February reading: Emmett Fox, The Sermon on the Mount – The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father

This simple statement in itself constitutes a definite and complete system of theology. It fixes clearly and distinctly the nature and character of God. It sums up the Truth of Being. It tells all that man needs to know about God, and about himself, and about his neighbor. Anything that is added to this can only be by way of commentary, and is more likely than not to complicate and obscure the true meaning of the text. Oliver Wendell Holmes said: "My religion is summed up in the first two words of the Lord's Prayer," and most of us will find ourselves in full agreement with him.

Notice the simple, clear-cut, definite statement - "Our Father." In this clause Jesus lays down once and for all that the relationship between God and man is that of father and child. This cuts out any possibility that the Deity could be the relentless and cruel tyrant that is often pictured by theology. Jesus says definitely that the relationship is that of parent and child; not an Oriental despot dealing with groveling slaves, but parent and child. Now we all know perfectly well that men and women, however short they may fall in other respects, nearly always do the best they can for their children. Unfortunately, cruel and wicked parents are to be found, but they are so exceptional as to make a paragraph for the newspapers. The vast majority of men and women are at their best in dealing with their children. Speaking of the same truth elsewhere, Jesus said: "If you, who are so full of evil, nevertheless do your best for your children, how much more so will God, who is altogether good, do for you"; and so he begins his Prayer by establishing the character of God as that of the perfect Father dealing with His children.

Note that this clause which fixes the nature of God at the same time fixes the nature of man, because if man is the offspring of God, he must partake of the nature of God, since the nature of the offspring is invariably similar to that of the parent. It is a cosmic law that like begets like. It is not possible that a rosebush should produce lilies, or that a cow should give birth to a colt. The offspring is and must be of the same nature as the parent; and so, since God is Divine Spirit, man must essentially be Divine Spirit too, whatever appearances may say to the contrary.

Let us pause here for a moment and try to realize what a tremendous step forward we have taken in appreciating the teaching of Jesus on this point. Do you not see that at a single blow it swept away ninety nine percent of all the old theology, with its avenging God, its chosen and favorite individuals, its eternal hell fire, and all the other horrible paraphernalia of man's diseased and terrified imagination. God exists - and the Eternal, All-Powerful, All-Present God is the loving Father of mankind.

If you would meditate upon this acct, until you had some degree of understanding of what it really means, most of your difficulties and physical ailments would disappear, for they are rooted and grounded in fear. The underlying cause of all trouble is fear. If only you could realize to some extent that Omnipotent Wisdom is your living, loving Father, most of your fears would go. If you could realize it completely, every negative thing in your life would vanish away, and you would demonstrate perfection in every phase. Now you see the object that Jesus had in mind when he placed this clause first.

Next we see that the Prayer says, not "My Father," but "Our Father," and this indicates, beyond the possibility of mistake, the truth of the brotherhood of man. It forces upon our attention at the very beginning the fact that all men are indeed brethren, the children of one Father; and that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither chose nor unchosen," because all men are brethren.

Here Jesus in making his second point, ends all the tiresome nonsense about a "chosen race,: about the spiritual superiority of an one group of human beings over any other group. He cuts away the illusion that the members of any nation, or race, or territory, or group, or class, or color, are, in the sight of God, superior to any other group. A belief in the superiority of one's own particular group, or "herd," as the psychologists call it, is an illusion to which mankind is very prone, but in the teaching of Jesus it has no place. He teaches that the thing that places a man is the spiritual condition of his own individual soul, and that as long as he is upon the spiritual path it makes no difference whatever to what group he belongs or does not belong.

The final point is the implied command that we are to pray not only for ourselves but for all mankind. Every student of Truth should hold the thought of the Truth of Being for the whole human race for a least a moment each day, since none of us lives to himself nor dies to himself; for indeed we are all truly - an in a much more literal sense than people are aware - limbs of on Body.

Now we begin to see how very much more than appears on the surface is contained in those simple words "Our Father." Simple - one might almost say innocent - as they look, Jesus has concealed within them a spiritual explosive that will ultimately destroy every man-made system that holds the human race in bondage.