungry.

Give us today our daily bread is a dangerous prayer if we pray it seriously. It moves us to be radical givers. Radical sharers. Both of the Supernatural Bread, of Jesus Christ, in evangelism. But also of our normal food, and other necessities that we have so plenty of.

Our spiritual Gospel is not very attractive for non-spiritual people, if we do not also share with them of our wealth - if they have needs.

Gospel preaching is unfaithful when it fails to include a strong concern that there be bread. This prayer for our bread is a prayer for social justice in the Christian community worldwide. And beyond that community.

Needy people, poor people, they pray that our Father supplies them in all their needs. And our Father wants to use our hands as his hands, to give the needy people what they need.

If we pray the Lord's Prayer earnestly, our life style will change. We should become more satisfied with little. Paul writes to Timothy, 'But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.'

And our bank account should feel the impact. We worry so much about the future that we always seem to need more - our bread for next year. But as long as we have brothers and sisters who go to bed hungry, something is radically wrong among the children of God.

## **Conclusion**

Guilt feelings are not so useful, and they often do not lead to much. But it is healthy for us, to seriously consider our lifestyle and our giving patterns. How to respond to the needs of our fellow Christians?

Is our life in line with our Lord Jesus Christ? He gave himself as bread for the world. And He asks us to follow in his footsteps. The DNA of giving is in God. That DNA is also transplanted in us by God the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

This radical Christian lifestyle may seem painful, but to act in harmony with the Giving God, can only increase our love, and peace, and joy.

**+ Amen**