



Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue
in the City of New York

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Sunday, February 19, 2012
The Last Sunday after Epiphany

Festal Evensong
at 4pm

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Dr. Andrew C. Blume, Rector
The Church of Saint Ignatius of Antioch

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Sermon Series: "Lord, Teach Us to Pray"
SERMON 4: "HALLOWED BE THY NAME"

I was first taught the Lord's Prayer sometime in September 1973 when I began first grade at St. Bernard's School up on Ninety-eighth Street. It would not be an outrageous overstatement for me to claim that I have said that prayer almost every day during the intervening thirty nine years. I wear it as part of my spiritual habit, like a well-worn tweed coat. It is something that trips off my tongue (in the traditional language version, of course) and it informs the way in which I formulate language about God and prayer. Nevertheless, while I have carefully studied the late antique anaphoras, the nuances of the Sarum Mass, and the construction of the Anglican Prayer Book office, I have never given that level of attention to the mysteries of this short, profound, model prayer from Matthew's Gospel that forms, arguably, the centre of Christian Worship, east and west, from the earliest days.

For inspiration for tonight's homily, therefore, I turned to that hero of many High Churchmen, Charles Gore, the early twentieth-century Bishop of Oxford, and his volume on the Sermon on the Mount. Gore reminded me that the Lord's Prayer teaches us that prayer should not be an attempt to impose our own whims and fancies on the wisdom of God, but a constant act of correspondence by which we bring our short-sighted wills and reasons into correspondence, the intelligent correspondence of sons, with the perfect reason and will of God, the all-wise Father of all human souls and of the great universe.¹

Yes, the purpose of the Lord's Prayer is to help us to conform our wills with God's will for us. It is to teach us who God is, to place God's priorities before our priorities, and then to pray for our simple needs: for our daily bread, for forgiveness and for the ability to forgive, and that we may be kept from temptation and evil. We pray all this with the values of the Kingdom of God as primary and that God's will, not our own (often self-interested) will, be done.

How, though, do we know the will of God? We know the will of God because we know God. How, though, do we know God? We know God because he has revealed himself to us, brought us into relationship with him, and taught us his name. Names, especially in the world of the Scriptures, are the foundation of relationship, especially covenantal relationships. Names make relationships personal and this is why we have a personal relationship with God. God knows us by name, as the

¹Charles Gore, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Practical Exposition* (London: John Murray, 1902), 139.

story of the Good Shepherd serves to remind us. Even more amazingly, we know God's name and call him by name.

It is amazing because in the world of the Hebrew Scriptures it is not a given that we would know God's name. Knowing someone's name is powerful stuff. We remember that the Angel who wrestled with Jacob, and who gave Jacob the name of Israel, refused to tell Jacob his own name (Gen. 32:28-29).² God, however, let us know his name—shared his name with his people—when he spoke to Moses at the burning bush:

Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'the God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I am has sent me to you.'" God said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord [YHWH] the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name for ever and this my title for all generations." (Exodus 3:13-22)

Moses' ability to bring God's name back to the people is that which will convince the stubborn multitude that Moses speaks with authority. To know God's name is to know God.

God names himself for Moses. God tells Moses to use that name, that name connected in its very meaning with the notion of eternal being and of eternal becoming—I am who I am, I am who I will be—to tell Israel who he is and about his will for them. God identifies himself with a personal name as a marker of his authority, of his connexion with Israel's past, and of his place in Israel's future. God's name is, indeed, intertwined in the Hebrew imagination with the unfolding of God's plan and the bringing into being of God's kingdom. That name, associated with being and becoming itself, with existence and persistence, and with creation itself, became sacred and worthy of great reverence. The people of God knew that name, but they did not say the name aloud. The name itself, God's identification, God's self-identification with the heart of creation, has power. It has the power to express and enact our relationship with God, with the very heart of the cosmos. Our past, present, and future are all contained in God's name. We know the name of God, and believe that one of our great responsibilities is to hold that name in honour, to hallow it. This has something to do with God's fulfilment of his promise, the fulfilment of the Kingdom. It has something to do with meeting our needs for the future and in the here and now.

"Hallowed be thy name," an aorist passive construction in Matthew's Greek (6:9), conveys to us at the outset the perfect and complete nature of God's greatness, something he achieves on his own. We do not sanctify the name of God. God's name, God's very self, is sanctification personified. We are, however, to hold that sanctified name in reverence, to hold God's very person in reverence as we live our lives according to the petitions of the prayer. By living according to these hopes that Jesus has for himself and for us—to have that which sustains us, to seek forgiveness and to be forgiven, and to be kept from temptation and evil—we are showing forth God's glory into the world. We hold God's hallowed name in reverence chiefly through our actions. In our Christian lives, therefore, we are teaching the whole world the name of the God of Israel who is the author of all creation. "Hallowed be thy name" is the foundation of our ethical lives, it is where we proclaim for all to hear that we know our God and that we are inexorably bound to God and to his priorities, his will, his destiny for all the cosmos, which is nothing less than love itself.

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²See W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew: a new translation with introduction and commentary*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 75.