

Again and Again: How Much Mercy Do I Need?

Theme

In asking for the Lord's mercy we request the Kingdom, as reflected by several facets of the litanies. Again and again the litanies ask for the peace of God, without which we cannot inherit the Kingdom.

Outline

Lord, have mercy
Litany of Peace
Little Litanies
Litany of Supplication
Litany Before the Lord's Prayer
Litany of Thanksgiving

Scripture References

Deuteronomy 8.17-18
Psalm 31.1–2 (32.1–2)¹
Psalm 122 (123)
Psalm 146.7 (147.7)
Joel
Isaiah 66.13
Jeremiah 36.7 (29.7)
Lamentations 3.22–23

Scripture References Continued

Matthew 5.9
Luke 2.14
Romans 14.17
Ephesians 2.13–18
Ephesians 5.1–2
Philippians 4.7
Hebrews 4.16
James 5.16

Glossary

Litany: a series of petitions recited by the clergy with a set response by the faithful.

Quote

To beg for God's mercy is to ask for his kingdom, that kingdom which Christ promised to give to those who seek for it, assuring them that all things else of which they have need will be added unto them.

— St Nicholas Cabasilas *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*

Resources

Commentary on the Divine Liturgy; St Nicholas Cabasilas
The Divine Liturgy: A Commentary in Light of the Fathers; Priestmonk Gregorios
The Heavenly Banquet: Understanding the Divine Liturgy; Fr Emmanuel Hatzidakis

¹ References from the Greek Bible; differing Hebrew Bible references are noted in parentheses.

The Priest's Silent Prayers of the Litanies: Litany of Supplication

St John Chrysostom

O Lord God Almighty, who alone art holy, who dost accept a sacrifice of praise from those who call upon thee with their whole heart: Receive also the prayer of us sinners, and lead us to thy holy altar, and enable us to offer unto thee gifts and spiritual sacrifices for our sins and for the ignorance of the people, and make us worthy to find grace in thy sight, that our sacrifice may be acceptable unto thee and that the good Spirit of thy grace may rest upon us and upon these gifts here spread forth and upon all thy people:

St Basil

O Lord, our God, who hast created us, and hast brought us into this life, who hast shown us ways of salvation, graciously bestowing upon us the revelation of heavenly mysteries: Thou art he who hath appointed us to this ministry by the power of thy Holy Spirit; graciously grant us, therefore, O Lord, to be servitors of thy new covenant, ministers of thy holy mysteries. Receive us who draw near to thy holy altar, according to the fulness of thy mercy, that we may be worthy to offer unto thee this rational and bloodless sacrifice for our own sins, and for the ignorance of the people, which do thou receive upon thy holy, most heavenly and spiritual altar as a savour of sweetness, and send down upon us in return the grace of thy Holy Spirit. Look upon us, O God, and behold this our worship, and receive it as thou didst receive the gifts of Abel, the sacrifices of Noah, the burnt-offerings of Abraham, the priestly offices of Moses and Aaron, the peace-offerings of Samuel. Even as thou didst receive at the hands of thy holy apostles this true worship, so also do thou in thy goodness, O Lord, receive from the hands of us sinners these gifts: that, having been accounted worthy to minister at thy holy altar, we may receive the recompense of wise and faithful stewards, in the fearful day of thy just requiting:

Through the compassions of thine only-begotten Son, with whom thou art blessed, together with thine all-holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

The Priest's Silent Prayers of the Litanies: Litany before the Lord's Prayer

St John Chrysostom

Unto thee we commend our whole life and our hope and we beseech thee and pray thee and supplicate thee: Vouchsafe us to partake of thy heavenly and dread mysteries of this sacred and spiritual table, with a pure conscience unto forgiveness of sins, unto pardon of transgressions, unto communion of the Holy Spirit, unto inheritance of the kingdom of heaven, unto boldness toward thee, not unto judgment nor unto condemnation:

St Basil

O our God, the God of salvation, do thou teach us how we may worthily give thanks unto thee for thy benefits, which thou hast ever bestowed and yet dost bestow among us. Do thou, O our God who receives these gifts, purify us from every defilement of flesh and spirit: teach us to perfect holiness in thy fear, that we, receiving a portion of thy holy things in the witness of a pure conscience toward thee, may be made one with the holy Body and Blood of thy Christ and that, having received them worthily, we may have Christ abiding in our hearts and may become a temple of thy Holy Spirit. Yea, O our God, cause also that none of us may be guilty of these thy dread and heavenly mysteries or infirm in soul or in body through an unworthy partaking; but enable us, even to our last breath, worthily to receive a portion of thy holy things, as a support upon the road to life eternal and as an acceptable defense at the fearful judgement seat of thy Christ. Then we also together with all the saints who, in all the ages, have been well-pleasing unto thee, may be made partakers of thine everlasting good things, which thou hast prepared for those who love thee, O Lord.

And vouchsafe, O Master, that with boldness and without condemnation we may dare to call upon thee, heavenly God, as Father and to say:
Our Father...

The Priest's Silent Prayers of the Litanies: Litany of Thanksgiving

St John Chrysostom

We give thanks unto thee, O Master who loves mankind, Benefactor of our souls, for that thou hast vouchsafed this day to feed us with thy heavenly and immortal mysteries. Make straight our path; establish us all in thy fear; guard our life; make firm our steps; through the prayers and intercessions of the glorious Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary and of all thy saints:

St Basil

We give thanks unto thee, O Lord our God, for the participation in thy holy, immaculate, immortal and heavenly mysteries, which thou hast given unto us for the welfare and sanctification of our souls and bodies. Do thou, the same Master of all, grant that the communion of the holy Body and Blood of thy Christ maybe be for us unto faith unashamed, unto love unfeigned, unto increase of wisdom, unto healing of soul and body, unto the turning aside of every adversary, unto the fulfillment of thy commandments, and unto an acceptable defense at the fearful judgement seat of thy Christ:

For thou art our Sanctification, and unto thee we ascribe glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages.

Extended Edition E-mail

Scriptures References²

Leviticus 10.1–3 NETS

And when the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, each took his fire-pan [censer], they placed fire on it and threw incense on it and offered before the Lord strange fire such as the Lord had not ordered them. And fire came out from the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. And Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the Lord spoke, saying,

‘Among those who are near me

I will be shown holy,

and in the whole congregation

I will be glorified.’ ”

And Aaron was shocked [or silent].

Deuteronomy 8.17–18 NETS

Do not say in your heart, “My strength and the mastery of my hand have produced for me this great power.” And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you strength to produce power—and so that he may uphold his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as today.

Esther C.10 NETS³

Hear my [Mordecai’s] petition, and have mercy upon your allotment [or inheritance]; turn our mourning into feasting, that we may live and sing hymns to your name, O Lord; do not silence the mouth of those who praise you.”

² Bible Versions:

ESV: English Standard Bible (a revision of the Revised Standard Version [RSV] used in our Gospel Book on the altar)

OSB/SAAS: Orthodox Study Bible / St Athanasius Academy Septuagint

LES: Lexham English Septuagint (a diplomatic translation of the Vatican Codex)

LEB: Lexham English Bible (From Hebrew OT, and Greek NT)

NET: New English Translation (with extensive translation notes) (not related to the NETS)

NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (an academic translation of the Septuagint, in these quotes proper names have been standardized)

³ Section C is after chapter 4. (Other versification systems exist for Esther, but they’re just as confusing. ESV numbers this verse 4.17k or 13.16 depending on which version of the ESV.) When the Blessed Jerome translated Esther from Hebrew to Latin, he put all the additions found in the Greek text but not the Hebrew at the end of the work. Later on when chapters and verses were added, they were numbered without regard to the proper order of the text.

*Tobit 3.2 NETS (shorter version)*⁴

You are righteous, O Lord,
and all your deeds
and all your ways are mercy and truth,
and with true and righteous judgment
you judge forever⁵.

Psalms 31.1–2 NETS

Pertaining to David. Of understanding.
Happy are those whose lawless behavior was forgiven
and whose sins were covered over.
Happy the man whose sin⁶ the Lord will not reckon,
and in his mouth there is no deceit.

Psalms 122 (123) NETS

An Ode of the Steps.
To you I lifted up my eyes,
you who reside in the sky.
Look, as slaves' eyes look to their masters' hands,
as a maid's eyes to her mistress' hands,
so our eyes look to the Lord our God
until he has compassion on us.
Have mercy upon us, O Lord; have mercy upon us,
because we have more than our fill of contempt;
our soul has had more than its fill.
Reproach is for those who are prosperous,
and contempt for the proud!

Psalms 134.6–7 (135.6–7)

Whatever the Lord wanted he did,
in the sky and on the earth,
in the seas and in all deeps.
Bringing up clouds from the earth's end,
he made lightnings into rain,

⁴ Two versions of Tobit exist, while the shorter version is a revision of the longer version, it has the most circulation among Greek manuscripts. Oddly, for this verse the shorter version is longer than the long version.

⁵ Longer version reading: "You judge the age."

⁶ Two Greek words for sin translate three Hebrew words for sin. Cf. quote in the talk.

he who brought out winds from his storehouses.

Psalms 135 (136) Refrain NETS

Because his mercy is forever.

Psalms 146.7–9 (147.7–9) NETS

Lead off to the Lord with acknowledgment;
make music to our God on a lyre,
to him who cloaks the sky with clouds,
to him who prepares rain for the earth,
to him who makes grass grow on mountains,
giving to the animals their food
and to the young of ravens that call on him.

Sirach 5.4–7 NETS

Do not say, "I sinned, and what has happened to me?"
For the Lord is long-suffering.
Do not become fearless concerning atonement,
to add sin upon sins.
And do not say, "His compassion is great;
it will atone for the multitude of my sins";
for mercy and wrath are with him,
and upon sinners will his anger rest.
Do not wait to turn back to the Lord,
and do not postpone it day after day;
for suddenly the wrath of the Lord will go forth,
and in the time of punishment you will perish.
A warning against presuming on the Lord's mercy and long suffering.

Sirach 7.36 ESV

In all your affairs, remember the end of your life,
and then you will never sin.

Joel 1.2–4 ESV

Hear this, you elders;
give ear, all inhabitants of the land!
Has such a thing happened in your days,
or in the days of your fathers?
Tell your children of it,
and let your children tell their children,

and their children to another generation.
What the cutting locust⁷ left,
the swarming locust has eaten.
What the swarming locust left,
the hopping locust has eaten,
and what the hopping locust left,
the destroying locust has eaten.

Joel 1.9–10 ESV

**The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off
from the house of the LORD.**

The priests mourn,
the ministers of the LORD.
The fields are destroyed,
the ground mourns,
because the grain is destroyed,
the wine dries up,
the oil languishes.

Joel 2.12–14 ESV

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD,
“return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
and rend your hearts and not your garments.”
Return to the LORD your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
and he relents over disaster.
Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering
for the LORD your God?

⁷ Various translations translate these terms differently. It’s been a trend among newer versions to translate them as various developmental stages (instars) or varieties of locust. Older ones tend to translate them as different types of insects. Translations from the LXX translate the last term as a type of fungal infection, but vary on which one (OSB red blight, LES mildew, NETS rust). The NET throws its hands up in the air and just transliterates the Hebrew words, but compensates with detailed notes. One resource I read on this states that the identification of the Hebrew or Greek words is not much better than guesswork. Given that, I used the ESV here because I like the rhetorical form of the differing types of locust.

Isaiah 49.15 NETS

Will a mother forget her child so as not to have mercy on the descendants of her womb?
But even if a woman should forget these, yet I will not forget you, said the Lord.

Isaiah 66.13 NETS

As a mother will comfort someone,
so also I will comfort you,
and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 36.7 (29.7) NETS

...[S]eek for peace of the land⁸ into which I have exiled you there, and pray to the Lord
on their behalf, because in their peace there will be peace for you.

Lamentations 3.22–23 ESV⁹

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

Daniel 3.90 NETS

All who worship the Lord,
bless the God of gods;
sing hymns, and acknowledge him,
for his mercy is forever.

Matthew 5.9 ESV

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Luke 2.14¹⁰

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men.

⁸ Translations from Hebrew use 'city'.

⁹ While this verse is in the NETS, it's not in other versions of the LXX (LES and OSB). ESV translates the first line from the Syriac rather than the Hebrew which reads "The steadfast love of the Lord is why they are not cut off (i.e., we do not cease).

¹⁰ Marginal reading of the ESV. The main text prefers the textual variant "...peace among those with whom he is pleased!", but our Liturgy uses the version above. For more information on textual variants of Luke (although not this phrase) see Fr Stephen De Young's blog [post](#).

Romans 14.17 ESV

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 2.14–17 ESV

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession¹¹, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

Ephesians 2.13–18 ESV

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both [Jews and the nations] one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Ephesians 5.1–2 ESV

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Philippians 4.4–7 ESV

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 4.16 ESV

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

¹¹ Note the connection with the pre-Christian use of 'gospel' which we discussed previously.

James 1.16–18 ESV

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

James 5.16 ESV

The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Quotes

The man who is discontented with his lot in life cannot have peace within him, but only he who is grateful and “in every thing gives thanks”¹² according to the teaching of the blessed Paul. Nor will he have a pure understanding, for a pure understanding is impossible without confession. So that he who prays in peace must first have a thankful and confessed soul. And further, the very petition which they make shows them to be in a state of thankfulness and confession. For their petition is for mercy. This is indeed the supplication of the condemned who have no possible defense and no justification to put forward; they make this one last appeal to the judge, counting on obtaining what they ask not because it is just, but because of his love for mankind. These people in fact bear witness to the judge of his great goodness and mercy and to themselves of their own iniquity; the first is an act of gratitude and the second one of confession.

— St Nicholas Cabasilas *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*

This intercession is appropriate, since we should not ask for anything except for mercy, as we have neither boldness nor access to offer anything as our own...So, as sinners and condemned through sin we cannot, nor dare, say anything to our loving Master, except ‘have mercy’”

—St Symeon of Thessalonica as quoted in *Heavenly Banquet*

¹² 1 Thessalonians 5.18