

A DEVOUT PRAYER

MADE BY SIR THOMAS MORE, KNIGHT,
AFTER HE WAS CONDEMNED TO DIE AND
BEFORE HE WAS PUT TO DEATH, WHO
WAS CONDEMNED THE THURSDAY THE
FIRST DAY OF JULY IN THE YEAR OF OUR
LORD 1535 AND IN THE 27TH YEAR OF
THE REIGN OF KING HENRY VIII, AND
WAS BEHEADED AT THE TOWER HILL
AT LONDON, THE TUESDAY FOLLOWING

Pater Noster. Ave Maria. Credo.

O HOLY TRINITY, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, three equal and coeternal Persons, and one Almighty God, have mercy on me, vile, abject, abominable, sinful wretch: meekly knowledging before thine High Majesty my long-continued sinful life, even from my very childhood hitherto.

In my childhood, in this point and that point, etc. After my childhood in this point and that point, and so forth by every age, etc.

Now, good gracious Lord, as thou givest me thy grace to knowledge them, so give me thy grace, not in only word but in heart also with very sorrowful contrition to repent them and utterly to forsake them. And forgive me those sins also, in which by mine own default, through evil affections and evil custom, my reason is with sensuality so blinded that I cannot discern them for sin. And illumine, good Lord, mine heart, and give me thy grace to know them, and forgive me my sins negligently forgotten, and bring them to my mind with grace to be purely confessed of them.

Glorious God, give me from henceforth thy grace, with little respect unto the world, so to set and fix firmly mine heart upon thee, that I may say with thy blessed apostle St Paul: *Mundus mihi crucifixus est et ego mundo. Mihi vivere Christus est, et mori lucrum. Cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo.* ²

Give me thy grace to amend my life, and to have an eye to mine end without grudge of death, which to them that die in thee, good Lord, is the gate of a wealthy life.

Almighty God, *Doce me facere voluntatem tuam. Fac me currere in odore unguentorum tuorum. Apprehende manum meam dexteram, et deduc me in via recta propter inimicos meos. Trahe me post te. In chamo et freno maxillas meas constringe, quum non approximo ad te.* ³

O glorious God, all sinful fear, all sinful sorrow and pensiveness, all sinful hope, all sinful mirth, and gladness take from me. And on the other side concerning such fear, such sor-row, such heaviness, such comfort, consolation and gladness as shall be profitable for my soul: *Fac mecum*

secundum magnam bonitatem tuam Domine. 4

Good Lord, give me the grace, in all my fear and agony, to have recourse to that great fear and wonderful agony that thou, my sweet Saviour, hadst at the Mount of Olivet before thy most bitter passion, and in the meditation thereof, to conceive ghostly comfort and consolation profitable for my soul.

Almighty God, take from me all vainglorious minds, all appetites of mine own praise, all envy, covetise, gluttony, sloth, and lechery, all wrathful affections, all appetite of revenging, all desire or delight of other folks' harm, all pleasure in provoking any person to wrath and anger, all delight of exprobatation or insultation against any person in their affliction and calamity.

And give me, good Lord, an humble, lowly, quiet, peaceable, patient, charitable, kind, tender, and pitiful mind, with all my works, and all my words, and all my thoughts, to have a taste of thy holy, blessed Spirit.

Give me, good Lord, a full faith, a firm hope, and a fervent charity, a love to the good Lord incomparable above the love to myself; and that I love nothing to thy displeasure, but everything in an order to thee.

Give me, good Lord, a longing to be with thee, not for the avoiding of the calamities of this wretched world, nor so much for the avoiding of the pains of purgatory, nor of the pains of hell neither, nor so much for the attaining of the joys of heaven, in respect of mine own commodity, as even for a very love to thee.

And bear me, good Lord, thy love and favour, which thing my love to thee (were it never so great) could not but of thy great goodness deserve.

And pardon me, good Lord, that I am so bold to ask so high petitions, being so vile a sin-ful wretch, and so unworthy to attain the lowest. But yet, good Lord, such they be, as I am bounden to wish and should be nearer the effectual desire of them, if my manifold sins were not the let. 5 From which, O glorious Trinity, vouchsafe of thy goodness to wash me, with that blessed blood that issued out of thy tender body, O sweet Saviour Christ, in the divers torments of thy most bitter passion.

Take from me, good Lord, this lukewarm fashion, or rather key-cold manner of meditation and this dullness in praying unto thee. And give me warmth, delight and quickness in thinking upon thee. And give me thy grace to long for thine holy sacraments, and specially to rejoice in the presence of thy very blessed body Sweet Saviour Christ, in the holy sacrament of the altar, and duly to thank thee for thy gracious visitation therewith, and at that high memorial, with tender compassion, to remember and consider thy most bitter passion.

Make us all, good Lord, virtually participant 6 of that holy sacrament this day, and every day make us all lively members, sweet Saviour Christ, of thine holy mystical body, thy Catholic Church.

Dignare, Domine, die isto sine peccato nos custodire. Miserere nostri, Domine, miserere nostri. Fiat misericordia tua, Domine, super nos quemadmodum speravimus in te. In te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in aeternum. ⁷
V. Ora pro nobis, sancta Dei Genitrix.
R. Ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi. ⁸

PRO AMICIS ⁹

ALMIGHTY GOD, have mercy on N. and N. (*with special meditation and consideration of every friend, as godly affection and occasion requireth*)

PRO INIMICIS ¹⁰

ALMIGHTY GOD, have mercy on N. and N., and on all that bear me evil will, and would me harm, and their faults and mine together, by such easy, tender, merciful means, as thine infinite wisdom best can devise, vouch-safe to amend and redress, and make us saved souls in heaven together where we may ever live and love together with thee and thy blessed saints. O glorious Trinity, for the bitter passion of our sweet Saviour Christ. Amen.

Lord, give me patience in tribulation and grace in everything to conform my will to thine: that I may truly say: *Fiat voluntas tua, sicut in coelo et in terra.* ¹¹

The things, good Lord, that I pray for, give me thy grace to labour for. Amen.

From *English Prayers and Treatise on the Holy Eucharist*, by Thomas More, edited by Philip E. Hallett (London: Oates and Washbourne, 1938).

¹ The 'Devout Prayer' which follows owes something, as Professor R. W. Chambers has pointed out, to Margaret Roper. In a letter to her from the Tower, her father writes: 'It doth me good here to rehearse your own words: Of his tender pity so firmly to rest our love in him, with little regard of this world, and so to flee sin and embrace virtue that we may say with St Paul, *Mihi vivere Christus est, et mori lucrum: et illud: Cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo* . . . you write these words of yourself: ... Our Lord send me the grace to amend my life and continually to have an eye to mine end, without grudge of death, which to them that die in God is the gate of a wealthy life...' (E. W., p. 1449). It will be seen that these words are incorporated in St Thomas's prayer. (Notes, translations, and editing by Philip E. Hallett, 1938.)

² The world is crucified to me and I to the world' (Gal. 6, 14). 'To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain' (Phil. 1, 21). 'I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ' (ibid. 23).

³ 'Teach me to do thy will' (Ps. 143, 10). 'Make me to run after thee to the odour of thy ointments' (Cant. 1, 3). 'Take thou my right hand and guide me in the straight path because of my enemies' (Passages from the Psalms). 'Draw me after thee' (Cant. 1, 3). 'With bit and bridle

bind fast my jaws when I come not near unto thee' (Ps. 31, 9).

⁴ Deal with me according to *thy* great goodness, O Lord' (cf. Ps. 118, 124).

⁵ hindrance.

⁶ Sharers in the virtue.

⁷ ' Deign, O Lord, to keep us on that day without sin. Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us. Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, as we have hoped in thee. In thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me not be confounded for ever' (From the *Te Deum*).

⁸ 'Pray for us, O holy mother of God.

⁸ That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.'

⁹ For my friends.

¹⁰ For my enemies.

¹¹ 'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.'