

Sermon on the last petition of the Lord's Prayer

“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil”.

If you remember, before the range of emotions we encountered on Mothers Day; as a Parish we have been thinking carefully about the Lord's Prayer.

So today the part of the Lord's Prayer we consider is this: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” These are really two prayer snippets so let's start with “Lead us not into temptation”.

There are issues raised by the translation from the Greek where it may mean 'to test' or 'to prove', and has been rendered in bible translations as 'temptation', or 'trial'. These differing perspectives result in much controversy amongst theologians. First let's look at it as 'temptation'; this may prompt awkward questions, the most provoking of which is “Does God tempt us?”.

Reference is often made to the Letter of James (1.13) in order to provide guidance. 'No one, when tempted, should say. “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one'.

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Set against this, Jesus himself was tempted, we are told by the evil one (Mark 1.12-13) and we know ourselves well enough to realise that we would be unlikely to withstand as Jesus did.

Without doubt we live in a world of temptation.

Temptation to fight others to succeed in our careers, to find ourselves the best positions in church hierarchy, or more subtly, to rely on our own strength when it would be better, easier and more loving, simply to rely on God.

Reflecting on these things will not just bring us closer to God but perhaps a bit more scarily, give us greater understanding of ourselves. This is worth doing because each of us is irreplaceable.

If we are willing to think about it and to face our temptations boldly, we will find God close to us as we learn to face our growing self knowledge and learn to be brave.

This may make it easier to understand why we might pray not to be led into temptation, or perhaps to be protected from a level of temptation which is more than we can bear.

Now if we look at the Greek translated as 'trial';

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Jewish tradition understood that before the redemption of the world there would be a time of trial (Daniel 7-9), this became part of early Christian thought (Rev. 3.10) when Jesus' second coming was expected imminently, so it would be understandable to petition to be protected during the time of the 'last things'.

So, this reading can refer both to the everyday temptations, trials or testing of faith from which, with Gods help we gain strength, even when we fail; and to matters of last cataclysmic times where we seek protection or support from God as His new world dawns. We are asking God to be close, to help us to know ourselves and to help us to be brave.

So now let's look at the second part of the petition "deliver us from evil" there is also some variation centring on whether the translation of the Greek should be 'deliver us from evil' or 'deliver us from the evil **one**'.

There is much discussion to be had here, but neither you nor I have the time to do that now, I would just say that every version of the Lord's Prayer I can find in Common Worship, and there are quite a few, translates it as deliver us from evil, even though the New Revised Standard Version of the bible refers to the 'evil one'. So we have a tension even between our own Liturgy and the preferred translation of the bible used here at St James's.

For today I will leave the argument to wiser minds than mine.

But you may want to think about it.

To truly understand any petition or phrase in the Lord's Prayer we need to go back to the first two words, "Our Father". Jesus' Ministry was founded on an intimacy with God, in which he encourages us to engage.

God is not just Jesus' father, he is **Our** Father.

Both in the Lords Prayer, when Jesus is teaching, and in the desperation of Gethsemane Jesus refers to God as 'Abba', the name with which a child would call on a human father; something like 'Daddy'; not 'Abinu' a strictly formal, religious form of address.

This level of intimacy indicates love, dependence and absolute trust in God. It is this to which we are called.

Entering into this trusting, loving relationship supported by God's grace and reaching into the depths of our own courage, we can come to know our irreplaceable selves better.

We may find that although it is useful to critically appraise the text of the Lord's Prayer, in order to avoid formulaic repetition; that of paramount

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importance is the intimacy of our relationship with God; “Our Father”, “Abba”, “Daddy” and that the prayer should be prayed with absolute confidence in Him.

So when you pray “Our Father” can you think of God as Daddy or if you prefer Mummy? Be **that** close, for that is how close God already is to you.

As we approach Holy Week,

Be close to God.

Learn more about yourself – you are irreplaceable

Be brave.

Amen