

18.1.68

Russian Liturgy
- Our Father.

"I do not pray for them only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn 17:20-21)

This was Christ's prayer after His last supper on the night before He suffered and died for us. He prayed for the unity of all who were to believe in Him, a unity with Him patterned on the unity of the three Persons in God. Today, the 18th January, we begin a week of prayer for Christian Unity - a week when Christians throughout the world pray together, and pray especially for the reclamation of that unity among themselves which is Christ's desire. For we've become more aware of the hindrance to Christ's message that Christian dis-unity is. We've begun to realise that our Christian brethren have more in common with us than, perhaps, we knew or cared; ~~that~~ more ~~than~~ than the world to which we've to bring the knowledge and love of Christ. Since Pope John's day and the Council

which he called together, we Catholics have been learning much about Ecumenism. There has been a great change in our official relations with other Christian churches - even as recently as 10 years ago it would have been unthinkable to many of us that in 1968 we'd be invited and encouraged to pray together with our Christian brethren for the unity of the Church. The change has, understandably and inevitably, upset and disturbed some of us: this itself should be an invitation to prayer during this week - prayer to understand what the Holy Spirit has been saying through the obvious holiness of Pope John and the work of our bishops gathered together in the Vatican Council: to understand what our fidelity and devotion to Christ demands of us in these days. This is a week of prayer, because genuine prayer is ^{our} ~~the~~ first requirement on the road to the re-union of ^{all} Christians; - a goal beyond the ability of merely human efforts. It has been our all too human failings as Christians that caused the now painful divisions among us in the first place. We need prayer to give us the conviction that Christian unity is a gift of God which our world sorely and urgently needs. When and how this unity may eventually be brought about we cannot know - it will need much work, thought, discussion, co-operation, action, for the differences between us are real and important, and

we cannot be untrue to our faith in Christ nor expect others to be so either. Prayer is not a substitute for all this work, but its necessary accompaniment. This union we seek and desire because it is Christ's will, will not be achieved unless each of us, united with Christ, prays for its coming, as and how He wills it. 'Christian unity will be attained when the Praying Christ has found enough Christian souls in all confessions in whom He Himself can truly pray to His Father for Unity.' We must pray if we are to "enjoy^{the} profound communion with the Father, the Word and the Spirit" which alone will give us "depth and ease in strengthening mutual brotherhood" - if we are to live according to the Gospel, which is for most of us ^{our} most practical way of 'fostering, and even practicing Christian unity'. To pray for Christian unity is to pray for other people and also for ourselves - ^{it is} to beg of God that he would fill our hearts with the Spirit of love and clarity, a empty them of all that pride and prejudice, arrogance and antipathy by which we hinder the fulfillment of his will for the unity of His people - ^{it is} to ask grace to know Christ in his brethren & his brethren in Him. Our most common prayer is Christ's own teaching - the Our Father. Let's reflect on this as we listen to it sung in ^{old Slavonic} the Russian Orthodox Liturgy. PRAYERS.