

Meditations and Prayers for Mealtime

c. 1557

This Is a Christian Grace Before Meals, Together with a Prayer of Thanksgiving After Meals—Intended for All Genuinely God-fearing Folk, and Moreover Intended to Be Taught to Their Children from Childhood on, in Order That They May Learn to Fear the Lord, May Learn to Know Him, and to Walk in His Commandments All Their Days, to the Praise and Glory of the Lord and to the Salvation of Their Souls. Amen.

Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

I. A CHRISTIAN GRACE BEFORE MEALS

O give thanks unto the Lord, said David, for He is good. For His goodness and mercy endureth forever. O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in Him. O fear the Lord, ye His saints, for there is no want to them that fear Him. The rich He sends away empty, but they that fear the Lord shall have lack of nothing. He giveth food to those that fear Him. He remembers His covenant forever.

Thou shalt eat the labor of thy hands; happy shalt thou be and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine in the innermost part of thy house; thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, thus shall the man be blest that feareth the Lord.

I have been young and now I am old, says David, and have never seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread, even as Thou hast, O Lord, demonstrated to the children of Israel. Thou hast given them bread from heaven and water out of the flinty rock in the wilderness forty years long. O Lord, Thou hast fed Elijah with flesh and with bread by the ravens morning and evening—also by the widow of Zarephath in that the meal did not diminish in the jar nor the oil in the cruse for a long time, according to the word spoken by the Prophet Elijah, the Tishbite—and by the angel of the Lord, with bread and with water under the juniper bush when he fled before Jezebel. O Lord, Thou hast fed Daniel in the den of lions in Babylon by the angel of the Lord, and by the Prophet Habakkuk with the victuals which he had prepared for his reapers. Habakkuk spoke saying, Daniel, Daniel, take of the food which God has sent to you. And Daniel spoke saying, And, Lord, Thou art ever mindful of me and dost not forsake those that call upon Thee and love Thee. And he rose up and ate.¹ O Lord, Thou hast so wonderfully, and unexpectedly, and, according to the Word of the Lord spoken by Elisha the prophet

¹ This account of Daniel and Habakkuk is found in the Apocryphal book called *Bel and the Dragon*. Tr.

of the Lord, fed those of Samaria when the hunger was so great that the women (by nature quite pitiful, as Lamentations has it) did sod and eat their own children, even as at Jerusalem.

O Lord, Thou hast with five barley loaves and two fishes fed about five thousand men, not counting women and children—twelve basketfuls remaining—by the power of Thy prayer of blessing and thanksgiving. What is impossible with men is possible with God. This, Lord, Thou Thyself hast declared.

Therefore, Thou hast in the Gospel taught Thy children that fear Thee saying, Take no thought for thy life, what ye shall eat and what ye shall drink, nor for the body what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than food and the body than raiment? Consider the birds of the heaven. They sow not, neither do they reap, nor do they gather into barns, and your heavenly Father feeds them nevertheless. Are you not much more than they? Which of you can add one cubit to his stature by being careful for it? And why do you take thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow. They toil not, neither do they spin—I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, would He not much more do such for you, O ye of little faith! Therefore, do not be filled with care saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? After these things do the Gentiles seek, but your Father knows that ye have need of all these things. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. It is enough that every day carries its own burdens, as Christ says.

But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world; and neither can we carry anything out. But having food and covering we shall be therewith content, etc. For God has created meat, says Paul, to be received with thanksgiving by them that believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it be received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified through the Word of God and prayer.

For this reason let us pray: Our Father which 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 debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil [one], for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

How lovingly do the eyes of the Lord behold the righteous. His ears are open to their prayers. And if there is any lack among his people, He fills it with every good gift. Their daily bread comes to them unexpectedly out of the hand of the Lord their God.

The heavens are the Lord's, says David, and all that is in them; the earth, and the fields, and all that on them is. Therefore, humble yourselves wholly before the mighty hand of God and fear the Lord, the Almighty God.

Therefore, eat and drink at this time, friends, together, for this food is given of God, our heavenly Father. Therefore, to Him be praise, honor, glory, and thanksgiving from eternity to eternity. Amen.

II. A CHRISTIAN GRACE OR PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AFTER MEALS

We thank Thee, Lord God and Father, Creator of heaven and earth, for all Thy good gifts which we, O Father of lights, have received of Thee, and receive daily out of Thy liberal hand through Jesus Christ, Thy dearly beloved Son, our Lord, Thou who hast clothed our bodies with the needed covering and hast satisfied them with the natural bread.

We pray Thee humbly, as our dearly beloved Father, to look upon us, Thy children, persecuted for the sake of Thy holy Gospel, and earnestly desirous, in our weakness, to live devoutly in this world. Be pleased to keep us in Thy Word in fatherly fashion, in order that to the end of our days we may remain constant in Thy Word and Gospel, revealed by Thee to the plain and simple, and hidden to the wise ones of this world. Look upon us with Thine eye of pity, as Thou didst upon the prodigal son, upon Mary Magdalene, upon the woman of Canaan, the centurion, the thief on the cross, Zacchaeus, and upon all those who have with tears desired Thy grace.

And feed our souls in like fashion with that heavenly bread, Thy holy Word, by which our poor souls may live, and give us to drink of that living water, the Holy Spirit, who can lead us into all truth, whom the world cannot receive because it knows Him not, nor sees Him, even as Thou Thyself, O Lord, hast said. For the world lieth in wickedness, said John, and will perish with all that is therein; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.

Therefore we pray Thy Fatherly mercy, with sorrowful hearts, and out of the depth of our souls, for all men, for kings, and for all magistrates, in order that we may live a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and gravity. For, said Paul, this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

O Lord, be pleased to enlighten them with Thy grace, those that are still in darkness and who walk in the ways of death and err unwittingly; and receive all those who with a firm trust come to Thee seeking Thy grace and mercy, confessing that they know not, and that henceforth they would live after the will of God, to reform their lives, do penance, be converted, be born again, believe the Gospel and obey it, confess it before the world, and live it. This we pray, O holy Father, for Thy great name's sake.

We also pray, dear Lord, especially for all those who confess Thy holy Word aright and who seek to live according to it in their poor weakness. Be pleased to guard them against all false doctrine and carnality of life; against the wiles of Satan, who, according to the holy Paul, transforms himself into an angel of light. Keep them also from temptation, and from the love and friendship of this world which according to the holy James is enmity with God, lest Thy Holy Spirit be grieved and Thy holy Gospel be blasphemed among the foolish and the perverse.

This we pray, O eternal Father of lights from whom all good and perfect gifts come forth, even as James says, and for the sake of Jesus Christ, Thy dearly beloved Son, our Lord, in whom Thou art well pleased and at whose name every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth, and things under the earth, and before whom all tongues must confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God His Father; and, as the holy Paul teaches, through Him in whose name we must be saved and of pure grace. And we believe, moreover, that there is no other name under heaven given among men by

which we must be saved, other than in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, even as Peter testified before the Council at Jerusalem, to whose high and holy and altogether adorable name be praise and honor, power and majesty, from eternity to eternity. Amen.