

## The Lord of the Darn Settee!

Pope Francis announced the other day that he had given approval for a change in the wording of the Lord's Prayer. Since the earliest times, in a prayer directed to God, we have appealed to him to "Lead us not into temptation". This is, in effect, a heretical proposition: God cannot lead us into temptation, that is very much the occupation of Satan and to imply that God and Satan are one and the same is, of course, heretical in the extreme. But it is there in every language. I grew up, as many of you did, with the Latin Mass and the expression is the same there: *ne nos inducas in tentationem*. Pope Francis approved the change for the Italian version which also speaks about leading us into temptation. In every language it is the same or similar, for instance the French has "do not submit us to temptation". Now scholars tell us that this wording is due to an early error of translation and on the strength of this Pope Francis has given approval for a change to "do not allow us to fall into temptation".

Of course, it won't make the slightest difference. Nothing will change. Prayers like the Our Father are so imprinted, so hard wired into our brains, so branded into our memories that we will never be able to switch. There have been many attempts to update the Lord's Prayer but none have really stuck. So an ill-fated attempt some decades ago to change 'forgive us our trespasses' to 'forgive us our debts' never really caught on.

It is interesting how these prayer expressions become indelibly imprinted from an early age when many of the words don't make sense to us with the limited vocabulary of the child. If you go into a class of infants in a primary school during their prayer time it is always interesting and instructive to hear how they try to make sense of the traditional prayers they have been taught but which contain unfamiliar expressions. The Hail Mary is a case in point. You get 'Hail Mary full of grapes', 'blessed art Thou a monk swimming' and 'blessed is the fruit of diamond Jesus'. Jesus is, of course, a diamond geezer, but I don't think the writers of *Eastenders* composed the prayer.

I once heard a little girl insisting, while her father tried in vain to correct her, that the line in the hymn 'I am the Lord of the dance said he' was *really* 'I am the Lord of the darn settee'. Language, even our own mother tongue, can

be a source of confusion. Even Donald Trump gets confused between ‘origins’ and ‘oranges’ and that reminds me of the problem between American English and the Queen’s English. Incidentally, I wonder how that played out earlier this week. I’d like to have been a fly on the wall.

I once had an American priest friend staying with me and I was telling him about my plans to pave the area outside my French windows to make a small patio. He was horrified. “Oh no! You cannot be serious!” He said, John McEnroe style, “that would be hideous!” I was incensed that he should think that my tasteful flair for garden design was so misguided and a heated argument ensued. Eventually we discovered that we were talking a completely different language. When we speak about paving an area we mean laying down paving slabs; what Americans mean by paving is to tarmac an area, or lay it down to ‘blacktop’ as they would say. That would indeed have been hideous. As George Bernard Shaw once observed, the Americans and the English are two nations divided by a single language.

Language can be a major source of confusion and misunderstanding in human communication and big catastrophes have happened because of it. Apparently the Americans would never have dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki if they had correctly understood a Japanese communiqué which asked for a ceasefire but was mistranslated to convey that the Japanese held the Americans in contempt.

According to the bible, in Genesis chapter 11, misunderstanding and confusion of language was caused by God himself. People were trying to build a tower to reach up to heaven so that humans could stand where God is and be on the same level as God, equal to him. God condemned their pride and thwarted their plans by making them speak different languages so they could no longer understand each other. Since they could no longer communicate, they had to abandon their plan to build the tower. The tower was called Babel and gives us our word ‘babble’.

Against all this background, there is something very significant in the fact that when the disciples receive the Holy Spirit they can make themselves understood in any language. They are given the power to fulfil Jesus’ command to make disciples of all nations because now, with the Spirit in control, there is no confusion of language. The story of Jesus can be heard by all people in their own language from the lips of the apostles energised

and glowing with the life of the Spirit. This is why today is called the birthday of the Church because now the Church is everywhere and contains 'people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation' because all hear the amazing truth about Jesus Christ in their own language. We say the Church is catholic, that is, universal, so the Church, which is the body of Christ in the world, speaks every language in the world through its members of every nation under the sun.

But in truth, the Church speaks, or should speak, only one universal language, the language which is expressed by every word and deed of Jesus because he is God and God is love. Love is the only language understood universally by every human being and, indeed, I believe by many animals - can anyone who has a dog not believe that it loves them with an almost unconditional love that thrills and excites it in every fibre of its being? Love can melt the hardest heart, heal the keenest hurt, redeem the greatest sin. Love alone is the language that can change the world and love is the greatest of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit today, then, to pour love into your heart to soften and melt the hardness and coldness that lurks in the depths of all our hearts so that we become like Jesus who taught us to love one another as he has loved us for then we too will truly be his disciples.