

Thomas More's Last Prayer

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 God
1535 (and in the twenty-seventh year of the reign
of King Henry the Eighth), and was beheaded at
the Tower Hill, at London, the Tuesday following.¹

*Pater Noster, Ave Maria, Credo.*²

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 knowledging³ before thine high Majesty my long-continued sinful life, even⁴ from my very childhood hitherto.

In my childhood, in this point, and that point, etc.

After my childhood, in this point, and that point, etc.

And so forth, by every age.

Now, good, gracious Lord, as Thou givest me Thy grace to knowledge⁵ 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,⁶ through evil affections and evil custom,⁷ 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 to knowledge them; and forgive me my sins negligently forgotten, and bring them to my mind with grace, to be purely⁸ confessed of them.

Glorious God, give me from henceforth the grace, with little respect unto the world, so to set and fix firmly my heart upon Thee that I may say with Thy blessed apostle Saint Paul, “The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”; “for me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. I long to be dissolved and to be with Christ.”⁹

Give me the grace to amend my life, and to have an eye to mine end without grudge of death,¹⁰ which to them that die in Thee, good Lord, is the gate of a wealthy life.¹¹

¹ This explanatory note appeared in Rastell's 1557 edition of More's *English Workes*. The critical edition of this prayer is in volume 13 of *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (Yale UP, 1976), pp. 228-31.

² *Pater Noster*: Our Father // *Ave Maria*: Hail Mary // *Credo*: “I believe,” the Creed

³ *knowledging*: acknowledging

⁴ *even*: right

⁵ *knowledge*: acknowledge

⁶ *default*: fault

⁷ *custom*: habit

⁸ *purely*: completely; genuinely

⁹ Here More quotes the Latin: *Mundus mihi crucifixus est, et ego mundo* [Gal 6:14]; *Mihi vivere Christus est, et mori lucrum. Cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo* [Phil 1:21, 23] – the very lines that Margaret quoted to him in her letter of 1534. In Letter 211, More responds to that letter from Margaret (which no longer survives): “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.*’ I beseech Our Lord, my dearly beloved daughter, that wholesome prayer that He hath put in your mind, it may like him to give your father the grace daily to remember and pray....” More goes on in that letter: “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.’” Although we do not have Margaret’s letter, Thomas More incorporated her words and prayers into this prayer.

¹⁰ *grudge of death*: reluctance to die

¹¹ *gate of*: gateway to // *wealthy*: happy, possessing well-being

Almighty God, “teach me to do your will. Make me run in the fragrance of your perfume. Take hold of my right hand, and lead me on the straight path, because of my enemies. Draw me after you. Bind my jaws with bit and bridle when I am not drawing near to you.”¹²

5 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 sorrow, such heaviness,¹³ such comfort, consolation, and gladness as shall be profitable for my soul, deal with me according to your great goodness, Lord.¹⁴

10 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 Savior, hadst at the Mount of Olivet before Thy most bitter Passion, and in the meditation thereof to conceive ghostly¹⁵ comfort and consolation profitable for my soul.

15 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 exprobration or insultation¹⁶ against any person in their affliction and calamity.

And give me, good Lord, an humble, lowly, quiet, peaceable, patient, charitable, kind, tender, and pitiful¹⁷ mind – with all my works, and all my words, and all my thoughts, to have a taste of Thy holy, blessed Spirit.

20 Give me, good Lord, a full faith, a firm hope, and a fervent charity – a love to¹⁸ Thee, good Lord, incomparably above the love to myself, and that I love nothing to Thy displeasure, but everything in an order to Thee.

25 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,¹⁹ as even for a very love to Thee.²⁰

And bear me, good Lord, Thy love and favor, which thing my love to Theeward²¹ – were it never so great – could not, but of²² Thy great goodness, deserve.

30 And pardon me, good Lord, that I am so bold to²³ ask so high petitions, being so vile a sinful wretch, and so unworthy to attain the lowest. But yet, good Lord, such they be, as I am bounden²⁴ to wish, and should be nearer the effectual²⁵ desire of them if my manifold sins were not the let.²⁶ From which, O

¹² Here again More quotes the Latin: *doce me facere voluntatem tuam* [Ps 143:10]. *Fac me currere in odore unguentorum tuorum* [Cant 1:3-4]. *Apprehende manum meam dexteram, et deduc me in via recta propter inimicos meos* [Ps 73:23; 27:11]. *Trahe me post te* [Cant 1:4]. *In camo et freno maxillas meas constringe, cum non approximo ad te* [Ps 32:9].

¹³ *heaviness*: heavyheartedness

¹⁴ More gives the Latin here, probably quoting from memory: *fac mecum secundum magnam bonitatem tuam, Domine* (Cf. Ps 119:124).

¹⁵ *ghostly*: spiritual

¹⁶ *exprobration*: reproaching // *insultation*: giving insults

¹⁷ *pitiful*: compassionate; pious

¹⁸ *to*: for

¹⁹ *in respect of mine own commodity*: as regards my own advantage

²⁰ *as even to a very love to Thee*: as simply for a true love for Thee

²¹ *to Theeward*: toward Thee

²² *but of*: except because of

²³ *to*: as to

²⁴ *bounden*: obliged

²⁵ *effectual*: efficacious

²⁶ *let*: hindrance

glorious Trinity, vouchsafe, of Thy goodness, to wash me with that blessed blood that issued out of Thy tender body – O sweet Savior Christ – in the divers²⁷ 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.

5 And give me Thy grace to long for Thine holy sacraments, and specially to rejoice in the presence of Thy very Blessed Body, sweet Savior 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.

10 Make us all, good Lord, virtually²⁸ participant of that holy Sacrament this day, and every day make us all lively members, sweet Savior Christ, of Thine holy mystical body, Thy Catholic Church.

“Deign, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin.

Have mercy on us, O Lord; have mercy on us.

May your mercy, O Lord, be upon us, just as we hope in you.

In you, O Lord, I hope; let me never be confounded.”²⁹

15 “Pray for us, O holy Mother of God,
that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.”³⁰

*Pro Amicis*³¹

20 Almighty God, have mercy on *N.* and *N.*, etc. (with special³² meditation and consideration of every friend, as godly affection and occasion requireth.)

*Pro Inimicis*³³

25 Almighty God, have mercy on *N.* and *N.*, etc., and on all that bear me evil will, and would³⁴ me harm; and their faults and mine together, by such easy, tender, merciful means as Thine infinite wisdom best can devise, vouchsafe 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 Savior Christ. Amen.

30 Lord, give me patience in tribulation, and grace in everything to conform my will to Thine, that I may truly say, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”³⁵

The things, good Lord, that I pray for, give me the grace to labor for. Amen.

35 (Edited by the Center for Thomas More Studies ©2016. For the original, see volume 13 of *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, Yale University Press.)

²⁷ *divers*: many different

²⁸ *virtually*: efficaciously; virtuously

²⁹ Here More quotes in Latin the last stanza of the hymn of thanksgiving, *Te Deum*, which incorporates Ps 123:3, Ps 33:22, Ps 31:2: *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.*

³⁰ Next he quotes these lines of the Marian prayer and hymn *Salve Regina*: *Ora pro nobis, Sancta Dei Genitrix, ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi.*

³¹ *Pro Amicis*: “For Friends”

³² *special*: particular

³³ *Pro Inimicis*: “For Enemies”

³⁴ *would*: wish

³⁵ His last Latin quotation is from the Our Father as given in Mt 6:10: *Fiat voluntas tua, sicut in caelo et in terra. “Fiat ... terra.”*