

“...and deliver us from evil”

Reflections on the *Our Father* by Fr. Dave Heney (daveheney@gmail.com)

Have you ever wondered what the “evil” is that we find in the Our Father? The scriptures do not say so I thought I would offer some reasonable reflections on what God actually does about evil.

We often presume that evils are things like crime, murder, or the sectarian violence in Iraq. While those are truly horrible, we will paint ourselves in a terrible corner if we place the “evil” of the Our Father verse in these actions. If we consider that events or the actions of others are the only things from which we hope that Jesus will deliver us we will often be disappointed. Moreover, this kind of understanding can create atheists. They can rightly claim that God has a very dismal record in delivering us from any of these tragedies, which don’t seem to have slowed down over the years. Atheists would claim that only fools wish for such deliverance. That god must be an underachiever.

If God were to deliver us from bad events or people He would have to forcibly stop these criminals against their will; destroying their free will ...and God will never do that. In addition, by placing evil only in events or the actions of others, people must then ask a question that can only end in disappointment, “Why does God never deliver us from bad people?”

That there are still evil events and evil people in the world must mean something important. Jesus came and went and we still have terrorism and crime. The Father did not even “deliver” His own Son from crucifixion and the earliest Christians faced Roman persecution. Where was God for them?

The first Christians called themselves “People of the Way.” Jesus lived and taught a way of love, forgiveness, compassion, and especially a way of getting through suffering in peace, (as He did on the cross) a way of facing evil with strength, (as He did with Pilate) and a way of fighting evil with courage (as with the Pharisees). It is no accident that our main

symbol is a person on a cross who then rises victorious from the dead. Yet, God’s grace involves no evil at all. His grace worked for Jesus and it is available and will work for us too.

Perhaps the Our Father verse is very precise. It actually reads, “...and deliver us from evil.” It doesn’t say, “deliver you criminals from the evil you do,” or “deliver you terrorists from your crimes. The prayer is a personal request precisely from the person praying. What then is our evil?”

Some translations read, “...and deliver us from the Evil One” meaning Satan. The Satan character in “*The Passion of the Christ*” tempts Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane to abandon his salvific work with the phrase, “*It is too much for one man. No one can do this. You cannot do this!*” Now that is truly an evil idea; that God’s grace is not enough. We *need* to be delivered from that evil idea! When we pray, “deliver us” we are freely asking God, to give us (*church people who actually say this prayer together*) the grace we each need to live the “way” of Jesus no matter what happens in the world.

While a single evil event falsifies God as a “deliverer” from evil events; a single person delivered from fear verifies God as a deliverer of those who freely call upon Him for that kind of deliverance, just as the verse indicates, and so refutes the atheist idea. Their idea of Jesus is a clear failure at deliverance from evil events while the Catholic idea of Jesus is instantly successful at delivering disciples from fear, as the Pentecost event showed and the incredibly rapid expansion of the Church revealed despite strenuous persecution. (*see also Catechism 2850-54*)

The world will always be the world, but we can be different, and Jesus makes that difference in us. We can freely ask for *and successfully receive* the grace that delivers us from fear, encourages us to live strong and happy, and ensures we will never be a source of evil our self. We are not so much asking God to change that jerk over there, but to deliver us from Satan's temptation, and change us into persons more like His Son. The resurrection of Jesus on Easter revealed that His grace ...works!