



Understanding “the Evil One” in the Lord’s Prayer

There is one prayer that is recited more than all others combine by Christians—it is the Lord’s Prayer—the Our Father or in Greek Πάτερ Υμῶν. It perhaps is the most important prayer in the Universe, because in this short prayer consists all we need to live both physically and spiritually. Also, it is the one prayer that Jesus Himself recited when describing the appropriate words and posture when praying. Today, I do not want to explain the entire Lord’s Prayer, but instead I want to focus on the last line of the prayer.



I hope and pray that you know that all of the New Testament was written in Greek. Jesus did not necessarily speak Greek—He probably spoke the language of the land, which was Aramaic. But 30 years after His resurrection, as the first books of the New Testament were being written, Paul, the Evangelists, and the rest of the authors, decided to write them in Greek, since Greek was the universal language of the intellectuals, and most who were able to read which, was a small percentage of the population.



In every Divine Liturgy we recite the Lord’s Prayer. In Greece the Lord’s Prayer is read in the original Greek exclusively. But here in the

United States, as of 1970, the Lord's Prayer is also recited in English, at least in most Churches. Before then, it was not allowed to be read in English, but the entire Divine Liturgy was prayed only in Greek. In fact, as I was growing up in Corona, I did not learn the Lord's Prayer in English until I was 11 years old, and then it was at Boy Scouts that I learned it, not at Church. I knew it in Greek from three years old, but not in English until 11—what a shame!



When the Orthodox Church came into the United States, there was already a universal translation of the Lord's Prayer in English, which was used by the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches. This same translation is the one that is recited every Sunday and written in all of our Liturgy books.



But there are mistakes in the translation—the Lord's Prayer that is recited is not an accurate translation. *Αλλά ρεισε υμασ απο του πονιρου.* We traditionally translate the passage as but deliver us from Evil. And yet, *του πονιρου* literally means the Evil One—it is genitive singular, denoting a person. If it were to describe evil, Christ would have said, *και ρεισαι υμασ απο πονιρια.*



As some of you have noticed, when I recite the Lord’s Prayer, I say, “and deliver us from the evil one.” I know that some of you have noticed, after all, our own parish council president was under the impression that somehow we, or I, changed two words in the bible. The other way that I know that you listened is because of the phone call I received from the acting Chancellor this week telling me that one of our own parishioners called him to complain about the way I recited the Lord’s Prayer with the, “Evil one.” Wow, that blows my mind.



When I arrived at Fayetteville, North Carolina, I followed a priest who served the community for 40 years—it was his first and primarily his only community. Some of the things he taught them were not Orthodox, but perhaps more important, he did not do other things that are part of Orthodox tradition including listening to confessions. As I began to teach this to the parishioners—some were offended—“what, we were not Orthodox until you came here? I never heard such things.” My response was always the same, “all I am teaching is what I have been taught at the seminary.” It took a while, but they came around—no one wants to hear that what they have been doing is wrong or inaccurate—especially when it comes to matters of faith.




Nevertheless, I wish to share with you some research on this topic. Metropolitan Timotheos of Corfu, in a recent paper presented to the IPCA European conference entitled “Evil and the Evil One” he writes:



“In the Lord's Prayer every believer prays to the Lord that He not allow him to fall into temptation, but that he be delivered from the Evil One. According to St. Maximus' interpretation, the temptations which man faces and from which he wishes to be delivered fall into two categories: the one category is made up of the temptations of pleasure, which offer some sort of satisfaction, and those that are painful, involuntary and drive away the passions. St. Maximus advises us to avoid the first category and to seek after the second. St. John Chrysostom in turn teaches us not to seek temptations and to be aware of our weakness. When, however, temptations do arise without our seeking them, we should face them courageously. St. John Chrysostom mentions further that the Lord does not say, deliver us from evil people, but from the Evil One, i.e. the devil, lest he teach us to be spiteful towards those who cause us sorrow; rather we should turn against the devil who goads them on when their will is weak. The devil is called the Evil One, in order to show that evil is not a natural condition but the result of a bad disposition.”



St. John Chrysostom, in his sermon on the Lord's prayer writes:

“Do you maintain that there is any prince of evil or not?  For if you say that there is not, I can prove to you from many statements, and those too of your teacher, that there is; but if you honestly allow that the **evil one** exists, then I shall speak in accordance with this belief.” And Peter said: “It is impossible for me to deny what my Teacher (Christ) has taught me. As a

result I know that the **evil one** exists, because my Teacher (Jesus Christ), who spoke the truth in all things, has frequently asserted that he exists. For instance, then, he acknowledges that he conversed with Him, and tempted Him for forty days **Mark 1:13**. ☞ And I know that He has said somewhere else, ‘If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself: how then is his kingdom to stand? **Matt. 12:26**. ☞ And He pointed out that He saw the **evil one** like lightning falling down from heaven. **Luke 10:18**. ☞ And elsewhere He said, ‘He who sowed the bad seed is the devil.’ **Matt. 13:39**. ☞ And again, ‘Give no pretext to the **evil one**.’ **Eph. 4:27**. ☞ Moreover, in giving advice, He said, ‘Let your yea be yea, and your nay nay; for what is more than these is of the **evil one**.’ **Matt. 5:37; Jas. 5:12**. ☞ Also, in the prayer which He delivered to us, we have it said, ‘Deliver us from the **evil one**.



This is my favorite

“And Deliver us from Evil. If you were to read this passage in the original Greek, the language of the New Testament, you would see that this petition literally means deliver us from the evil one--which tells us that we are in the middle of spiritual warfare.”

“That is from “The idiot’s Guide to Prayer.” The idiot’s guide to prayer.



So why do we say “Evil” instead of the evil one? Well, in my conversation with the acting Chancellor of the Archdiocese, I was informed

that in 2004, the Eparchal Synod agreed to a universal translation of the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. In this universal translation, they decided to use evil instead of the evil one—Why? Since just about every other Christian denomination uses evil, and we often find ourselves in ecumenical prayer services and other places where we pray together, and since this is the way we have been saying it for at least 40 years in the US, the synod decided to keep it the same, even if it is not the most accurate way of translating the end of the Lord's prayer. I wonder—is it our job as Orthodox Christians to become Americanized, or for us to make America Orthodox?



I have never insisted that any of you say the Lord's Prayer ending in the Evil one—I simply said it that way every liturgy. But since the Eparchal synod decided that this should be the way that it is said—then we should say it that way. I just want you to know that when we say evil—we are speaking about the Devil and the many ways that he attacks us—even on issues like this one. But I glorify God always that at least for a little while, and even if I caused problems in my ministry, our minds were on the more important topics of the world, like how we should say the Lord's Prayer, instead of focusing on materialistic things—like we often do.

May God bless all of you and keep you, and may He protect you from the Evil one and all his attacks, Amen.

