



Pastor's Column

Lead Us Not Into Temptation

January 21, 2018 ~ Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Recently, the bishops conference in France voted to change the French translation of the original Greek of the Lord's Prayer in the Gospel account of St. Matthew (Mt. 6:9-13) for use in the Mass celebrated in the French language. Pope Francis has commented that he likes how the French bishops changed their liturgical translation; it just so happens that how the French render it now is similar to the Spanish translation in use in Latin America. In English, the revision is something like this: "Let us not be led into temptation."

(Incidentally, while some people may balk at people rendering the Lord's Prayer in different ways and different translations, keep in mind that Scripture itself does this; St. Matthew offers one rendering; St. Luke offers a different rendering; yet both are regarded as inspired by God. And so, the mere fact of the French updating their French translation for liturgical use is not a problem.)

Some considerations. First of all, is Pope Francis advocating or commanding that all people, all languages, interpret the Lord's Prayer thus? No. He was merely commenting in an interview his thoughts on what the French have chosen to do. Secondly, is it a good idea for American English to reinterpret similar to the Spanish and the French. Again, no – for several reasons. One, as it is now translated in American English, the Lord's Prayer as worded is the one common link between all Christian denominations; we all pretty much pray the Lord's Prayer using the same words, which is important, for example, when we have weddings or funerals in the Catholic Church; all the rest of the liturgical might be completely alien to our non-Catholic brethren, but when we pray the Lord's Prayer together, our non-Catholic brethren have the opportunity at last to pray and worship with us.

Also, the original Greek in St. Matthew is clearly in active voice ("lead us not"), not passive voice or subjunctive voice ("let us not be led"). But why would God inspire St. Matthew to write it in such a way as to make it seem that God is actively, deliberately leading us into temptation? After all, God also inspired St. James, who wrote that the Lord "is not subject to temptation to evil, and He Himself tempts no one." (Jas 1:13) So...does God tempt us or *not* tempt us? Does God *lead* us into temptation or *not* lead us? It seems that we have a contradiction here – and both sides of this issues apparently inspired by God! So what gives?

What gives is that God is the Primary Cause of all things. In our post-modern, anti-God, anti-religion world, nobody seems to consider the Primary Cause anymore, only secondary causes: the physical, material, and human causes for why things happen. But all of that is *secondary*, insofar as all physical, material, and human causes owe their very existence to God. God created *everything*; thus, God is the Primary Cause of everything. But with the world so hyper-focused on secondary causality, God has been moved to the margins of society, as it were, and we are easily forgetful of God's essential action of holding all things in existence.

And this leads us back now to the petition in the Lord's Prayer that God "lead us not into temptation." Truly, God does not tempt us in any direct sense; God does not will to entrap us, to confound us so as to make us fall. And yet because the Lord is the first cause of *all* existing things, He is also the first cause of things that tempt us. Thus, when we ask the Lord to "lead us not into temptation," we ask Him, who providentially holds us and all things in existence, to lead us forward with the grace that we need to resist it. This will allow us to enjoy the good things that He gives to us without giving way to the temptations of our inordinate desires. To say that the Lord "leads" us is to acknowledge that He is the first cause of our movement through life; though we have free will in our decisions, He sustains us in those decisions and thereby "leads" us as the first cause of all we do. He sustains us even when He does not approve of what we do. And so, each of us is asking in effect, "O Lord, in Your provident and sustaining causality of all that I do, please lead me in Your grace to resist sin and to do what is right."

This petition in the Lord's Prayer offers us a crucial teaching moment of a most important truth about God as the Primary Cause of all that is and all that happens, that we cannot go forward unless God leads us and holds us in existence. It is a great mystery, then, that the Lord sustains us and leads us by causing our very existence, even when we stray from His will for us.

~Fr. Lewis