



BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL **Matthew 6, 5-14**

The Bible refuses to search for the origin of evil. The Old Testament describes situations considered intolerable by God or the prophets, gestures or attitudes, the outrage in response to evil and the struggle that God takes up with us (and for us) as well as laws that have lost none of their relevance. The fight begins inside us with a struggle against indifference, fear, weariness . . . and sometimes with a desire for revenge and punitive violence.

Evil exists in all forms: the list is long and reminiscent of the commandments given at Sinai. We also find in the Psalms all the organs of speech that can contribute to evil: the mouth, the lips, the tongue. Two forms are particularly horrible: slander and false accusation. This destroys human relationships, as it refuses to accept the humanity of the other.

In the first place: it is the word that kills. To say bad things about someone is to wish him misfortune or death (Psalms 41.6). To falsely accuse a defenseless person in a trial is a crime. (Isaiah 32.7).

The victims of torture are at the heart of our thoughts and our prayers as we watch over the night. Torture practiced in most of the countries of our Earth is absolute “evil.” It crushes the dignity of the ones who are tortured.

But how do we figure out the source of evil in humans? Where is it rooted?

To try to find the origin of evil is to immediately fall into the trap of the accusation: it is not me, it is the other. Any evil act is an offense against God and someone else as well: *“My faults are always before me, but it’s against you and you alone that I have sinned. That which is evil in your eyes, I have done it.”* (Psalms 50-51.5). There is, in us, an echo, complicity that is certain. The oldest rabbis (like in Qumran) questioned humanity’s “penchant for evil.” According to Genesis: to want to master everything, to give away nothing, from which jealousy, taking the place of another, taking place of God, is to take over the right to live and die over others.

What does the New Testament tell us?

Judaism has long been linked to the love of God and the love of neighbor: Leviticus 19, 18 *You will love your neighbor as yourself, as it is me, your God.* And it is the scribe that in Luke 10.27 (and also Mark 12.32) that ties together the two commandments.

Jesus will thus go away from precise teachings of the law and show how the logic of the heavenly kingdom surpasses them. The famous law “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” (Leviticus 24, 29) becomes obsolete; it’s not about paying back evil for evil but instead the opposite – to do good in return for evil: *“And I tell you, do not resist an evil person.”*

If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek as well.” (Matthew 5.39-41). Jesus is at the forefront of the Pharisees search on the unification of the law; he doesn’t invent the link between the love of God and the love of neighbor. The novelty of the Gospel is that Christ identifies himself with the neighbor, and the neighbor becomes the crucified, the condemned slave, the accursed of God, the one we are close to (Luke 10).

Last year we meditated, during Nuit des Veilleurs, on loving our enemies, faced with the evil perpetrated by a dictator or a torturer. We wished that he realizes that his action is an abomination, and that the hate or the cruel indifference leaves his spirit. That he converts and changes the way he considers the victim. It’s not about taking revenge on the dictator or the torturer, but to do all that we can to remedy his evil, without hate or anger. This is neither to approve of his behavior, nor to diminish the horror of his acts; the only weapon that we have against the evil, we Christians and members of ACAT, is prayer and love.

But deliver us from evil. We find this quotation in the **Lord’s Prayer** that summarizes all the depth of the Gospel. It is a prayer said by all the Christians of all faiths, in all situations: community prayer and personal prayer.

We see that the **Lord’s Prayer** highlights 7 requests, 3 aimed at our other fight against Evil.

“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from Evil.” In other words, most of the intercessions of this prayer concern the struggle against Evil!

The seventh request, *“But deliver us from evil,”* could appear redundant compared to the previous *“lead us not into temptation.”* Do not let us enter into hardship. Let us not be locked in trial or temptation. Let us leave from the evil of which we are prisoners. This request is composed of two parts that, in reality, express the same request, first in a negative way and then in a positive way. Without God’s intervention, we have very little chance of escaping from evil.

- **What does the word “evil” mean?**

In ACAT, the eradication of “evil,” of torture and of abuse and of capital punishment has been an objective since the founding of the association, but we must recognize that the goal has yet to be achieved. We observe the normalization of violence: the fear of terrorism, various feelings of insecurity...The culture of violence in the cinema, on television, in games, on the Internet, scenes of torture influence us and can even take hold sway over the public.

Evil undermines humanity. It is in each of us each time that we dominate the other and move away from God. The word “evil” in Greek can be represented as a masculine “devil” as well as a genderless evil. The story of temptations in the Gospel (Matthew 4, 1-11, but also 13, 19, and 39) prefers the masculine form, designated by Matthew, imbued with Jewish culture, and also calls evil Satan, the great opponent to God’s plans. **Evil comes from a separation from God**, Jesus tells us. The goodness, the love, the peace and the joy that we all search are in God; while living without God, while establishing my own norms for my life and those of others, I let evil settle in me, in my thoughts, in my desires, and dominate me.

- **What is deliverance?**

The deliverance of which Matthew's Gospel speaks, saying "*but deliver us from evil*" concerns our daily experience here and now; this deliverance already flourishes in the figure of Jesus and the history of his life: when He heals the sick, expels the demons, lives in communion with the marginalized, when He brings people back to life, forgives sins, feeds the hungry.

"Deliverance is about the well-being of the whole person. We ask God to deliver us from the *devil* (ecumenical translation of the Bible), from evil itself, from this diffuse cluster of destructive words, acts, and desires that bind us and constantly resurface. Jesus did not forbid evil but instead invites us to work on our conversion so that we no longer have the idea or the desire to do evil. Asking God to pull us away from the devil, is more than merely requesting that we do not commit too many sins or make too many errors in our lives. Instead, this is to ask God to belong to him entirely and give us true freedom." (*in Our Father, A Summary of all the Gospel. A Theology for Today by Louis Perrot. Editions de Paris.*)

- **"But deliver us from evil"**

The "*but*" that opens this expression invites us to read this last plea – that of Matthew – on the positive side of the previous demand concerning temptation. To free us, it is God that is the essential force, it is Him that we resort to at the end of **the Lord' prayer**. The love of God accompanies us always, it supports us and gives us life.

The prayer does not give the devil the last word, it ends with a positive mention of God, of his greatness, of his power "for yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory of God, now and forever." **AMEN.**

It is Christ that fulfills the promises of the Scriptures, he that already during his public life defined himself as the "Resurrection and the life" (John 11, 25). Christ, as Paul affirms in his letter to the Romans 8, 2, "frees us from the law of sins and of death" from which they had until then been slaves. Death is vanquished by Christ, and evil is destroyed.

We recite the Lord's Prayer each day and, especially during our celebrations at ACAT. And why not this year, for the 14th Nuit des Veilleurs, use the prayer that Jesus gave us as a model for our vigils?

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