

I. INTRODUCTION

OPENING REMARKS

This book is an expanded version of the explanations and prayerful meditations on the Lord's prayer, which originally appeared as a series in the Ukrainian-language weekly, *The Christian Voice* (Munich, 1970).

Divine Providence has permitted this book to find its way to you. Accept it as a show of God's love for you, as a call by which He wishes to say something, reveal something to you. So, do not close your hearts, do not put this book aside without having read it, or at least having familiarized yourself with its contents. If, while reading you feel emanating from the words the voice of God calling you, try to respond with an open heart.

This book arose from the new needs of pastoral work among our people in the diaspora, and was based on sermons that were subsequently expanded. Therefore, the point here is not to develop deeper studies, but prayerful meditation - that is, practical conclusions drawn from the Lord's Prayer in light of the needs of our times. We would like this volume to be useful to the widest numbers of our people, without regard to their religious affiliation: be it Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical or other. We therefore dedicate this book to all who sincerely seek peace, joy, true brotherhood, humanism, "the Kingdom of God and its righteousness" (Matthew 6:33)¹.

Why is the Our Father called the Lord's Prayer? Because it was taught and given to the Apostles and disciples by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. The evangelist Luke describes the scene in this way: once upon a time Jesus was praying and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John did his disciples". Jesus said to them: "When you pray, say: Father...". In this way are recounted, in Luke (11:1-5) and Matthew (6:9-14), the words of the Lord's Prayer.

In its text, the Lord's Prayer is so profound, that were we to pray it with complete attention, we would start with the first words but seldom reach the end. This prayer invites so many thoughts that every single word or supplication can fill our hearts with such joy

and happiness that we might be unable to proceed further. Thus, let us not be afraid, this is the way it should be. The value of our prayer is not measured by the quantity of its words, but by the measure to which we have grown in faith, hope and love.

In composing these meditations, we have sought one thing: that the eternal, immutable plans of God for the salvation of the world expressed so inspirationally in the Our Father, might be explained in clear, simple words, and expressed in a way that is understandable and relevant to contemporary men and women. This is indeed a difficult task, but it is bound to be useful if we wish to renew our Christian faith.

The words of Christ's Gospel should truly be words of grace for us - that is, a good and joyful message. The essential part of the Gospel, given to us in the Lord's Prayer, should become part of us, comprehensible and dear to every man and woman of the twentieth century.

In life nothing can be gained without effort. For in everything effort, fortitude and constancy are required. Normally, a child will not learn to read if the parents or teachers do not arouse the interest. After beginning to read, the child recognizes the necessity and attraction of reading and only later becomes aware of its importance for learning and enjoyment. The same applies to prayer. To become proficient in prayer, and thus to find in prayer peace, happiness, joy and sweetness, it is likewise necessary to expend effort and fortitude. It is also necessary to ask as did the Apostles: "Lord, teach us to pray!". With God's grace and our good will, may these prayerful meditations be of help to this end. It is necessary to begin with some rules and directions.

The first and most important (and dependent on us) prerequisite is this: before beginning each prayer time, we must take the time to prepare for it. By sitting still for at least 2-3 minutes, we rest, separate ourselves spiritually from what came before. We remind ourselves and realize what we want to ask or thank for; and only after having thus relaxed, we begin our prayer.

This same guideline should be followed whether reading Sacred Scripture or these prayerful meditations. They are not meant to be read as if they were a short story or a novel - that is, without interruption, from cover to cover. These former should be read in peace, one after the other, giving every word a chance to appear in all its meaning. When we find something that illumines our mind or moves our heart, we should stop reading, put the book aside and begin to pray. In our own words, we should tell the Lord

everything that our heart feels, everything that disturbs or calms our heart. We may thank God for opening our spiritual eyes, for illuminating our spirit, and we may ask Him for help and strength to carry our decision over into life, if we have made such a decision.

Some time after having read this book, it would be a good idea to return to it again. Reading these explanations a second or even a third time, we shall certainly find in them something new, which we did not see or feel the first time. Only when the supplications of the Lord's Prayer are thus read and pondered can they become our own personal prayer. They will become relevant and meaningful to us. They will open for us a deeper, newer, and unknown world: one of divine filiation, the beginning of a more joyful, happier and meaningful life with God.

If, through the grace of God, these explanations and prayerful meditations will help at least some of our readers love this prayer, which was given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ in his infinite goodness, then these explanations will have accomplished their goal - and for this, King of kings and Lord of lords, One Eternal, may You always be praised and glorified!

CAN WE BE SURE THAT GOD EXISTS?

In order to be able to consider further the words of God and meditate on Him and His affairs, let us ask ourselves a question concerning the certainty with which we can know that God exists. Stated differently, let us ask ourselves what the foundation of our faith is. Does it have an intellectual foundation, or is it just the product of our imagination, our internal desire, an effect of a religious upbringing or of past experience? What motives and truly substantial foundations lead us to have faith in God's existence?

For the sake of complete clarity, we must immediately state that we cannot prove the existence of God using the same methods used in the natural sciences, as if we were mathematically proving that $2+2=4$. God is completely different from the material world, a world that we can accept through the use of sight, touch, and auditory faculties. We shall never be able to prove his existence