

UNDERSTANDING *OUR FATHER* IN THE CONTEXT OF HUMAN PERFECTION PREACHED IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, ACCORDING TO ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA'S *HOMILIES ON THE LORD'S PRAYER*

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ABSTRACT. It is not by chance that the prayer *Our Father* is recommended by Jesus Christ during the so-called Sermon on the Mount. All that has been said in this Sermon aimed at perfection: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5, 48). Viewed in this light, the Lord's prayer is also the prayer which is properly uttered only in a state of perfection, and even if it may be used as a mean to achieve perfection, nevertheless it is perfectly uttered only in a state of perfection; therefore, in a way, the Lord's prayer is the aim of the Christian life. This is the view of St. Gregory of Nyssa and this is what this article tries to argue by using the texts of this Cappadocian Father.

Keywords: Lord's prayer, St. Gregory of Nyssa, asceticism, perfection, *parrhesia*, the perfect prayer.

When I have chosen this title, I had had in my mind the idea that, being offered to His disciples and to those who listened to Jesus in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord's Prayer was meant to be a perfect prayer, The prayer that should be uttered or, better said, The prayer that is properly uttered only by those who strive to become in the likeness of God, who strive to become perfect. The whole Sermon on the Mount has a single and striking motto: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5, 48). Speaking of murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, fasting etc. Jesus Christ surpasses or fulfills the Law of Moses, in his hope to guide people to another level in their resemblance to God, to a level which prolongs itself ultimately in what Gregory calls *ἐπέκτασις*. And as David Brown said about the meaning of *ἐπέκτασις* (as an eschatological process) "we may think of heaven as in part constituted by endless exploration of the infinite riches of God"¹.

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¹ David Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination: Christian Tradition and Truth*, Oxford, 2000, 122.

The present paper does not intend to point out any philosophical influences on Gregory of Nyssa' *Homilies* on Our Father, any rhetorical devices used by him, or to argue in favor of a Christian Tradition regarding prayer, which, eventually, would have been followed by Gregory. The present paper is humble in its intentions: it tries only to underline and to argue with texts the fact that, for Gregory, the prayer *Our Father* is the perfect prayer and it is properly used only by ascetic Christians, spiritually active Christians, not by nominal Christians, who are Christians only by name, but anti-Christians in deeds. The Lord's prayer is uttered in a more and more proper way as the Christian progresses in his effort to be in the likeness to God.

The first texts of Gregory which I would like to put forward are taken from the treatise *On perfection*. Gregory says: "Since the good Lord has allowed us fellowship in the greatest, most divine and first of names to make us worthy of being called Christians by Christ's name, we must realize every term explaining this name so that the name given us is not false but is borne out by our lives"². And a few lines further: "Therefore, those who name themselves after Christ must become first what this name demands and then adjust this call to themselves"³. Or, again and more explicit:

"If we are to be named brothers of him who brought us into birth, innocence of life will constitute our kinship with him provided that no impurity separates us from a union in innocence. The First-Born is justice, holiness, love, redemption and so forth. If these qualities characterize our lives, we will manifest the brilliant marks of our nobility that they may bear witness to that fact that we are Christ's brothers"⁴.

² Οὐκοῦν ἐπειδὴ τοῦ μεγίστου τε καὶ θειοτάτου καὶ πρώτου τῶν ὀνομάτων γέγονε παρὰ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ δεσπότης ἡμῖν ἡ κοινωνία, ὥστε τοὺς τῆ ἐπωνυμία τοῦ Χριστοῦ τιμηθέντας Χριστιανούς ὀνομάζεσθαι, ἀναγκαῖον ἂν εἴη πάντα τὰ ἐρμηνευτικὰ τῆς τοιαύτης φωνῆς ὀνόματα καὶ ἐν ἡμῖν καθορᾶσθαι, ὡς μὴ ψευδώνυμον ἐφ' ἡμῶν εἶναι τὴν κλησιν, ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ βίου τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἔχειν (*Perf*, GNO VIII/1, 177, 7-14). The English translation of this text and of the following two, with some adjustments, is to be found on this website: http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0330-0395_Gregorius_Nyssenus_On_Perfection_EN.doc, which was accessed on 10.12.2018.

³ Οὐκοῦν τοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἑαυτοὺς ὀνομάζοντας πρώτων γενέσθαι χρῆ ὅπερ τὸ ὄνομα βούλεται, εἴθ' οὕτως ἑαυτοῖς ἐφαρμόσαι τὴν κλησιν (*Perf*, GNO VIII/1, 178, 2-4).

⁴ Οὐκοῦν εἰ μέλλοιμεν ἀδελφοὶ χρηματίζειν τοῦ καθηγησαμένου ἡμῶν τῆς γεννήσεως, τὸ ἀναμάρτητον τῆς ζωῆς ἡμῶν πιστώσεται τὴν πρὸς ἐκεῖνον συγγένειαν, μηδενὸς ῥύπου τῆς πρὸς τὴν καθαρότητα συναφείας ἡμᾶς ἀφορίζοντος. ἀλλὰ καὶ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀγιασμός ὁ πρωτότοκός ἐστι καὶ ἀγάπη καὶ ἀπολύτρωσις καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα. οὐκοῦν εἰ διὰ τῶν τοιούτων καὶ ὁ ἡμέτερος χαρακτηρίζεται βίος, ἐναργῆ παρεξόμεθα τῆς εὐγενείας ἡμῶν τὰ γνωρίσματα, ὥστε τὸν ταῦτα καθορῶντα ἐν τῇ ζωῇ τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ προσμαρτυρεῖν ἡμῖν τὴν πρὸς τὸν Χριστὸν ἀδελφότητα (*Perf*, GNO VIII/1, 203-204, 16-24; 1-3).

There are in these texts two words that are important and relevant in our context: συγγένεια (kinship) and ἀδελφοὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ (brothers of Christ) or ἡ πρὸς τὸν Χριστὸν ἀδελφότης (the brotherhood to Christ). The first one appears in the *Second Homily* on the Lord's Prayer as well, when Gregory says: "He then makes them not merely spectators of the divine power but even partakers, and leads those present into kinship, in a certain way, with the transcendent nature"⁵. The one who leads us into kinship with the transcendent nature is Christ Himself⁶, so it is not a natural kinship, but a mediated one. There is only one Son of God by nature, but there can be many sons of God by choice, by human choice which, eventually, is fertilized and made effective by God's/ Christ's grace. We become sons of God and therefore, ἀδελφοὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, but this implies a resemblance/ likeness with the true Son of God.

In the Funeral Oration (or Encomium) delivered in honour of his deceased brother, Basil, Sf. Gregory of Nyssa speaks about the proper way of praising someone, especially a saint: *μίμησις*, that is by copying, in your own life, the virtues that made that saint a saint:

"Brethren, having imitated his discretion by appropriating it, let us praise virtue according to his worthiness and fulfill all his wonderful deeds by sharing his wisdom. By praising poverty, we become poor with regard to material wealth. No one should speak of contempt for this world simply because it is laudable and glorious; rather, let one's life testify to such contempt with regard to what the world values. Do not merely say that he is dedicated but dedicate yourselves to God, and not only that he possessed the hoped for rest but that you treasure up this wealth like him. It certainly lies within your power. [*Basil*] stored up his own wealth in the treasure house of heaven, so imitate the teacher in this way [cf. *Lk* 6.40]. The disciple will be perfect when he resembles the master. In other occupations one who is a disciple to a physician, geometrician or a rhetor will be not be worthy of his master's art unless he admires this skill by speech, for he has not yet shown himself worthy of such respect. Allow someone to say to him, 'How can you say that a physician was your master

⁵ "Ἐπειτα δὲ οὐ θεατὰς μόνον τῆς θείας δυνάμεως, ἀλλὰ καὶ κοινωνοὺς ἀπεργάζεται, καὶ εἰς συγγένειαν τρόπον τινὰ τῆς ὑπερκειμένης φύσεως τοὺς προσιόντας ἄγων (*Or. dom.* II, SC 596, 350, 15-18). The English translation is made by Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, page 16 in the pdf document delivered to us prior to the colloquy.

⁶ Lucian Turcescu says: "Nonetheless, since the status of sons of God is the supreme state that we can reach, it is not only through our own efforts that we achieve this. It is the Son of God proper who helps us in this by joining us to him by spiritual generation" ("«Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they will be called Sons of God» (Matt. 5, 9): Does Gregory of Nyssa have a Theology of Adoption?" in Hubertus R. Drobner and Albert Viciano (eds.), *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes. An English Version with Commentary and Supporting Studies. Proceedings of the Eighth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Paderborn, 14-18 September 1998)*, Brill, 2000, 397-406), 399.

when you have no knowledge of his skill? How can you say that a geometrician was your master, when you have no knowledge of his craft?' But if anyone demonstrates expertise in what he has learned, his own knowledge will honor his master's instruction. *Thus we who magnify the teacher Basil should reveal his teaching by our lives* because his name honored God and men in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and power forever and ever. Amen"⁷.

If *μίμησις* is a proper way of praising a man by another man, if, as in this encomium, one is properly named "one's disciple" if he imitates not only in words, but also in virtues and deeds the virtues and deeds of his master, then, when we speak about the relationship between Christ, our Lord, and Christians, who bear Christ's name, *μίμησις* becomes a necessity even more. And it is not only a necessity for the individual, but also a necessity from a missionary standpoint. Let me explain myself:

In the *Third Homily* on the Lord's Prayer, St. Gregory of Nyssa says about those who do not sanctify the Lord's name through their deeds:

"Somewhere I have heard the Holy Scripture condemning those who come to be liable for blasphemy against God. For it says, 'Woe on those because of whom my name is blasphemed among the Gentiles'. This means something like this: those who have not yet come to believe in the word of truth turn away from faith in the mystery because of how those who have accepted it live. This happens whenever there is nominal

⁷ Οὕτως οὖν, ἀδελφοί, καὶ ἡμεῖς μιμησάμενοι τῆ σωφροσύνη τὸν σώφρονα, οἷς ποιῶμεν, κατ' ἀξίαν τὴν ἀρετὴν ἐπαινέσωμεν, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πάντα ὡσαύτως τὸ θαῦμα τοῦ σοφοῦ ἐν τῇ μετουσίᾳ τῆς σοφίας πληροῦσθω. ὁ τῆς ἀκτημοσύνης ἔπαινος ἐν τῷ καὶ ἡμᾶς γενέσθαι τῆς ὑλικῆς περιουσίας ἀκτῆμονας. ἡ ὑπεροψία τοῦ κόσμου τούτου μὴ λεγέσθω, ὅτι ἐστὶ τις ἐπαινετὴ καὶ ἐπίδοξος, ἀλλὰ μάρτυς τῆς ὑπεροψίας τῶν κατὰ τὸν κόσμον σπουδαζομένων ὁ βίος ἔστω. μὴ λέγε μόνον, ὅτι τῷ θεῷ ἐκεῖνος ἀνέκειτο, ἀλλὰ ἀνάθες καὶ σὺ σεαυτὸν τῷ θεῷ, μήθ' ὅτι μόνον ἦν αὐτῷ κτῆμα ἢ ἐπιζομένη ἀνάπαυσις, ἀλλὰ καὶ σὺ θησαύρισον σεαυτῷ τοῦτον τὸν πλοῦτον ὡσπερ ἐκεῖνος. ἔξεστι γάρ. μετέθηκεν ἐκεῖνος ἀπὸ γῆς εἰς οὐρανὸν τὸ πολίτευμα, μετάρθες καὶ σὺ. τοῖς ἀσύλοις τοῦ οὐρανοῦ θησαυροφυλακίαις τὸν ἴδιον ἐναπέθετο πλοῦτον. μίμησαι διὰ τούτων καὶ σὺ τὸν διδάσκαλον. Κατηρτισμένοι γάρ ἔσται μαθητῆς ὡς ὁ διδάσκαλος αὐτοῦ. καὶ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς λοιποῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασιν ὁ ἰατρῷ μαθητεύσας ἢ γεωμέτρῃ ἢ ῥήτορι ἀναξιόπιστος ἐπαινήτης τῆς τοῦ διδασκάλου τέχνης γενήσεται, εἰ τῷ μὲν λόγῳ θαυμάζοι τοῦ καθηγητοῦ τὴν ἐπιστήμην, ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ δὲ δευκνύοι μηδὲν τοῦ θαύματος ἄξιον. ἐρεῖ γὰρ τις πρὸς αὐτόν· πῶς ἰατρὸν λέγεις τὸν ἑαυτοῦ διδάσκαλον αὐτὸς ἀνιάτρευτος ὢν; ἢ πῶς μαθητὴν σεαυτὸν τοῦ γεωμέτρου λέγεις ἀπείρω τῆς γεωμετρίας ἔχων; ἀλλ' εἴ τις ἐν ἑαυτῷ δείκνυσι τὴν τέχνην, ἢ ἐμαθῆτευσε, σεμνύνει τῇ καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἐπιστήμῃ τὸν τῆς τέχνης καθηγησάμενον. οὕτω καὶ ἡμεῖς οἱ Βασιλείον ἀύχουντες διδάσκαλον τῷ βίῳ δεῖξωμεν τὴν μαθητείαν ἐκεῖνο γινόμενοι, ὅπερ αὐτὸν ὀνομαστόν τε καὶ μέγαν θεῷ καὶ ἀνθρώποις ἐποίησεν, ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν, ᾧ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν (Bas, GNO X, 1, 133-134, 19-23; 1-21). The English translation, with some adjustments, is to be found at this website: <http://full-of-grace-and-truth.blogspot.com/2013/12/an-encomium-to-st-basil-great-by-st.html>, which was accessed on 15.02.2019.

faith, but the way of life speaks against the name—either they commit idolatry through greed, or they disgrace themselves with drunkenness and revelry, or they wallow in the filth of prodigality like a pig—immediately the unfaithful ones have the argument at hand, *not accusing the free choice of those who spend their life badly but claiming that the mystery teaches them to do such things*. For so-and-so, who has been initiated into the divine mysteries would not have become an abuser or greedy or a thief or any other similar evil, unless sinning was legal for him”⁸.

Basically, St. Gregory says that non-Christians will judge one’s faith through one’s deeds: if your deeds are good and praiseworthy, then your faith will be judged good and praiseworthy; if your deeds are bad are blameworthy, your faith will be judged accordingly⁹.

The same idea is expressed by St. John Chrysostom in his treatise *On the Priesthood*, although he speaks from a different perspective. Speaking of the priest’s force of arguing his faith and debating with the heretics, St. John says:

“But when a dispute arises concerning matters of doctrine, and all take their weapons from the same Scriptures, of what weight will any one’s life be able to prove? What then will be the good of his many austerities, when after such painful exercises, any one from the Priest’s great unskillfulness in argument fall into heresy, and be cut off from the body of the Church, a misfortune which I have myself seen many suffering. Of what profit then will his patience be to him? None; no more than there will be in a sound faith if the life is corrupt. Wherefore, for this reason more than for all others, it concerns him whose office it is to teach others, to be experienced in disputations of this kind. For though he himself stands safely, and is unhurt by the gainsayers, yet the simple multitude under

⁸ “Ἦκουσά που τῆς ἀγίας γραφῆς κατακρινοῦσης ἐκείνους οἱ τῆς κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ βλασφημίας αἴτιοι γίνονται. Οὐαὶ γάρ, φησί, δι’ οὓς τὸ ὄνομά μου βλασφημεῖται ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν. Τοῦτο δὲ τοιοῦτόν ἐστιν· οἱ μήπω πεπιστευκότες τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας πρὸς τὸν βίον τῶν παραδεδεγμένων τὴν τοῦ μυστηρίου πίστιν ἀποσκοποῦσιν. Ὅταν τοίνυν τὸ μὲν ὄνομα τῆς πίστεως ἦ, ὃ δὲ βίος ἀντιφθέγγεται τῷ ὀνόματι, ἢ διὰ πλεονεξίας εἰδωλολατρῶν ἢ ἐν μέθαις καὶ κώμοις ἀσχημονῶν ἢ τῷ βορβόρῳ τῆς ἀσωτίας ὑὸς δίκην ἐγκαλινδοῦμενος, πρόχειρος εὐθύς παρὰ τῶν ἀπίστων ὁ λόγος, οὐκ εἰς τὴν προαίρεσιν τῶν κακῶς τῷ βίῳ κεχημένων τὴν κατηγορίαν τρέπων, ἀλλ’ ὡς τοιαῦτα πράττειν τοῦ μυστηρίου διδάσκοντος. Μὴ γὰρ ἂν γενέσθαι τὸν δεῖνα τὸν τὰ θεῖα μεμυημένον μυστήρια ἢ λοῖδορον ἢ πλεονέκτην ἢ ἄρπαγα ἢ ἄλλο τι τοιοῦτον κακὸν εἰ μὴ ἔννομον αὐτοῖς τὸ ἁμαρτάνειν ἦν (*Or.dom.II*, SC 596, 400-402, 5-19; 1). The English translation belongs to Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, 28-29.

⁹ Here the necessity of assuming faith is revealed with much strength: the nominal Christians will never or very seldom adjust their lives to the Christian teachings they are supposed to know and to observe. On the other side, those who assume their faith and try to transform their lives according to it will do, in most cases, only what is good and right. Accordingly, one is entitled to call himself a Christian only if his life is adjusted, as much as possible, to the Christian moral doctrine.

his direction, when they see their leader defeated, and without any answer for the gainsayers, will be apt to lay the blame of his discomfiture not on his own weakness, but on the doctrines themselves, as though they were faulty; and so by reason of the inexperience of one, great numbers are brought to extreme ruin; for though they do not entirely go over to the adversary, yet they are forced to doubt about matters in which formerly they firmly believed, and those whom they used to approach with unswerving confidence, they are unable to hold to any longer steadfastly, but in consequence of their leader's defeat, so great a storm settles down upon their souls, that the mischief ends in their shipwreck altogether"¹⁰.

Returning to the *Homilies on the Lord's Prayer*, there is one verse which points out the fact that the state of those who properly utter this prayer should be that of perfection (or close to it): "Forgive us our debts, as we too forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:33). It is this present tense which testify that the state of perfection is already present in the person who prays. Gregory says:

"As our text marches on, now it has come to the very pinnacle of virtue. For through the words of the Prayer it sketches out what it wants a person approaching to God to be like: someone who just about no longer exhibits the limits of the human nature but has become like God himself through virtue, so that he seems to be another god, in that he does those things that can be done by God alone. After all, the forgiving of our debts is proper to God and his special prerogative, for it is said, 'No one can forgive sins except God alone'. Accordingly, if one should imitate in his own life the characteristics of the divine nature, in some sense he becomes what he has imitated through an exact likeness"¹¹.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, *De sacerdotio* IV, 9, 3-21 (SC 272, 278-280): Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐκεῖ μόνον αὐτὸν τὸ πᾶν κατορθοῦν φαῖν ἄν, ὅταν δὲ ὑπὲρ δογμάτων αὐτῶν κινῆται καὶ πάντες ἀπὸ τῶν αὐτῶν μάχωνται γραφῶν, ποίαν ἰσχὺν ὁ βίος ἐνταῦθα ἐπιδειξάι δυνήσεται; Τί τῶν πολλῶν ὄφελος ἰδρώτων, ὅταν μετὰ τοὺς μόχθους ἐκείνους ἀπὸ τῆς πολλῆς τις ἀπειρίας εἰς αἴρεσιν ἐκπεσῶν ἀποσχισθῆ τοῦ σώματος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας; Ὅπερ οἶδα πολλοὺς παθόντας ἐγῶ. Ποῖον αὐτῷ κέρδος τῆς καρτερίας; Οὐδέν, ὡσπερ οὖν οὐδὲ ὑγιῶς πίστεως, τῆς πολιτείας διεφθαρμένης. Διὰ δὴ ταῦτα μάλιστα πάντων ἔμπειρον εἶναι δεῖ τῶν τοιούτων ἀγώνων τὸν διδάσκειν τοὺς ἄλλους λαχόντα. Εἰ γὰρ καὶ αὐτὸς ἔστηκεν ἐν ἀσφαλείᾳ, μηδὲν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀντιλεγόντων βλαπτόμενος, ἀλλὰ τὸ τῶν ἀφελεστέρων πλῆθος τὸ ταττόμενον ὑπ' ἐκείνῳ, ὅταν ἴδῃ τὸν ἠγούμενον ἠττηθέντα καὶ οὐδὲν ἔχοντα πρὸς τοὺς ἀντιλέγοντας εἰπεῖν, οὐ τὴν ἀσθένειαν τὴν ἐκείνου τῆς ἡττης ἀλλὰ τὴν τοῦ δόγματος αἰτιῶνται σαθρότητα, καὶ διὰ τὴν τοῦ ἐνὸς ἀπειρίαν ὁ πολὺς λεῶς εἰς ἔσχατον ὄλεθρον καταφέρεται. The English translation belongs to W.R.W. Stephens in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. First Series*, vol. 9 and was taken from this website: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/19224.htm>, which was accessed on 20.04. 2019.

¹¹ Ἦλθε προῖον ὁ λόγος ἐπ' αὐτὸ τῆς ἀρετῆς τὸ ἀκρότατον' ὑπογράφει γὰρ διὰ τῶν τῆς προσευχῆς ῥημάτων οἷον εἶναι βούλεται τὸν τῷ θεῷ προσερχόμενον, οὐκέτι σχεδὸν ἐν τοῖς τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως ὄροις δεικνύμενον, ἀλλ' αὐτῷ τῷ θεῷ διὰ τῆς ἀρετῆς ὁμοιούμενον, ὥστε δοκεῖν ἄλλον εἶναι

In a different context and addressing to people contemporary to us, St. Silouan the Athonite says that the presence of the Holy Spirit in us is ascertained by the love of our enemies, shown in the acts of forgiving them and praying for them¹². In the nineteenth century, another saint named Seraphim of Sarov told a Christian whose name was Motovilov what was the aim of the Christian life: “The true aim of our Christian life consists of the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God”¹³. It is the Holy Spirit of God the one who sanctifies our life and St. Gregory of Nyssa is aware of this, when he quotes the *Our Father*’ version recorded in the Gospel according to Saint Luke:

“Or perhaps, in keeping with how the same idea is expounded for us more clearly by the text (by Luke), is it that the one who asks the kingdom to come is calling on the alliance of the Holy Spirit? For in that Gospel, in place of ‘Your kingdom come’, it says this: ‘Your Holy Spirit come to us and purify us’ ”¹⁴.

The Lord’s Prayer consists of some requests which are very different from the wishes of a normal person, more interested in earthly things than in divine ones. To be interested in earthly things is “to babble on like the gentiles do”; on the contrary, to be interested in divine things is the sign of a “developed mind”, a sign of a holy life:

“What counsel, then, does the text offer to us? That at the time for prayers we should not suffer from the same malady that dwells in the mind of young people. For those whose minds are undeveloped do not try to figure out how any of their wishes might come true but instead whimsically picture for themselves various turns of good luck, envisioning riches,

ἐκείνον ἐν τῷ ταῦτα ποιῆν ἃ τοῦ θεοῦ μόνου ἐστὶ ποιῆν. Ἡ γὰρ τῶν ὀφλημάτων ἄφρασις ἴδιόν ἐστι τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐξαίρετον· εἴρηται γὰρ ὅτι Οὐδεις δύναται ἀφιέναι ἀμαρτίας εἰ μὴ μόνος ὁ θεός. Εἰ τοίνυν τις ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ βίῳ μιμήσαιο τῆς θείας φύσεως τὰ γνωρίσματα, ἐκεῖνο γίνεται τρόπον τινὰ οὗ τὴν μίμησιν δι’ ἀκριβοῦς ὁμοιότητος ἐπεδείξατο (*Or. dom.* V, SC 596, 478-480, 1-8; 1-3). The English translation is made by Mark DelCogliano, page 48 in the pdf document delivered to us prior to the colloquy.

¹² See the chapter “How man recognizes the presence of the Holy Spirit in him” in Jean-Claude Larchet, *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, (Romanian edition), Sophia, 2001, 322-325.

¹³ The whole conversation of the two may be read at the following website address: <http://orthodoxinfo.com/praxis/wonderful.aspx>, which was accessed on 20.04.2019. I have chosen these two rather contemporary saints (St. Silouan and St. Seraphim of Sarov) because I try to underline the continuity of the Tradition in the works of the Fathers, no matter the period they have lived in, a continuity which is assured and preserved by the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

¹⁴ Ἡ τάχα, καθὼς ἡμῖν ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου τὸ αὐτὸ νόημα σαφέστερον ἐρμηνεύεται, ὁ τὴν βασιλείαν ἐλθεῖν ἀξιῶν τὴν τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος συμμαχίαν ἐπιβοᾶται; Οὕτω γὰρ ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ φησὶν, ἀντὶ τοῦ Ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου, Ἐλθέτω τὸ πνεῦμά σου τὸ ἅγιον ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς καὶ καθαρισάτω ἡμᾶς (*Or. dom.* III, SC 596, 412-414, 14-17; 1-2). The English translation belongs to Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, 32.

marriages, kingdoms, and great cities renamed with their name—they imagine themselves as being in whatever position the vanity of their thoughts presents to them”¹⁵.

And a few passages later in the same homily, Gregory says:

“Indeed, it would be one of the most irrational acts for someone coming before God to seek fleeting gifts from the eternal one, earthly gifts from the heavenly one, humble things from the lofty one, this earthly and lowly good fortune from the one who gives the kingdom of the heavens, the brief use of alienable goods—whose removal is inevitable, whose enjoyment is fleeting, whose administration is insecure—from the one who grants gifts that cannot be taken away”¹⁶.

So, even the requests contained in the Lord’s Prayer testify to the state of the one who prays, which is in the likeness of God.

To utter the Lord’s Prayer is an act of *παρρησία*, of boldness, and requires purity of soul:

“Indeed, for someone who says this, there is a need for such a soul, for this much boldness, for such a conscience in order to apprehend God, insofar as is possible, from the titles conceived of for him, as one is led by the hand to the understanding of the inexpressible one and learns that the divine nature, whatever it is in itself, is goodness, holiness, joy, power, glory, purity, eternity, being ever stable and the same, and all like concepts of the

¹⁵ Τί οὖν ἡμῖν συμβουλευεῖ ὁ λόγος; Μὴ ταῦτόν πάσχειν ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τῶν προσευχῶν οἷον ἐν τῇ τῶν νηπίων διανοίᾳ συνίσταται πάθος. Ὡσπερ γὰρ οἱ ἀτελεῖς τὴν διάνοιαν οὐχ ὅπως ἂν τι γένοιτο τῶν κατὰ γνώμην αὐτοῖς ἐπινοοῦσιν, ἀλλὰ κατ’ ἐξουσίαν εὐκληρίας τινὰς ἑαυτοῖς ἀναπλάσσουσιν, θησαυροὺς καὶ γάμους καὶ βασιλείας καὶ πόλεις μεγάλας ταῖς προσηγορίας αὐτῶν ἐπινομαζομένας ὑποτιθέμενοι· εἰς ἐκεῖνο εἶναι τῇ διανοίᾳ φαντάζονται ὅπερ ἂν αὐτοῖς ἡ ματαιότης τῶν λογισμῶν ὑπογράψῃ (Or. dom. I, SC 596, 322, 1-9). The English translation belongs to Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, 8.

¹⁶ Καὶ γὰρ ἂν εἴη τῶν ἀλογωτάτων προσελθόντα θεῶ ζῆτεῖν παρὰ τοῦ αἰδίου τὰ πρόσκαιρα, παρὰ τοῦ ἐπουρανίου τὰ ἐπίγεια, παρὰ τοῦ ὑψηλοῦ τὰ χαμαιζήλα, παρὰ τοῦ βασιλείαν οὐρανῶν δωρομένου τὴν γῆνιν ταύτην καὶ ταπεινὴν εὐκληρίαν, παρὰ τοῦ τὰ ἀναφαίρετα χαριζομένου τὴν ἐν ὀλίγῳ τῶν ἄλλοτριῶν χρῆσιν, ὧν ἀναγκαῖα μὲν ἡ ἀφαιρέσις, πρόσκαιρος δὲ ἡ ἀπόλαυσις, ἐπικίνδυνος δὲ ἡ οἰκονομία (Or. dom. I, SC 596, 344, 1-7). The English translation belongs to Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, 14. The same idea is expressed by Saint Maximus the Confessor in *On the Lord’s prayer* when he says: “The prayer includes petitions for everything that the divine Logos effected through His self-emptying in the incarnation, and it teaches us to strive for those blessings of which the true provider is God the Father alone through the natural mediation of the Son in the Holy Spirit” (*Philokalia* II, London-Boston, Paperback Edition, 1990, 286). And later in the same work, St. Maximus says: “It is for this reason, I think, that Scripture calls this teaching ‘prayer’, since it contains petitions for the gifts that God gives to men by grace. Our divinely inspired fathers have explained prayer in a similar way, saying that prayer is petition for that which God naturally gives men in the manner appropriate to Him” (*Philokalia* II, 289).

divine nature; once one has understood these from the divine scripture and from suitable reflections, he then has the audacity to utter such a word and to call such a one his own father”¹⁷.

This boldness is not an act of impudence, but rather is founded on the purity of soul and it is a sign which testifies the lack of two emotions/ feelings which are present in the sinful persons: shame (αἰσχύνη) and fear (φόβος). It is the merit of Jean Daniélou to clarify the meanings or παρρησία and to put this word in connection to prayer (προσευχή). I quote: „La *parrhesia* est comme le couronnement, l'épanouissement de l'*apatheia*. L'âme, purifiée par l'*apatheia*, recouvre la liberté de ses rapports avec Dieu, elle ose à nouveau se présenter devant lui, elle rentre dans sa familiarité”¹⁸. And a few lines further:

„La *parrhesia* s'oppose à l'*aischyne*, à la honte, d'une part. Et d'autre part elle s'oppose à la crainte. Elle marque par là une double restauration: d'une part, la restauration dans l'état d'innocence, qui s'oppose à la honte; de l'autre, la restauration dans l'état d'amitié, qui s'oppose à la crainte”¹⁹.

¹⁷ Οἷας γὰρ τῶ λέγοντι χρεια ψυχῆς, ὅσης τῆς παρρησίας, οἷας τῆς συνειδήσεως ἵνα θεὸν νοήσας, ὡς ἔστι δυνατόν, ἐκ τῶν ἐπινοουμένων αὐτῶ προσηγοριῶν πρὸς τὴν σύνεσιν τοῦ ἀφράστου χειραγωγούμενος καὶ μαθὼν ὅτι ἡ θεία φύσις, ὃ τί ποτέ ἐστιν, αὐτοαγαθότης ἐστίν, ἁγιασμός, ἀγαλλίαμα, δύναμις, δόξα, καθαρότης, ἀϊδιότης, αἰεὶ κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχουσα, καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα νενόηται περὶ τὴν θείαν φύσιν διὰ τε τῆς ἁγίας γραφῆς καὶ διὰ τῶν οἰκείων λογισμῶν κατανοήσας εἶτα τολμήσῃ τὴν τοιαύτην προέσθαι φωνὴν καὶ τὸν τοιοῦτον ἑαυτοῦ κατονομάσαι πατέρα (*Or.dom.* II, SC 596, 362, 1-10). The English translation belongs to Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, 18.

¹⁸ Jean Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique. Essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nysse*, Paris, 1944, 111.

¹⁹ Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique*, 112. There are also other short definitions of *parrhesia*: “la confiance filiale, la familiarité avec Dieu”; “la vertu caractéristique de la filiation adoptive” (*Ibidem, passim*). It is well worthy to note some remarks of John Behr on παρρησία: “It is not surprising that the prayer which is said with this transcendent boldness was reserved, in the early centuries, for those who had committed themselves to Christ, revealed only in the last stages of catechism when it was handed down, “traditioned”, together with the rule of faith, as a “concise statement of the Gospel” (Tertullian). If this prayer expresses our identity as Christians, then so too does the boldness that we are granted; and it is a boldness not only to approach God in this manner, but one that extends to our whole bearing as Christians” (John Behr, “With boldness and without condemnation”, *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 51, 4 (2007), 359-69), 359. A few lines further, he says: “The word that is used, *parrhesia*, expresses not just daring or temerity, but confidence and frankness, a freedom of approach granted by God towards himself, and in turn the right and the duty to speak the truth, with all the risks and dangers that this will entail in worldly terms” (John Behr, “With boldness and without condemnation”), 359. And later on: “Rather than indignation and condemnation (as is all too common today), a godly *parrhesia* requires soberness, the acceptance of the hardship and tribulation that will come to those who speak God’s truth, and from which it is spoken, and a reluctance to condemn anyone. Such is the character of Christian existence in this world” (John Behr, “With boldness and without condemnation”), 360.

When a sinful person dares to say the Lord's Prayer in a sinful condition and without humiliation, as an ὑβριστής, he then makes an act of blasphemy:

“Indeed, if someone, upon self-examination, realizes that he still needs purification and that his wretched conscience is filled with stains and vile blotches, and even before he is cleansed of so many evils of this kind he adopts himself into God's clan and says, ‘Father’—the unjust one speaking to the just one! the impure one speaking to the pure one!— his words would be a total outrage and sheer nonsense as he names God the father of his own wretchedness. For the term ‘Father’ signifies the cause of the one who comes to exist from him. Therefore, if someone of wretched conscience claims God as his own father, he would accuse him of being none other than the source and explanation of his own evils”²⁰.

There are still many texts which support the idea mentioned at the beginning of this paper. I would like to quote only one more text, a text which can be seen as an epitome of all that has been said. It is in the *Second Homily* on the Lord's Prayer and it sounds like this:

“Therefore, when he gives the command in the prayer to call God your own Father, he is enjoining nothing other than that you, through godly living, become like the heavenly Father, just as elsewhere he more openly commands something similar, when he says “Become perfect as your Father too is perfect”²¹.

²⁰ Εἰ γάρ τις πρὸς ἑαυτὸν βλέπων ἔτι καθαρσίου δεόμενον καὶ τὴν μοχθηρὰν ἑαυτοῦ συνείδησιν ἐπιγινώσκων πλήρη κηλίδων καὶ πονηρῶν ἐγκαιμάτων, πρὶν καθαρθῆναι τῶν τοιούτων κακῶν πρὸς τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ συγγένειαν ἑαυτὸν εἰσποιεῖ καὶ λέγει· Πάτερ, τῷ δικαίῳ ὁ ἄδικος, καὶ τῷ καθαρῷ ὁ ἀκάθαρτος, ὑβρις ἀντικρυς ἂν εἴη καὶ λοιδορία τὰ ῥήματα, εἴπερ τῆς ἰδίας μοχθηρίας πατέρα τὸν θεὸν ὀνομάζοι. Ἡ γὰρ τοῦ πατρὸς φωνὴ τὴν αἰτίαν τοῦ ἐξ αὐτοῦ ὑποστάντος διασεμαίνει. Οὐκοῦν ὁ μοχθηρὸς τὴν συνείδησιν, εἰ πατέρα ἑαυτοῦ τὸν θεὸν λέγει, οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἢ τῶν ἰδίων κακῶν ἀρχηγὸν τε καὶ αἴτιον αὐτὸν εἶναι κατηγορήσει (*Or.dom.II*, SC 596, 364-366, 10-19; 1-3). The English translation belongs to Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, 18-19.

²¹ Προστάξας τοίνυν ἐν τῇ προσευχῇ λέγειν πατέρα ἑαυτοῦ τὸν θεὸν, οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἢ ὁμοιοῦσθαί σε τῇ θεοπρεπεῖ πολιτείᾳ τῷ οὐρανίῳ κελεύει πατρί, καθάπερ καὶ φανερώτερον ἐτέρωθι τὸ τοιοῦτον παρεγγυᾷ λέγων· Γίνεσθε τέλειοι καθὼς καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τέλειός ἐστιν (*Or.dom.II*, SC 596, 378, 9-14). The English translation belongs to Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, 22-23. In *In Canticum Canticorum*, St. Gregory says that a state of perfection is required even for those who try to understand the deep meaning of the *Song of Songs*: Πάλιν τοίνυν τὸν ἐν τοῖς προομίῳ ἐπαναλήψομαι λόγον· μὴ τις ἐμπαθῆς καὶ σαρκώδης ἔτι τῆς νεκρᾶς τοῦ παλαιοῦ ἀνθρώπου δυσωδίας ἀπόζων πρὸς τὰς κτηνώδεις ἀλογίας κατασυστρέτω τὰς τῶν θεοπνεύστων νοημάτων τε καὶ ῥεμάτων ἐμφάσεις, ἀλλ' ἐκβάς ἕκαστος αὐτὸς ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἔξω τοῦ ὕλικου κόσμου γενόμενος καὶ ἐπανελεῶν τρόπον τινα δι' ἀπαθείας εἰς τὸν παράδεισον καὶ διὰ καθαρότητος ὁμοιωθεὶς τῷ θεῷ οὕτως ἐπὶ τὸ ἄδυτον τῶν προφαινομένων ἡμῖν διὰ τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου μυστηρίων χωρεῖτω. εἰ δέ τις ἀπαρασκευαστός ἐστιν ἡ ψυχὴ πρὸς τὴν τοιαύτην ἀκρόασιν, ἀκουσάτωσαν τοῦ Μωϋσέως νομοθετοῦντος μὴ κατατολμήσῃ τῆς ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος τὸ πνευματικὸν ἀναβάσεως, πρὶν πλῦναι τῶν καρδιῶν ἡμῶν τὰ ἱμάτια καὶ τοῖς καθήκουσι τῶν λογισμῶν περιρραντηρίους τὰς ψυχὰς ἀφαγνίσασθαι (*In Cant I*, GNO VI, 25, 2-15). The English translation of this text is: „Again,

I would like to make only a short observation, in accordance to the Orthodox Church, of the most proper place and time in which the *Our Father* prayer should be uttered: in the Church, in the Holy Liturgy²². The whole Liturgy and every Liturgy is a process of Ascension from earth to heaven, a process of transforming our status from slavery to sonship, and this is marked especially by some moments in the Liturgy: the Cherubic Hymn (“Let us, who mystically represent the Cherubim and who sing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-creating Trinity, now lay aside every worldly care”), then the exclamation before the Lord’s Prayer (“And grant us, Master, with boldness and without condemnation, to dare call You, the heavenly God, Father, and to say...”) and finally the Holy Communion Itself, which makes us partakers in the divine nature. This is why I said at the beginning that this prayer is properly used only by ascetic Christians, by spiritually active Christians, because the most revealing sign of the fact that they are ascetic and active is the participation to the Holy Liturgy. What is the Holy Liturgy, if not an exercise of altruism, a school where everyone learns how to love one’s neighbor in common prayer? Let us recall of Moses: when the Israelites have made for themselves a metal ox and given worship to it, God was angry and wanted to send destruction on them. Moses said: “This people has done a great sin, making themselves a god of gold; but now, if you will give them forgiveness, forgive them! But if not, let my name be taken out of your book!” (Exodus 32: 31-32). It is exactly the same attitude which must characterize our presence in the Church, during the Holy Liturgy: we are all there to pray together to God, acknowledging our need for God’s grace and our determination to stay together in front of God and receive the same treatment from Him in the name of Christian solidarity. There is a canon in the Orthodox Church which stipulates that if a person do not participate in the Holy Liturgy three times one after another without good reasons, that person should be stopped from the Holy Communion. This canon is not a punishment, but rather a barometer which shows us how long a person is spiritually alive when not participating in the Holy Liturgy. And without Liturgy, the utterance of the Lord’s prayer is severely diminished in its effects of making us perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect.

therefore, we reiterate, what we said by way of preamble. Let not any passionate and fleshly person, who still gives off the deathly smell of the old humanity, drag the meaning of the divinely inspired ideas and words down to the level of brutish irrationality. No, let each depart from himself and get beyond the material cosmos and ascend somehow, by way of impassibility, into paradise, and having by purity been made like to God, let him in this fashion journey to the inner shrine of the mysteries manifested to us in this book. And if the soul of some persons is not prepared to listen in this way, let them pay attention to Moses when he decrees that no one should dare the ascent of the spiritual mountain until the garments of our hearts are washed clean and our souls are purified by the appropriate sprinklings of reasoned thoughts” (Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Song of Songs*, tr. Norris, 2012, 27).

²² This assertion is founded on the life itself of the Church and it is experienced by every Orthodox Christian who practices his faith liturgically.

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