



#PLEDGE2PRAY

#### REFLECTION 4 : PLEASE SIR, CAN I HAVE SOME MORE?

*"You'll never know that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you've got!"* I think Mother Teresa touched the heart of what the third part of the Lord's prayer is all about when she said those words. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, *"Give us this day our daily bread,"* I think he was encouraging them to live in daily dependence on God.

Just a few verses after the Lord's Prayer in Matthew's Gospel we find this teaching of Jesus:

*"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"*

*And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."*

These words paint a perfectly clear picture showing that if we live in daily dependence on God, God will provide all that we need and we will experience a huge decrease in the level of worry and anxiety that we carry round with us in life.

And when Jesus said these words the minds of the disciples and the crowd would automatically have turned back in their history to the story of God's miraculous provision of food for his people as they wandered round the desert after the Exodus from slavery in Egypt. It is a fascinating story. The Israelites had just been delivered from Egypt and the hand of Pharaoh. They had seen God's hand at work through the plagues, the guidance provided by the pillars of cloud and fire and the parting of the Red Sea, so you'd expect that they would be quite happy to live in daily dependence on God but actually what we hear is, *"if only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! At least there we had food to eat but now we are going to starve to death in the desert!"*

The children of God were acting like ungrateful, spoilt little children and like an angry parent Moses wants to tell them off. But then we see the gracious hand of the Lord at work, not just to feed the people but to teach them, and all of us who follow in their footsteps, a vital lesson about trust and dependence.

I'm sure you know the story, and it is great news for me because God provides them with my favourite breakfast cereal – frosted flakes. And this bread from heaven he calls manna. And as with his name "Yahweh", which means "I am what I am," so "manna" actually means "it is what it is!" It reminds me of those times when I sat down at the dinner table at school and a friend would say, *"what is it?"* of the unrecognisable congealed mess on offer. And you'd think, *"I have absolutely no idea – it is what it is!"*

And I guess the Israelites must have got quite creative with their menus. Imagine forty years of nothing but bread and quails! Perhaps they had manna burgers, or roasted manna or manna cakes, or even manna pudding. The point of this is that God did not provide luxuries but he did provide more than enough.

And think about this for a moment. If you do the maths you get some quite astonishing figures. The passage tells us that the people gathered an omer of manna per person per day. An omer is about 2 litres. And experts estimate that there were probably between 2 and 3 million people. That equates to some 73 billion litres of manna over 40 years. That is one huge food mountain and it is an illustration of God's generosity towards his people.

It's quite a simple equation really. "Dependence on God + God's faithfulness and provision = the possibility of a worry free life." But we don't tend to see it like that do we? We tend to think more along the lines of "huge responsibilities - limited natural resources = stress related illness!" If only we could truly come to terms with the idea that God is the creator and sustainer of life!

But what does this daily dependence on God actually refer to? Well there are all sorts of ideas as to what Jesus was speaking about. My own view is that when he taught his disciples to pray, *"Give us this day our daily bread,"* he was talking not just about literal food but about all that we need to live. And note I said 'need' not 'want.' I think he was very definitely talking about food. God provided it for the Israelites. Jesus provided it for all sorts of people throughout his ministry, most notably through the feeding of the 5000. And God continues to provide more than enough food to feed the whole world. The provision of food is not the problem. The problem lies in its distribution. Even in the Exodus passage we saw the greed of people on display. That is an issue that we as members of the human family have to work on.

But I also think Jesus was speaking about life in general and even spiritual life. At the time that he was speaking to his disciples, most people worked on daily contracts as the parable of the workers demonstrates. They literally did not know whether there would be any work the next day and therefore any food. And when you add to that the whole thrust of the Sermon on the Mount you have to say that Jesus is encouraging people to place their whole lives before God in daily dependence.

And then there is St. John's teaching about Jesus as the true bread from heaven who gives life to the world through his broken body on the cross and all this leads me to conclude that asking God for our daily bread is also about the strength and grace to face all that life throws at us.

It seems to me that when we add this teaching to the previous phrases of the Lord's Prayer it places four issues before us about our attitude towards life and God. First it is about having an attitude of gratitude and not grumbling. When we actually recognise God's provision in our lives the only appropriate response is thanksgiving and that brings joy and faith.

Second, it is about an attitude of submission not stubbornness. If we are constantly fighting with God's plan for our lives then we will not know the peace that he offers. We will instead be plagued by worry.

Third, we should seek an attitude of dependence not determination. We have already prayed, "*your will be done.*" If we can submit ourselves to God to this degree we will be totally dependent on God. And that brings us to the fourth attitude. It is one of trusting not being troubled. Perhaps, like some of the Israelites we don't actually trust that the manna will be there tomorrow and that causes worry to rise in our hearts. Worry is an enemy of trust but dependence builds trust. When you are used to relying on God and seeing God's provision it becomes even easier to continue to rely on him.

Dallas Willard wrote something which I think hits the nail on the head: "*Today I have God and God has the provisions. Tomorrow it will be exactly the same.*"

It is a response that demonstrates an attitude towards God of gratitude, submission, dependence and trust. At the end of the day, if the God we are praying to is our Father in heaven, the creator and sustainer of all things and if we are seeking God's will to be done in our lives as it is in heaven, then trusting that God will provide for our needs is not actually that big an ask. When we recognise who it is that we are speaking to we should be better able to put the concerns of this life into their proper perspective – we are loved and cared for by the creator of the very universe in which we live. He will not let us down.

Perhaps you could spend some time reflecting on what it is that you need God to do for you or in you. Jesus' prayer might help with that: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. **Amen.**"