

LETTING THE LORD'S PRAYER LOOK AT US: II

In the first of these two sessions, the Lord's prayer appeared twice:*In a paraphrase as our opening prayer, & in all the RSV words in the Gospels' two versions of it. Here, as our opening prayer, let's use the words we usually use: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen." (*In Thinksheet #3222, for the first session.)

REPORTS on the "Assignment": "Write your lectio divina (first) as free prayer using the Lord's Prayer themes, then (second) using each successive phrase in the Lord's Prayer."

TRANSCRIPTION of our written "assumptions" (§1 in #3222). In trusting Jesus to teach them how to pray, the disciples were assuming that God is (an assumption so deep that, in our speaking what we'd written, it came late in the list); Jesus knows how to pray & (as a peripatetic rabbi had the authority to teach his disciples how to pray); Jesus is a man of prayer; God is good, so intends our good; because he cares, the Lord listens to our prayers; because God loves us, prayer as return love pleases him; beyond knowledge, we need the wisdom God can give us when we pray; when we tell God our & others' needs, he can do something about it (God is "great" as well as "good"); in prayer, we open ourselves for God's guidance; creating us as persons, God personally converses with us in revelation & prayer; God can & does answer prayer, & does so according to our needs (not necessarily our wants); prayer changes things, including those who pray (transformation in transcendence); prayer is essential to discipleship, for the church is the "communion" of the community with God through our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit....Those are the premises, the assumptions, I jotted down last time. Anyone have any to add to the list now?

Prayer is the CENTER & HEART of religion. It's the middle link joining the top link (heaven) to the bottom link (earth). I suggest that sometimes, when you pray, you have this picture in mind: you are so important! In & through you, heaven & earth are in communion! Also, prayer the the middle link horizontally between the past & the future. Try praying the links. E.g., prayerfully explore your link to earth: beloved, family, friends, church, work, civic responsibilities, the environment, un-/sustainable resources, health, fungible & human capital),

On §4 ("what themes do you find" in the Lord's Prayer?), we listed trust, adoration, life-intention, food, forgiveness, hope, & praise. Please look at this section (the two versions of the Lord's Prayer), then write responses to these questions:

1 Do you see any themes not on our list?

2 Alongside the Lord's Prayer lines, write your theme-words: our listed words that you accept, any substitutes for words on our list, any words expressing themes not on our list.

Prayer is both solitary (as "My Father") & social (as "Our Father"): Christian prayer is never individual (i.e., I-my-mine-me alone, with no thought for others). In Luke, the Lord's Prayer's first word is not (as in Matthew) "Our" but "Father"--but note the personal plurals in the prayer's body in Luke: "us/our/us/our/we/us/us/us."

Whom does Jesus mean in the first word of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew? Write three responses:

1

2

3

You prayed the Lord's Prayer in church this morning? How many times do you intend to say it this week?

PRAYER-notes to ponder

1 "Who was that?" I sometimes ask Loree after she hangs up the phone. Often I can tell: hearing only one end of the conversation, I can "see" (recognize) who's on the other end. Now, who is that deity on the other end of your actual prayers, the god of your "soul's sincere desire," the investment you bank on (Mt.6.21 & L.12.34 TEV: "your heart will always be where your riches are")?

After the 3rd presidential debate, I asked a man (not of our church) his reaction & learned that he'd been into (as it were) the 3rd inning (of the Yankees/Red Sox game). Many Americans are more invested in sports than in politics or religion. In 1990, a college coach said "If we had ESPN [the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network] 22 years ago, we wouldn't have any children [children taking time that could be given to sports]." Michael Mandelbaum did eight books on international relations, now one on THE MEANING OF SPORTS, "a variety of religious experience" providing an artificial alternative world of rationality ("play by the rules") & thus transparency (you know what's going on), simplicity (in! out!), & conclusion (you know who won, & that it's over). Geo.Will, columnist & baseball expert (CCT 10.12.04): "Today the average baseball salary" is \$2.55 million, & "there are 1,702 million-dollar athletes." I add: the highest-paid priests of any religion on earth.

Jesus' statement (§1, above) is reversible: Your riches will always flow to where your heart is.

2 Prayer & sports are both escapist, differing in this: the world you enter when paying attention to a sports event is a virtual world that ceases when the game's over: in prayer, you enter "the world to come," the world that is more real than our actual daily world. In "The Return of the King," the last film of THE LORD OF THE RINGS trilogy, the wizard Gandalf encourages missionary Frodo (on the mission to destroy the ring, the source of evil) to fix his attention on "a far green country" & "a swift sunrise." The pie really is in the sky, but (as in the Lord's Prayer) it is to come "on earth" in the doing of God's will.

3 Prayer and theology are reciprocal in both directions. In §1 (above), the direction is seeing the deity (who/what is being worshiped) through the praying. The reverse is knowing the deity (by revelation [depositum fidei, the historical deposit of faith] & by personal repentance-commitment) & then praying. This is educated, informed praying--the kind of praying the disciples wanted to learn to do when they asked their Lord how to pray. Without Christian education, prayer cannot be Christian, but only a stab in the dark instead of a step in the Light. Without Christian theology (the continuous intellectual effort to make sense of things--conditions, events, ideas--in the light of Christ) Christian prayer cannot be maturely intelligent.

4 Before age 40, God is responsible for how your face looks: after that, both of you are. We become like whom/what we love. "Prayer without ceasing" (i.e., the continual practice of prayer) makes you a lover whose beloved is on your face, in your attitudes & actions. In public, this will coincide with the life-witness of some & clash with that of others: necessarily, you will be in a community both of confirmation & of resistance (paying "the cost of discipleship" in the struggle for authenticity, justice, & peace). And you will not fit neatly into categories set & honored by "the world": you will not be partisanly predictable.

5 These two sessions have been on "letting the Lord's Prayer look at us." When it looks at me, at you, does it see somebody it recognizes as a companion on the Way? How may I, you, become more recognizable?

6 Early this month, a Cape Cod woman saw a plane crash & said "I wish I [had] had the presence of mind to say a little prayer." What does this say about prayer & human nature & human culture?

7 On the rest of this page, please write a response to the question "What sense would it make to describe living the Lord's Prayer as a walk on the wild side?"

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COT
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ESPN mirrors society's changes

"If we had ESPN 22 years ago, we wouldn't have any children."
— a college coach, 1990

You are in a ballpark with your 12-year-old. The short-stop makes a sparkling play and your child murmurs, "Web gem." As a slugger approaches the plate your child says, with a hint of drollery, "You can't stop him, you can only hope to contain him." When the slugger hits one 400 feet, the child says, "That'll make the Top Ten Plays."

Congratulations: Your child is bilingual. He or she speaks Sports-Centerese, the *lingua franca* of ESPN nation, the capital of which is Bristol, Conn., where 27 satellite dishes scarf up 40,000 feeds a year, the best of which are sent around the clock to sports addicts, such as the viewer who, in 1987, said: "Please show the Nebraska-UCLA game at 6:00 as I have a 5:00 Mass and would have to find a priest to replace me if you show it earlier."

ESPN became a quarter-century old on Tuesday. Measurements of "brand resonance" show that among 138 brands, including Coca-Cola and McDonalds, ESPN ranks first among men.

Each week more than 90 million people are exposed to ESPN media — ESPN (there are locally produced SportsCenters in Canada, Brazil, a Spanish version for the rest of Latin America, China, India and Taiwan), ESPN2, ESPN Classic, ESPN.com (2.3 million page



GEORGE WILL

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views in a peak hour), and ESPN The Magazine (a circulation of 1.7 million in just five years).

This stunning growth reflects ways America has changed in a quarter of a century. The change can be measured in money. In 1979, when the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network began, the average Major League Baseball salary was \$113,558 and pitcher Nolan Ryan became the first million-dollar-a-year athlete in team sports. Today the average baseball salary (\$2.55 million) has increased 2,241 percent and there are 1,702 million-dollar athletes.

In 1979 broadcasters paid the National Football League \$8.8 million annually; today the fee is approximately \$2.25 billion, an increase of more than 25,400 percent.

America is a lot richer than it was in 1979, but not *that* much richer. Something else is afoot,

turning so many eyes — that is what pulls the tide of money — to sports. Perhaps people are drawn to sports because they really don't mean a thing.

In this politicized age, even — no, especially — cultural arguments are political arguments. Politics is understood as a series of angry confrontations, and war (on drugs, poverty, illiteracy, etc.) is a metaphor for policy.

Perhaps, then, sports delight because they are a refuge — one of society's few meaning-free zones. Or not. Perhaps there is an opposite explanation for the unslakeable appetite for the spectacle of sport, an appetite that has produced ESPN.

Michael Mandelbaum, author of eight books on international relations, argues in his ninth book, "The Meaning of Sports," that sports are "a variety of religious experience." Like religion, sports stand apart from the mundane and are a realm of special coherence and heroic example. The rise of team sports coincided with what Mandelbaum calls the 20th century's "social and political hurricanes." Those were urbanization — people moving from countryside to town and from job to job — and world wars, unprecedented confusions and traumas from which people sought diversions.

The 20th century, Mandelbaum writes, "was the era of free verse in poetry, stream-of-consciousness writing in literature, atonal music

in place of traditional harmony and melody, and abstract rather than figurative art. James Joyce succeeded Charles Dickens, Jackson Pollock filled the place Rembrandt had occupied."

At a time when Robert Frost was comparing free verse to playing tennis without a net, sports became cultural counterpoints because they are transparent and coherent. Transparent because spectators can see for themselves what is happening, and why. Coherent in that they are defined and governed by rationality — rules — and reach definitive conclusions.

It is surely not mere coincidence that sports and detective novels found mass audiences simultaneously. These clues to the mystery of ESPN's remarkable success may assuage any guilt you feel about the time you spend with the boys and girls from Bristol. But don't get carried away.

There has been at least one ESPN divorce in which the wife gave to her husband an improvident ultimatum: It's ESPN or me. In at least 10 harmonious marriages the parents have named children ESPN, Espn, Espin or Espyn. How many children have been named HBO or CNN?

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