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ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH

“THE LORD’S PRAYER---PART 3, ‘THY KINGDOM COME...’”

This summer I am using the sermon time for several weeks in a row to focus on the topic of the Lord’s Prayer. The Lord’s Prayer is the greatest prayer of all because it was composed by our Lord Jesus Christ! And He told us to pray it. And we pray it a lot, in all our services and in our personal prayers. That makes it especially important that we know what it means so that we aren’t just rattling off the words with no thought about what we are saying. Thus, this series of sermons.....

Today is the third homily in this series and we are looking at the third part of the prayer, two phrases in the prayer that go together-----“Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

With these words we are praying that God’s Kingdom will come to our world. And we are praying that the will of God would be done in our world as it is done in heaven.

In heaven, God’s will is done perfectly. We pray that it will be done perfectly here on earth, too. In heaven, God is King. We pray that His Kingdom will be established here as it is in heaven.

In a certain sense, God’s Kingdom already *has* come to earth. The Kingdom came here when the King of the Kingdom, Jesus of Nazareth, came to our world 2000 years ago. The Lord’s main message was---“The Kingdom of God is at hand.” “At hand” means “right here”. The Kingdom came here when the King came here.

But that first coming of the Kingdom wasn’t yet the final and complete victory of the Kingdom of God in our world. That is still in the future... Christ most definitely was victorious when He came here the first time, but the final victory still lies ahead and will happen when He comes the second time.....

Let me give you an historical illustration to help make this point clearer-----
In 1781, the American colonial armies, with the help of French forces, won a big victory over the British army at Yorktown, Virginia. That battle was the conclusive battle of the long Revolutionary War. And as the British commander, General Cornwallis, surrendered his army to George Washington, Cornwallis knew the war was lost. So he had his army band play, as he surrendered, a tune popular at that time: “The World Has Turned Upside Down.”

For, indeed, the world did turn upside down that day in 1781. The upstart little American colonies defeated the world’s greatest empire. Everything was topsy-turvy. But Yorktown was not actually the end of the Revolutionary War. The final end didn’t come until the Treaty of Paris was signed two years later in 1783—in that treaty, Britain recognized our independence and all fighting totally stopped. In between Yorktown and 1783 there still was some fighting. There were some small battles and there were soldiers killed on both sides. In one sense, the war was won in 1781. But the war wasn’t totally done until 1783.

It’s similar with the coming to our world of the Kingdom of God. When Christ came 2000 years ago He won a great victory, the decisive victory. But the war isn’t totally over

yet. His first coming parallels Yorktown. His second coming will finally and totally end the war with evil forever. The devil is still fighting God, there are still casualties---we know we're on the winning side, but it's not done yet.

After Yorktown, the Americans knew they would be independent. And after Christ's first coming, we know He is the winner of the old struggle with sin, death, and the devil. But the war isn't totally over yet. The Kingdom has come, but not yet totally, so we just keep on praying all the time----"Thy Kingdom come...."

And while we pray for, and wait for, that final victory of the King and the Kingdom, it is up to us to help spread God's Kingdom more in our world in the here and now.

God's Kingdom becomes more complete every time His will is done by us. Every baptism, every prayer, every good deed---the Kingdom gets stronger. Every time we resist temptation, the Kingdom gets stronger. Every time we work for God and for His Church, the Kingdom gets stronger. Yes, every time we do His will, the Kingdom gets stronger.

Giving our lives to the King, doing our best to live in obedience to the King strengthens His Kingdom in this world. So how strong His Kingdom is on earth now depends partly on us!

A day will come when the Kingdom will fully come, as we pray in the Lord's Prayer. That will be the day when the King comes a second time to our world. It will be His final victory and heaven and earth will become one. Then, of course, God's will shall be totally done on earth as it is in heaven.

We don't know when that will be, but it's obviously a day closer every day. So we keep praying, "Thy Kingdom come...", hoping it could be today. But whenever it happens, that's one prayer we know will be answered.

How can we make sure we're ready for that Kingdom to come? By fully living for it now, by not just praying "Thy will be done", but by doing whatever we can to do God's will. If we do that, by God's grace, we'll be ready when the King comes back.

So be diligent---every day live fully in God's will, seeking to be obedient to Him in thought, word, and deed.

On the Acropolis in Athens stands one of the very greatest architectural marvels of human history---the ancient temple called the Parthenon. It is maybe almost the ultimate in human artistic achievement, but did you know humans weren't the only creatures that worked on it? The ancient historian Plutarch tells about its construction in his writings. And he says that, in addition to the men working on it, there were many mules also involved. Their job was to haul the construction materials up the hill to the building site and then go back down for another load. Hard work---they had to be prodded along and sometimes driven with whips. Except for one mule, Plutarch says. This one special mule seemed to be totally dedicated to the building of a temple for the worship of the gods. (Don't blame the mule for dedication to pagan gods who didn't exist---how could he know any better?) This mule didn't need to be pushed or pulled or whipped or hollered at. He joyfully and quickly carried his load up the hill, turned right around, and trotted down to get his next load. In fact, if there were mules shirking on the job, Plutarch says this mule would go over and bray at them and nudge them to get them to get back to work! The people of Athens noticed this dedicated mule and were very impressed with him. And when the work was all over, he was given a beautiful green field to relax in for the rest of

his life, at public expense (Peter Green, The Parthenon, Newsweek Books, 1973, p. 78)

If only all of us were as dedicated to serving the real God as that mule was to serving non-existent gods. If only we were so diligent to doing God's will and strengthening His Kingdom in our world while waiting for Kingdom's fulfillment when the King comes back.

As we pray every day---"Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"---may we, with God's help and the power of the Holy Spirit, do God's will on earth now and strive for His Kingdom to be more and more present.....until the day when the King, our Lord Jesus Christ, appears in the sky and establishes His eternal Kingdom in its fullness.

