

Fr. Perozich comments —

As an American I want you to “get to the point”, “what’s the bottom line”, “so what you’re really saying is”

It is prose thinking which is limiting and holding back the full meaning.

Poetry, on the other hand, can say much more in a few words.

Sometimes God speaks a few words which take much time and prayer in order to uncover what He is communicating.

Some of us wish to substitute our opinions to get to a bottom line and stifle the truth that God is communicating.

Michael Pakaluk shows the depth of God’s wisdom offered in a simple phrase that many with authority may not yet understand as they try to impose their interpretation on God’s expansive wisdom.

The Lord’s Koan

By [Michael Pakaluk](#) AUGUST 17, 2022

The *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, also known as the “Roman Catechism,” devotes twelve dense pages to explaining the meaning of “lead us not into temptation.” The catechism of the Second Vatican Council, simply called *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, despite its extensive treatment of prayer, offers in contrast only four brief and independent bullet points (Nos. 2846-9). The one is a masterpiece of elucidation, counsel, and argument; the other reads a bit like a PowerPoint slide.

This difference is a fact. Likewise, a fact is the relative lightness of treatment of fear of God, spiritual combat, and the perils of final perseverance in the more recent Council and Catechism, as compared with those of Trent.

Do not misunderstand me. I don’t draw these contrasts to imply anything invidious, in either direction. No statement of anything can be a statement of everything. Catholicity, of its nature it would seem,

must welcome complementarity. And there can be complementarity in presentations of the faith as well as in liturgies.

Here, rather, I am interested simply in the fact that this petition, **“Lead us not into temptation,” is apparently so rich in implicit meaning that the learned expositors of the faith who wrote the Roman Catechism could devote twelve pages to it, and found it fruitful to do so.** This fact in turn testifies, it would seem, to the divine wisdom of the particular wording of that petition, which has been passed down to us from the Apostles.

That is to say, if we view the petition pedagogically. Undeniably, “lead us not into temptation,” asked of God, is challenging. One teacher’s “confusing and potentially misleading” statement, however, is another teacher’s puzzle, or koan, or paradox set forth precisely to be unraveled.

Or turn the matter upside down: suppose you had to pick a short phrase, a brief petition, which would capture everything unfolded in those twelve pages of exposition, what would you pick? What other expression could *possibly* have the same effect? By the nature of the case it couldn’t be something that was straightforward, obvious on its face, and easily grasped.

Look at the Lord’s Prayer as it leads up to that petition.

It presents a picture that is, as it were, rather flattering to us, and such as might even encourage a certain complacency, if taken on its own.

“Our Father” — we are children of God, then, on good terms with him, it seems. “Hallowed be thy name,” — we apparently find it natural and easy to revere him. “Thy Kingdom come” — so we are on his side! “as we forgive those who trespass against us,” — we even seem to be “proactive” in forgiving sins, forgiving them before God forgives us.

Yes, I am aware that these are all “petitions,” and that we tend to ask for things we want but don’t yet have, or don’t possess securely. But how much of this more “cautious” mode of reading the opening of the Lord’s Prayer comes from our habits of reading back into it the cautiousness of “Lead us not into temptation”?

Again, look at the Lord’s Prayer from the point of view of a teacher.



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You, as a teacher, want to convey the ideal condition of a disciple of yours: confident in his divine filiation; reverent towards holy things; zealously apostolic for the spread of the Kingdom; merciful and forgiving towards his neighbor.

But then, you also want to be sure to position such a disciple in the world as he will actually face it, highlighting just and only the things that matter. How do you do so with a couple more brief petitions?

“Do not tempt me”? Unnecessary to say. “Temptations exist”? Not a petition at all; not something you’d say in conversation with another person. **“Give me strength for the combat”? Now we’re getting closer to the mark.**

But *what* combat — nothing has been said so far about any combat, a war, or an enemy. **And not all temptations look like combat. Temptations are tricky. And combat calls for steadfastness and courage, but virtues other than these are needed in the face of many temptations.**

And besides, steadfastness and courage connote self-reliance rather than the necessary reliance on God.

“Do not allow me to face temptation”? But God *does* allow us, often testing us by permitting us to be tempted. The Bible is filled with examples.

“Do not allow me to fall into temptation”? (The language adopted by some bishops’ conferences recently.) But many **temptations are insidious, growing imperceptibly, not something we “fall” into at all.**

Or do you mean, rather, “do not allow me to fall, once tempted”? But then this includes two things at least, not simply “Give me the grace not to fall into sin when tempted,” but also **“Do not, as you sometimes do, and may justly do, by withholding your grace, allow me to fall into additional sin as punishment for my past sins”.**

Yes, the Roman Catechism patiently explains, these are both among the petitions so elegantly contained within the simple and brief, “lead us not into temptation.” And yet not only these but also, for example, **“Keep me from the perversity of using your**

blessings, such as beauty and wealth, as instruments of sin,” and “Keep me from becoming corrupted by prosperity.”

A whole world is introduced by that simple petition, a world where, as the Roman Catechism explains, **a Christian must practice watchfulness (“Satan is overcome not by indolence, sleep, wine, revealing, or lust; but by prayer, labor, watching, fasting, continence, and chastity”): and distrust of self and confidence in God (“It will be most efficacious when offering this Petition that, remembering our weakness, we distrust our own strength”).**

“Let no one indulge feelings of self-complacency,” the Roman Catechism warns, nor flatter himself that he can “withstand the temptations and hostile assaults of the demons” without serious divine assistance from the sacraments.

It is the Lord’s koan, disturbing, inducing caution yet reliance upon him, jarring us out of self-complacency.

***Image:** *The Temptation of St Anthony* by Hieronymus Bosch, c. 1500-1510 [Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO]

You may also enjoy:

Fr. Thomas G. Weinandy’s [*Lead Us Not into Temptation, But Deliver Us From Evil*](#)

St. Augustine of Hippo’s [*Lead us not into temptation*](#)

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Lead Us Not into Temptation, But Deliver Us From Evil

[Fr. Thomas G. Weinandy, OFM, Cap. JANUARY 5, 2019](#)

There has been a fair bit of discussion of Pope Francis' suggestion that the Our Father's petition "lead us not into temptation" be changed. The reason given for this proposal is that God never leads us into temptation, that is, tempts us to sin. Satan may tempt us to sin, but God does not. In this light, the pope states that he prefers the French and Spanish translations not "to let us fall into temptation." Recently, the Italian Bishops Conference voted to change the Our Father to "do not abandon us to temptation."

On one level the point that Pope Francis is making is obviously true – the Father does not literally steer us in the direction of sin, wherefore we need to pray that he cease from doing so. But is the prayer that Jesus taught us actually instructing us to pray that our good heavenly Father not actively direct us into tempting situations wherein we could fall prey to sin?

I think not. Jesus has a much deeper theological point to make; one that he wants us always to be aware of when we pray to the Father.

A proper understanding of this petition is found in Jesus' own life. His life exemplifies, and so becomes the interpretive key, to the authentic meaning of the petition. Moreover, as in Jesus' life, the petition, "lead us not into temptation," cannot be understood apart from "deliver us from evil." Together they form one complete petition.

When the Holy Spirit descended upon him at his baptism, Jesus undertook the salvific ministry that his Father now entrusted to him. This "embracing" is why his Father declares: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Mt. 3:17) Jesus, as the anointed Messiah, would be the Father's loyal, obedient Son by becoming the Father's saving suffering-servant. (see Is. 42:1 and Ps. 2:7)

Significantly, Jesus immediately “was *led* up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” (Mt. 4:1; Mark 1:12 states more strongly that “the Spirit immediately *drove* him into the wilderness.”) Is the Father, through the Holy Spirit, thrusting Jesus into the tempting hands of the devil? No. The very Spirit-filled commissioning of Jesus to be the salvific suffering-servant brings its own temptation, its own testing.

Fear of the suffering entailed in being the messianic servant naturally arises within Jesus’ humanity, and in the face of this fear, he is confronted with temptation. Would he not prefer his own messianic self-aggrandizement, a worldly exaltation that bears no pain? By fending off the devil’s temptations, Jesus refuses to seek worldly glory and prestige – the gaining of the whole world. He would remain true to the salvific ministry given to him by his Father.

Similarly, in response to Peter’s declaration that he is “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus specifies that for him to be such means that “he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” To which Peter protests that such cannot possibly be the case given who Jesus is. Jesus immediately rebukes Peter: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men.” (Mt. 16:16, 21-23)

Like Satan, Peter is tempting Jesus to be a Messiah other than the one his Father anointed him to be – the suffering-servant-Son. Because Jesus is really tempted, Peter is a hindrance. Peter’s words strike an all too tempting cord within Jesus’ own fearful heart and mind, a temptation that Jesus must reject.

Being the loyal and obedient suffering-servant-Son *leads* Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane. Here we find a stark contrast between Jesus and his apostles. His fateful hour has arrived and Jesus knows that his Father is leading him to the cross. This very “leading” is leading him into temptation, and so he prays to his Father that he be not led into temptation but that he be delivered from evil. Moreover, he exhorts his apostles to pray lest they too “enter into temptation.” (Mt. 26:41) Jesus, because of his prayer, will overcome his temptation. The apostles, not having prayed, will fall.

While he desperately wants to be delivered from the evil of the cross, Jesus ultimately rejects his own tempting heart – “My Father, if

this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” (Mt. 26:42)
Jesus knows that his Father sent him into the world for this very hour.
“Now is my soul troubled.” And yet “what shall I say? ‘Father, save
me from this hour?’ No, for this purpose I have come to this hour.”
(Jn. 12:27)



Jesus recognizes that his Father will not save him from his hour of death, but he trusts that his Father will deliver him from the evil of death that this hour brings.

In his crucifixion, Jesus enacts the Our Father. On the cross, Jesus hallows his Father's name. He establishes his Father's kingdom, for on earth, as he did in heaven, he has done his Father's will. On the cross he obtains the forgiveness of sins and forgives all who have sinned against him.

Yet here on the cross Jesus undergoes his final and gravest temptation. In fearful torment, Jesus cries out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46) Doing his Father's will has brought the dying Jesus to the moment when he feels that his Father has utterly abandoned him. In his apparent forsakenness, Jesus, nonetheless, trusts that his loving Father has not deserted him.

While the first verse of Psalm 22, which he speaks, is a cry of seeming despair, Jesus would proceed to acknowledge in that same psalm: "Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried, and were saved; to you they trusted, and were not disappointed." (Ps. 22:3-4) Doing the Father's will led Jesus into his final temptation, but this ultimate temptation leads him confidently to pray "deliver me from all evil."

His Father did deliver him, not by taking the cross from him, the death that Jesus so much feared, but by delivering him from the evil of death. He raised Jesus gloriously from the dead. In this definitive act of deliverance from evil, the Father everlastingly declares: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

What we now can see is the inherent conjoining of "lead us not into temptation" and "deliver us from evil." While the doing of his Father's will led him into temptation, yet Jesus firmly trusted that his Father would deliver him from death and raise him to the newness of everlasting life.

Thus, there is not only a present component to this petition, the present freeing from the temptation and the present deliverance, but also, and more importantly, an intrinsic eschatological component within this conjoined petition, the final liberation from all temptation in the definitive delivering from all evil. This final deliverance consists in resurrected glory, the reward for doing the Father's will. This

understanding is what Jesus wants us to grasp when he taught us to pray the Our Father.

In our wanting to hallow the Father's name, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit we received at our baptism, leads us to do the Father's will. The doing of the Father's will often, as followers of Jesus, leads us to take up our own individual crosses. Our crosses, as with Jesus, often fill us with dread – our anxieties over our marriages, families, work, health, the Church, and the world. Thus, doing the Father's will leads us into temptation – fear of the evils that might befall us and those we love.

When we pray “lead us not into temptation,” then, we are asking the Father to free us from the tempting foreboding that doing his will entails, and petitioning that he do so by delivering us from the evil that doing his will portends. Moreover, we make this petition believing that, even if evil does befall us in this world, we are assured that the reward of doing the Father's will leads, as in the case of Jesus, to our glory, a present glory, though one rejected by this sinful world, and the eternal fullness of glory that Jesus will bestow upon us at the end of time.

This deeper Christocentric understanding of the petition “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” undercuts, I believe, the more simplistic and ill-founded interpretations that call for a change in the Our Father, a change that would be pastorally disastrous. This Christic interpretation is more in accord with our lived experience and truer to the Gospel that we strive to follow.

Jesus, the Son, has taught us to pray every day that our Father would lead us not, in doing his will, into temptation, but that he would deliver us from the evil we fear and, in so doing, empower us, in the Holy Spirit, to hallow our Father's name here on earth and forever in heaven.

***Image:** *My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? (Eli, Eli lama sabachthani)* by James J. Tissot, c 1890 [Brooklyn Museum]. This is one of the 350 watercolors Tissot did in the series *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ (La Vie de Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ)*. Tissot made two trips to the Holy Land (1886–87 and 1890), taking inspiration there from the landscapes, clothing, architecture, and faces he saw.

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