

A Paraphrase on the Lord's Prayer

by Aphra Behn (1685)

Our Father,

Oh, wondrous condescension of a God
To poor, unworthy, sinful flesh and blood!
Lest the high mystery of divinity,
Thy sacred title, should too awful¹ be;
Lest trembling prostrates should not freely come,
As to their parent, to their native home;
Lest Thy incomprehensible Godhead should
Not by dull man be rightly understood;
Thou deignst to take a name that fits our sense,
Yet lessens not Thy glorious excellence.

which art in heaven,

Thy mercy ended not when Thou didst own
Poor lost and outcast man to be thy son.
'Twas not enough the Father to dispense;²
In heaven thou gavest us an inheritance,
A province, where Thou'st deigned each child a share.
Advance, my timorous soul. Thou needst not fear.
Thou hast a God! a God and Father! there.

hallowed be thy name.

For ever be it, may my pious verse,
That shall thy great and glorious name rehearse,³
By singing angels still repeated be,
And tune a song that may be worthy thee.
While all the earth with echoing heaven shall join
To magnify a Being so divine.

¹ **awful**: i.e. awe-filled, terrifying.

² **dispense**: mete out, distribute; with possible allusion to granting dispensation from punishment.

³ **rehearse**: i.e. repeat, say.

Thy kingdom come,

Prepare, my soul, 'gainst that triumphant day.
Adorn thyself with all that's heavenly gay.
Put on the garment which no spot can stain,
And with thy God, thy King and Father! reign.
When all the joyful court of heaven shall be
One everlasting day of jubilee
Make my soul fit but there to find a room;
Then, when thou wilt, Lord, let thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done,

With all submission, prostrate I resign
My soul, my faculties and will to thine.
For Thou, oh Lord, art holy, wise, and just,
And, raising man from forth the common dust,
Hast set Thy sacred image on his soul.
And shall the pot the potter's hand control?
Poor, boasting, feeble clay, that error shun.
Submit, and let the Almighty's will be done.

in earth, as it is in heaven.

For there, the angels and the saints rejoice,
Resigning all to the blest heavenly voice.
Behold the seraphins his will obey,
Wilt thou less humble be, fond⁴ man, than they?
Behold the cherubins, and powers divine, }
And all the heavenly host in homage join. }
Shall their submission yield, and shall not thine? }
Nay, shall even God submit to flesh and blood
For our redemption, our eternal good?
Shall he submit to stripes, nay, even to die }
A death reproachful, and of infamy? }
Shall God himself submit, and shall not I? }
Vain, stubborn fool, draw not thy ruin on,
But, as in heaven, on earth, God's will be done.

⁴ **fond**: i.e. foolish.

Give us this day our daily bread,

For, oh my God! as boasting as we are,
We cannot live without thy heavenly care.
With all our pride, not one poor morsel's gained,
Till by thy wondrous bounty first obtained.
With all our flattered wit, our fancied sense, }
We have not to one mercy a pretence }
Without the aid of thy omnipotence. }
Oh God, so fit my soul that I may prove
A pitied object of thy grace and love.
May my soul be with heavenly manna fed,
And deign my grosser part thy daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

How prone we are to sin. How sweet were made
The pleasures our resistless hearts invade!
Of all my crimes, the breach of all thy laws
Love, soft bewitching love, has been the cause!
Of all the paths that vanity has trod,
That, sure, will soonest be forgiven of God.
If things on earth may be to heaven resembled,
It must be love, pure, constant, undissembled.
But if to sin, by chance, the charmer press,
Forgive, oh Lord, forgive our trespasses.

as we forgive them that trespass against us.

Oh, that the grateful, little charity, }
Forgiving others all their sins to me }
May, with my God, for mine atoning be. }
I've sought around, and found no foe in view, }
Whom with the least revenge I would pursue. }
My God, my God, dispense thy mercies, too. }

Lead us not into temptation,

Thou but permits it, Lord, 'tis we go on,
And give ourselves the provocation.
'Tis we that, prone to pleasures which invite,
Seek all the arts to heighten vain delight.
But, if without some sin we cannot move,
May mine proceed no higher than to love;
And may thy vengeance be the less severe,
Since thou hast made the object loved so fair.

but deliver us from evil.

From all the hasty fury passion breeds,
And into deaf and blinded error leads;
From words that bear damnation in the sound,
And do the soul, as well as honour, wound,
That by degrees of madness lead us on
To indiscretion, shame, confusion;
From fondness, lying, and hypocrisy,
From my neglect of what I owe to thee,
From scandal, and from pride, divert my thought,
And from my neighbour, grant I covet nought.
From black ingratitude, and treason, Lord,
Guard me, even in the least unreverent word.
In my opinion, grant, oh Lord, I may }
Be guided in the true and rightful way, }
And he that guides me may not go astray. }
Do thou, oh Lord, instruct me how to know
Not whither, but which way I am to go;
For how should I an unknown passage find,
When my instructing guide himself is blind?
All honour, glory, and all praise be given
To kings on earth, and to our God in heaven.

----- *Amen.*