



Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue
in the City of New York

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Sunday, May 20, 2012

The Seventh Sunday of Easter: The Sunday after Ascension Day

*Festal Evensong
at 4pm*

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Victor Lee Austin, Ph.D.

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Sermon Series: "Lord, Teach Us to Pray"

*SERMON 15: "FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, AND THE POWER, AND THE GLORY, FOR
EVER AND EVER. AMEN."*

Are "the kingdom, and the power, and the glory" three things or one thing? The traditional wording suggests that they are one thing: we say, "For thine *is* . . ."—using the singular verb "is" to cover kingdom and power and glory. But in a contemporary version, you will hear: "the kingdom, the power, and the glory *are yours*"—the plural "are" suggesting God's kingdom and power and glory are three things. So which is it?

Certainly, for Americans at the beginning of the third millennium, kingdom and power and glory are different things. We don't have kingdoms, of course; and our experience of political rule is not of something particularly glorious. Indeed, political power often seems impotent and ineffective in relation to the matters it is addressing—not much in the way of power and certainly not glorious. Glory, on the other hand, we understand in terms of fame, something had by entertainment stars or sports stars, or by a corporate executive in a hoodie. Glory for us is not found in kingdoms or politics. And while our stars of glory have a certain economic power, they often seem to be but pawns—willing pawns but pawns nonetheless—in the hands of larger impersonal organizations and forces. True power seldom belongs to the politicians or the famous.

So for us, kingdom and power and glory are clearly different things, and even if they should happen to be held by one person—if there were a queen who had the most power in our land and who was also supremely glorious—still we could distinguish and separate out in our mind her kingdom from her power and from her glory.

When, then, we say that to God belongs kingdom and power and glory we are saying something about human reality. With respect to us, God's kingdom, power, and glory are three things that fundamentally relativize our kingdoms and power and glory. Let's consider glory. To say that "the glory" is God's is to say that there is no glory that is not God's. Now that is not to say that there is no such thing as human glory—nor, for that matter, to deny that there is truly the glory of a sunrise or the glory of a lion or the glory of birdsong or the glory of, indeed, the flower called "Morning glory." There is created glory, and there is the glory of human achievement, and there is that special human glory that lies in our capacity to recognize glory. But the point is: all these

created glories are real only insofar as they are relativized to the uncreated glory of God himself. “The glory” is and ever will be God’s, and created glory is glory only in relation to him.

Likewise with power: whatever power there may be in the world, it is God’s creation: from the power of gravity to the power of thought, God made it all. And “the power” is, and ever will be, not ours but God’s. Created power is power only in relation to him, and by itself it is nothing. Finally, the Scriptures teach us that all government in the world comes “from above,” from God. Jesus told Pilate that he would have no political authority over him had it not been given to him from above. There is a governor over all governors, a king over all kings, and his is the true politics by means of which human beings flourish.

Thus in the closing line of the Lord’s prayer we are reminded that no human realities are self-standing; that human beings are not autonomous; that we do not exist of our own making; that we and the whole universe, whatever glory and power and rule there may be—we do not have “the glory” and “the power” and “the kingdom.” The end of the prayer thus takes us back to the beginning, back to the posture assumed when we say “Our Father.”

When we say *Our Father, who art in heaven*, we boldly claim to be children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus, children who are able to call upon their heavenly Father in response to what he has already done for us in creating us, sending his Son to live and die and rise again, and giving us his Spirit who cries out within us *Abba, Father*.

When we say *Hallowed be thy Name* we offer adoration to God, recognizing that his Name is awesome and worthy to be praised and, in the silence beyond praise, to be adored simply in love.

When we ask *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven* we give voice to the authentically human longing for an end to lies and cruelty and violent hatred and every sort of evil and wickedness, the longing for human beings to live together as friends with each other and friends with God. This can only happen in God’s politics, when his rule becomes effective here on earth as it is in heaven; and its happening will require that each of us be willing to give up our life for the sake of others, as Jesus did when he prayed, “thy will be done.”

To ask God to *give us this day our daily bread* is to ask him to give us what we need to live, today, yes, but also the bread of the morrow, the bread of the last day, the bread of the kingdom. This request combines our worldly needs with our sacramental life, and asks God to make it so that each day will be a foretaste of heaven.

The words, *forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us*, comprise our prayer of penitence. We sorrow for our sins, while at the same time recognizing that God cannot forgive us if we have not already forgiven others. This hard teaching is about a hard reality—our ongoing struggle in this world, how we go on sinning and also being sinned against. It is our continuing task throughout life to offer forgiveness and to ask for forgiveness.

To pray that God *lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil* is to look to the end of our lives. We will be tempted, we will have trials, but may God save us from and through them. May God give us such grace that we are able to continue his forever, all the way to the end, that we never allow evil to take total control over us. With this petition the prayer brings us to the end of our lives.

And then, as I've said, we circle back to the beginning. For thine, dear Father, is the kingdom and the power and the glory. We say "is" because now, at last, we are looking to God again, and in God there are no distinctions of essence. With respect to God, there is no difference between his kingdom and his power and his glory. They are but one thing in God—namely, and simply, God himself. We look to him and say "thine is." And having looked at our earthly lives, and having prayed for the peace of the kingdom and the bread of the morrow and ongoing forgiveness as we slug along and deliverance from trials and ultimate deliverance from evil—having scanned through human life thus temporally, we turn back to God himself and see him as ever the same, without beginning or end or change or season. So he is; so one day may we see him; so may the number of his children (the citizens of heaven) increase, until with one united voice we all cry, *Our Father*.

Amen.