

Christian Prayer: September

Grace before meals

Grace before meals can be a mere formality. Grace can be the sort of prayer that gets prayer a bad name.

But when we come to a meal hungry or appreciative of what it is, and that (often) it has been prepared by others for our benefit and that (ultimately) it is a blessing (a grace) from God how proper it is that we should want to give thanks for the meal, for the giver and for those who have prepared it.

Food can be seen as just a traded commodity. But that it is to rob it of its most precious meanings and reduce it to just a thing. Food comes to us bearing the significance of all sorts of relationships and all sorts of meanings. Pausing for a moment of prayer before we eat – whether this is something we do as individuals or as a community – alerts us to this and helps our eating and drinking to be a more fully human action.

There are many graces that are commonly said before meals. Perhaps the most common is the following.

Bless us, O Lord,
and these, Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty.
Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

(NB Sometimes people substitute 'goodness' for 'bounty')

However sometimes prayers we commonly use need looking at to see whether they do give best expression to our faith. And sometimes they don't.

In this case, for example, we know God has already blessed us, not least through the food we have been given. And in recent years there has been a move to return to an older sense of 'blessing prayers' such that we do not pray asking God for further blessings on us or things, but rather - grateful for these blessings which we already have and enjoy - we bless God for the blessing that he has already given us.

The following prayer is more in-line with this revived (and ancient) understanding.

Blessed are you, almighty Father,
who give us our daily bread.
Blessed is your only begotten Son
who continually feeds us
with the Word of Life.
Blessed is the Holy Spirit
who blesses this table.
Blessed be God now and forever.
Amen.

