

Today we bring to a close, the lessons Jesus teaches on, how to pray. We have said, over the past several weeks, that prayer can be quite enigmatic, difficult to understand and therefore difficult to put into practice.

It doesn't help when Dionne Warwick sings, "*The moment I wake up, before I put on my make-up, I say a little prayer for you. While combing my hair now, And wondering what dress to wear now, I say a little prayer for you.*"¹ The song of a young woman thinking of her husband in the Vietnam war, composed by Hal David, put to music by Bacharach, to be sung by the one and only Dionne Warwick.

Music and songs have great influence on us and exert considerable power of suggestion. Like it or not, songs teach, not only the young, but adults as well. A song like this leaves us with a mixed message. On the one hand, Jesus teaches, there is no fixed time to pray. *Don't be like those who stand in the streets and pray set prayers at set times. Go home, into your room. Close the door and pray in secret. Your Heavenly Father knows you what you need.* If you have this kind of a positive and constructive relationship with God your Father, you can talk with Him anytime, from the time you wake up, and put on your makeup, combing your hair, wondering what dress to wear, prayer is your conversation with God.

To make sure that I won't have any come-backs for being sexist, perhaps we might persuade Gregory Porter to pay Burt Bacharach his licence fee for the song, and sing the following line:

From the moment I wake up,
before I shave, shower and dress up,
I say a little prayer for you.
While travelling to work dear,
wondering what dress you'll buy today dear,
I said a whole *lotta* prayer for you!

¹ Written by Hal David & Burt F. Bacharach, written for Dionne Warwick and sung by many artistes.

The song ties in with Jesus' teaching, *pray when you can, pray at all times*, but a song like this, can also offer a misleading message: you don't need to spend focussed time in prayer with God; just saying a simple 'little prayer' will do, which flies in the face of Jesus' response to the disciples' question, *Lord, teach us to pray*. Jesus did not offer them **a set little prayer** to say at set times, in set places; He taught them how to pray.

We come to the final part of Jesus's teaching on prayer: *Our Father, please don't let us give-in to temptation, but deliver us, save us, spare us from the advances of the one who has only evil in his heart*.

It is difficult for us to grasp the extent to which evil is so very near to us. We can accept that evil exist out there where people kill and maim, rape and behead men, women and children; we can accept evil exists out there where the innocent are swindled of their possessions; we can accept evil exists out there where violent robbery takes place, but it is very difficult for people like us to accept that evil is very near to us, that we are surrounded by evil, that we are often only one step away from from evil.

This is mostly because of the way we have defined evil. We have personified Satan as a "little devil" dressed in red, with horns, a long tail ending in an arrowhead, a pitchfork in his right hand, an an "evil look" in his eyes.

If you are looking for this caricature of satan, you won't find him anywhere, except perhaps on a label stuck to a thin long bottle of red sauce branded very appropriately, "Red Devil". You might find this caricature in some books and comics, and you might find it in film, where an actor is facing a life-changing decision, and an angel on his left shoulder speaks common sense wisdom, while a "red devil" on the right, taunts the actor to do the opposite. This caricature softens our expectation of satan!

I think, good ol' Elvis Presley got it right:

You look like an angel

Walk like an angel

Talk like an angel
But I got wise
You're the devil in disguise.

There is **this** popular culture in music which shapes and influences us, but our language also contributes significantly to our understanding of the real evil one. We say light-heartedly, *The devil is in the detail*, implying that the detail, the fine print is so confusing, it must be work of the devil.

When we don't want to own up to a mistake, we say, *The devil made me do it!* Why give him the credit for a mistake on our part? Why we use phrases like, *give the devil his due*, and *let me play the devil's advocate*? Why would anyone, knowing that the devil is evil, want to advocate for him?

On a personal note, I do wish, however, someone would have the courage, influence and the power to change the name of my favourite chocolate cake and not call it *Devil Food Cake*. Any while they are at it, please can we not refer to chocolate as "sinful". I am so conditioned by this notion that chocolate is sinful, every time I hear it, I wash my mouth out with chocolate. But Jo Brand says it best, "*Anything is good, if it's made of chocolate.*"

Our almost careless use of words like devil, evil, satan etc., distracts us from a proper understanding the impact of this line in the prayer, *Our Father, please don't let us give-in to temptation, but deliver us, save us, spare us from the advances of the one who is evil.*

Many of us are distracted by the translation of this line in the prayer which reads, "Lead us not into temptation...", believing it is God who leads us into temptation; we, therefore, should plead for Him not to do so.

The Apostle James teaches us, "*Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one*".²

² James 1:13

You might come back to me and say, *Ah, Kalyan! You are mistaken. Matthew tells us, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness, **to be tempted**.*³

As we explore, discover and better understand ancient languages, we discover Matthew's original text says, *the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness **to meet the tempter*** (another name for the evil one).

God does not do the tempting, He cannot put evil desires in our hearts, because He can have no evil desires in his own heart, nor does He **lead us** into places of temptation to test our strength and will power. But God recognises our proximity to evil; He recognises the power and influence of the evil one; hence Jesus suggests, *Father don't let us give-in to temptation, but spare us from the destructive power of the one who is evil.*

This part of the prayer Jesus teaches, goes much deeper.

God knows that the evil one's only mission is to prevent us from entering into God's eternal Kingdom where there is no death, and is aware of the evil one's clever strategy of **distract-and-destroy**. God knows, sex, drugs and rock n' roll is not the only way the evil one can distract-and-destroy.

The evil one can use any of the most real issues of life to distract-and-destroy: anxiety and worry, procrastination and idleness, over-indulgence (food, pornography, the various expressions of social media...).

But the evil one also has other weapons at his disposal, aimed at us.

"Attitudes to life" such as:

- a sense of entitlement: God owes me.
- shortcuts to success: doing things I really shouldn't be doing to get places.
- financial folly: not seeking wisdom and guidance in money matters.

³ Matthew 5

"Attitudes towards oneself" such as,

- condemning yourself by focusing on past mistakes, sins, shortcomings, faults and failures.
- feeling sorry for yourself, wallowing in self-pity about life's disappointments
- blaming others and holding them accountable for the situation you are currently in (grudges, unforgiveness, careless gossip which damages others).
- compromising personal integrity, reputation and Christian testimony through a moment of unfocussed thought, resulting in an act of indiscretion.

In fact, every step we take in life, is a step in the presence of temptation. There isn't a moment in your life that is not surrounded by temptation, a moment when unbelief and disobedience is not a possibility.

Jesus asks us to pray that temptation does not take us in, suck us **into** its trap. *Don't let me give-in to temptation. Spare me from the evil one who entices, invites, even convinces me.*

Today and everyday, we stand before innumerable temptations. That's what life is: endless choices between belief and unbelief, obedience and disobedience. *Our Father, forbid that I would yield to it. Hold me back from stepping-in to the temptation.*

Jesus teaches us to close our prayers in a spirit of humility, recognising Who has true power and authority to deliver. *Yours is the Kingdom, all power and all authority, for ever and ever, Amen.*

This final verse of the prayer Jesus taught us to pray, reminds me of something I had read about Admiral Lord Nelson when the British fleet crushingly defeated the French fleet and they surrendered. The leading French captain was rowed across to Nelson's ship. He climbed up the ladder and approached

Nelson extending to him his hand. Nelson said, "*Sir, give me your sword and then I will take your hand,*" which the man did.

These are the terms that Jesus lays down for any person who would submit to him. Lay down your weapons first, the weapons of unbelief, and indifference, and hostility to him; end your rebellion against God. Leave serving other masters, and serve only this great loving Lord your God. Take his yoke upon you and learn of him. That is the condition of having him as your great Protector and Shepherd for the rest of your life, for He is able to do so much more than you can every imagine. **AMEN**