

13.10.77

5-6.78 ✓

21-10-82

I have Dailed (Broken
Bread 16)
Loving You Gently
Lord Our God
(Verse 16) ✓

Last Monday, I gave you some reflections (not my own)
on the Lord's Prayer, part of it. Today, from another section

OUR FATHER

4.1 - but first let us pray together...

... "As we forgive..." — do we? how do we? It's easy enough to say the words: and how many, literally millions of times must they be repeated every day, all round the world, in almost all the languages of the human family? This most Christian of all prayers makes such a great demand: we acknowledge it, yes, and quite sincerely, accept to pray to God in these terms, wishing and hoping that we might really live up to what we say. Yet, when you think of it, it's quite frightening to ask God's forgiveness in terms of how we ourselves forgive others. It's all right when the "others" are remote, or their sin not directly affecting us. But close to home? When you're personally involved? And it's easy to see other Christians, sincere people too, who seem not to be forgiving, who find it very hard to forgive some one thing, or person. So then don't let's be too critical of others but of ourselves: to have accepted to pray in those words of the Lord's Prayer is already a grace — so many people around us simply don't accept that one ought and needs to forgive and receive forgiveness. It may seem unfair that we're expected to be forgiving in an unforgiving world, and at the same time criticised when we don't live up to this high demand: but again, unlike much of the world we live in, that mustn't become an excuse for not trying, an excuse just to go along with lower ideals, an easier way, a standard of behaviour in which God has no part. Mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation aren't options, occasional good things for a Christian, but very much part of what it entailed in being a Christian in the first place. So,

for instance what happens when there's a public display of vindictiveness against a man, or even spite or hatred? We who are Christians are part of the society we live in, sharing its sinfulness and its being sinned against. We ought rightly to rage against injustice and wrong-doing, as the prophets of old did, as Christ Himself did. But then there's that other touching scene of Christ being forced into a dilemma, as his opponents tried to do: a clear law and a person clearly caught in violation of it, and a clear penalty laid down. 'Do you flout the law or criticise its harsh penalty?' — that was the implied question. Jesus simply said: Let him who is himself sinner among you cast the first stone of punishment — and at least that jury and judges were honest ^{enough} with their own consciences, and the accused and condemned woman did not receive her deserved penalty. It was then Jesus said He would not condemn her, and told her to go and not sin again. And surely no Christian can or ought to forget that it was through the forms of legality, there to protect and provide justice, that Jesus Himself was condemned to death and brutally tortured and killed. In certain moods of popular feeling or opinion it's inconvenient to say some things, even, maybe, to tell the truth — like the tale of the emperor's clothes. But how, in this imperfect world, with its imperfect people, is there to be any justice worthy of the name, worthy of human brotherhood, if there's not any charity, mercy, forgiveness? What penalty can ever really atone for even the smallest sin against God or against a fellow human being? Pray and think about it: and let's pray again in those words taught us by Christ Himself, as

'Our Father', by Lucien Deiss [De Dance our Songs 2']

we listen to this version of the Lord's Prayer: MUSIC (from St Francis)

PRAYERS ('Stade' p25-27)

It's strange for us now to think how the official church once condemned the ideas of liberty, equality + fraternity, proclaimed in aid by the French Revolution: or at least, the manner and practice of their proclamation. Today the same ideas are accepted, but they're not necessarily any better practiced than they were then. There's been, in this past quarter-century, a great cry for liberty, which is still going on: equality has more recently come to the fore as a cry. There's a great desire, and demand, for a more equal sharing of the world's wealth, at present so unevenly divided and (it seems) growingly more so. The dream of a society of free and equal people has great attraction today, and understandably so when you see the mess and injustices in so much of the world. But how can we abolish greed, sin, exploitation, corruption among free human beings? Without other oppressions, injustices, no way has yet been found in practice, whatever about theory. Yet the dream persists. But how would it be if there was real fraternity as well, for every one? Love of other people, despite and beyond their sins, is the only road to that — a society in which there would be mercy + forgiveness. In principle, there already is such a society, among those ^{for} who ^{Christ} stand in their brother — a society struggling to be, and to become one with every man and woman. You and I who pray 'Our Father' have also to live by "forgiving those who sin against us" and trusting God's mercy to forgive and correct our failure to do so so often.