

# DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

## *Verses & Notes September 6, 2006*

### *Matthew 6:5-15*

48: *You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

#### **Matthew, chapter 6**

1: *"Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them;  
for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*

5: *"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites;  
for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners,  
that they may be seen by men.*

*Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.*

6: *But when you pray,  
go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret;  
and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

7: *"And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do;  
for they think that they will be heard for their many words.*

8: *Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

9: *Pray then like this:*

*Our Father who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.*

10: *Thy kingdom come.  
Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.*

11: *Give us this day our daily bread;*

12: *And forgive us our debts, As we also have forgiven our debtors;*

13: *And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil.*

14: *For if you forgive men their trespasses,  
your heavenly Father also will forgive you;*

15: *but if you do not forgive men their trespasses,  
neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

21: *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

## Discussion Notes:

#### **Intro: Conversion involves a change both inside and out.**

- a. The Sermon on the Mount
  - Jesus calling & training disciples = call to holiness & union with Him.
  - i.e., Establishing & outlining his program of discipleship.
- b. Beatitudes: the core of his teachings; ladder of renewal / foundation stones
  - Jesus is emphasizing the importance of internal conversion,
  - But this does NOT exclude the externals!
- c. The important summarizing statement: 5:48

- But what did Jesus mean by perfection?
  - Jesus is therefore talking about an attitude of life: heart, mind, soul, & strength.
  - **Main question: Whom are you imitating?**
    - Jesus is saying NOT the Pharisees / scribes BUT our Father in heaven;
      - But how do we imitate a God we can't see?
    - Jesus will say Imitate me! (John 14:9)
      - But how do we imitate Jesus who we've never seen?
    - The Apostles will say "Imitate us as we imitate Him"
      - But how do we continue to imitate those who we have never seen?
        - The Church & her Sacred Tradition & Scripture (Jn 14:25-26, 16:13)
        - The Saints (CCC, 828)
- d. **In 6:1-21, Jesus tells his novice disciples what this striving to be like the Father means as we live out our faith in community.**
- **In 6:1 Jesus cautions his followers to beware of a tendency for misplaced motives;**
    - The external expressions of our faith carry the danger of ostentation,
      - And this danger, which shows on the outside, begins on the inside;
  - **In 6:21, Jesus caps off his discussion with the poignant statement:**

*"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."*

    - *The key is the HEART = soul = conscience*
    - *Is your focus / motives horizontal or vertical? Human approval or God's? Earth or heaven?*
- e. **In 6:3-18 Three illustrations of this caution in three acts of piety his audience already knows:**
- Jesus paints a familiar picture of a self-righteous hypocrite who makes sure everyone around him knows when he is giving alms, praying, or fasting.
  - All with same pattern:
    1. The practice
    2. The abuse
    3. Condemnation of the abuse
    4. Advice
  - All three begin with the phrase, "When you" ... implies these are acts they know & do.
  - These three represent 3 conversions: To God (prayer), for others (alms), & from self (fasting).
- f. **6:2-4 Almsgiving**
- A: The Practice: *"Thus, when you give alms,*
- B: The abuse: *"sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men."*
- C: The Condemnation: *"Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward."*
- D: The Advice: *"But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

*Email:*

*Dear Marcus,*

*I'm following your radio show and am a little confused, how do you distinguish between "giving alms in secret" and "letting one's light shine" for God's greater glory, through charitable works?*

*God bless, Elizabeth, NYC*

g. **6:5-15 Prayer**

A: The Practice: *"And when you pray,*

B: The abuse: *"you must not be like the hypocrites;*

*for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men.*

- Is Jesus condemning standing & praying in synagogues or at street corners? No!
- He's condemning praying for the sake of those around you.
  - Those who attend worship because it's good for business, votes, etc.
    - *Email ...*

- Is this ever acceptable? (Pastors? Fathers? Leaders?)
  - As long as inner motive is sincere = God focused.
- But how can we ever be freed from mixed motives?!
  - My experience as a pastor; at early mass...for onlookers or God?!
  - Danger of “projecting”
  - Therefore, must listen to formed conscience:
    - Freedom of rubrics, liturgy, & litanies. (Ps 136)
      - & the confusion & anxiety of “just pray however you like.”

**C: The Condemnation:** *“Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.”*

- Their prayer has lost any spiritual significance / effect.

**D: The Advice: Three things:**

- Can consider as 3 separate words of advice;
- Or as corrective steps for examining & redirecting our spiritual focus
- **1<sup>st</sup>: Hyperbolic corrective to help evaluate motives:**
  - 6: *But when you pray,*  
*go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret;*  
*and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*
    - Doing this, of course, eliminates distractions!
    - But also cuts thru hypocrisy & sets inner “posture” / attitude for all prayer.
      - “room” = “storeroom” = heart.
      - “Do you do alone what you do in public?”
      - Uncovers the dangers of poor formation...
    - Reiterates the freedom of Sacred Tradition!
    - Submitting to the prescribed rituals established a “prayer room” wherever you are!
- **2<sup>nd</sup>: Addresses another unmentioned yet familiar hypocritical practice**
  - 7: *“And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do;*  
*for they think that they will be heard for their many words.*
  - 8: *Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*
    - “empty phrases” = flowery, impressive, verbose soliloquies, often meant to appease or obligate a deity;
      - Have experienced this with both liturgical & expository prayer!
    - Jesus is Not condemning frequent or repeated prayers (like litanies, liturgy, rosaries), for Jesus does these himself: (Mk 14:39, “And again he went away & prayed, saying the same words;” Mt 27:46 = Ps 22:1)
      - Nor does this eliminate the Rosary prayer = all Scripture!
      - However, we must always be careful & not digress into the attitude that the mere saying of the words is praying.
    - Nor does this eliminate prayer altogether, since God already knows! “Why pray?!”
      - Because more matter of a contrite / obedient heart...
- These two steps emphasize that at the core of true prayer is silence, physical & audible, before God the Father!
- **3<sup>rd</sup>: He gives them clear instruction on how to pray:**
  - 9: *Pray then like this:*
    - Imperative form = command
    - Some Christians emphasize “like” to mean merely a model & therefore refuse to pray the Lord’s Prayer!
    - But from the beginning, the Church has promoted the praying of the Lord’s Prayer:
      - The Didache, ch. 8: *“Do not pray like the hypocrites, but rather as the Lord commanded in His Gospel, like this: ‘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 today our daily (needful) bread, and forgive us our debt as we also forgive our debtors. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one (or, evil); for Thine is the power and the glory for ever...’ Pray this three times each day.”*

- St. Augustine (CCC, 2762) “Run through all the words of the holy prayers [in Scripture], and I do not think that you will find anything in them that is not contained and included in the Lord's Prayer.”
  - St. Thomas Aquinas (CCC, 2763) “The Lord's Prayer is the most perfect of prayers. . . . In it we ask, not only for all the things we can rightly desire, but also in the sequence that they should be desired. This prayer not only teaches us to ask for things, but also in what order we should desire them.
- Traditionally the Our Father divided / interpreted in 7 Petitions (Books on the *Our Father* by Dr. Scott Hahn, Fr. Dubay, Fr. Garrigou-LaGrange, etc. as well as the Catechism: Section Two.
  - Due to my busyness, I've simplified it to Five:
    - Recognize that this intimate family prayer, as a part of the Sermon on the Mount, is first and foremost **a prayer of conversion and re-commitment**.
    - Each of these 5 Petitions are acts of surrender.
  - Following the teaching of St. Francis de Sales, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and others:
    1. Begin with silence, wherever you are...
    2. Imagine standing directly before Jesus.
- Stanza One: *Adoration of the God before you:*  
“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name!”
  - Stanza Two: *Complete surrender to Him:*  
“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”
  - Stanza Three: *Detachment from all but what you need:*  
“Give us this day our daily bread.”
  - Stanza Four: *Forget and forgive the past, wiping it clean:*  
“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”
  - Stanza Five: *Relinquish all anxiety about the future into God's hands:*  
“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”
  - “Amen.” *Turning your back on all things that take us away from Jesus.*