

The Daily Bread

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Two things I ask of you, Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, "Who is the Lord?" Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.

(Proverbs 30:7-9 NIV)

What do we mean when we pray "Give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11)? Isn't there an emphasis we are ignoring?

The above prayer of the unknown man, Agur, breathes deep humility and human realism before God. It focuses on what is essential in life before death. One temptation is to repeat it as a request for me alone, as an individual prayer, humble and wise, conscious of my personal imperfection and of the danger of denying and dishonoring God in affluence or in

poverty: Keep far from me, O Lord, the worst evils, falsehood and lack of bread. Another temptation is to desire that it be repeated by others, by the corrupt and those in power, because the conversion to integrity and personal modesty would be the real solution for social maladies. Both usages are superficial middle-class morality, with no understanding of systemic evil. The one billion hungry people on our planet do not exist because of lack of food, but due to an extremely unjust distribution of resources, knowledge, and power.

Agur speaks of more than the morals of individuals and elites. Proverbs is practical wisdom. It is a record of people's experience of marching every day with God. Stumbling and recovering, the people learned that God is not a domestic deity, but one who pays attention to the cries of the needy and the things that cause those cries. "Who is the Lord?" is the question of Pharaoh, who denies God and thereby continues justifying his oppressing system (Exodus 5:2). When God acts, liberation happens. Pharaoh is defeated. When God acts, hunger is defeated. Food is granted to everyone

in a new system. Thus, the avoiding of falsehood is not personal morality, but it is the attitude of defending one's neighbor's right. It is the warranty of the social fabric to protect the impoverished. It is people's autonomous organization to avoid the return of oppression. "Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another. Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord. Do not defraud or rob your neighbor. Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight" (Leviticus 19:11-13 NIV).

Daily bread means the balance of needs and supply, of production and access to healthy food. Social unbalance and the attempt of hiding it are offensive to God. It's a lie to speak of a "modern" society when the citizens don't control the wealth distribution nor partake in the decision making power. Daily bread means the bread needed just for today plus the trust that God will provide for the future, as he provided the manna in the desert. But to accumulate more than we need is wrong. "Gather of it every man as much as he should eat" (Exodus 16:16 NASB).



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on reducing hunger and poverty. More effective assistance translates into more progress for the world's nearly 1 billion chronically hungry people. Contact PHP.php@pcusa.org to learn more about the Offering of Letters.