

I've sometimes had a problem when someone talked about God or prayed as if He was their personal magician or guardian angel, so I will start our prayers with the beginning of a prayer by Michel Quoist, the French priest who helped so many with their faith some years ago.

Let us pray:

My God, I don't believe that you cause the rain to fall or the sun to shine, to order, on request, so that the Christian's corn will grow or the parish priest's bazaar will be a success; that you find work for the virtuous unemployed person but leave others to search alone and never find a job; that you protect from accidents the child whose mother prays and allow the other one to be killed, the little one who has no mother to storm heaven; that you give us food to eat when we ask you for it, and allow people to die of hunger when we stop asking for your help.

My God, I don't believe that you lead us wherever you want us to go, and that we only have to let ourselves be led: that you send us hardship and all we can do is to accept it; that you offer us success and we only have to thank you for it; that when you make a decision, you know what is good for us and it is up to us to accept with resignation.

No, my God, I don't believe that you are a dictator, all-powerful, imposing your will, for the good of your people; that we are puppets and that you pull the strings whenever you feel like it; that you make us play out a mysterious drama in which the smallest details have been preordained by you since the beginning of time.

No, I don't believe it, I no longer believe it, because I know now, my God, that this is not what you want, that you couldn't do this, because you are LOVE, because you are our FATHER and because we are your children and through your love for us, you have always wanted us to be *free*, [and we are free to make our own choices].

AMEN

Our God we thank you for inspirers like Michel Quoist, who help us as we grow in faith, following the Way of Jesus. We thank you for our own community of faith, worshipping here today, or with us in spirit wherever else they may be. Together we remember that your love for us helps us to love others – our family, our friends, our colleagues, yes, but we remember that Jesus told us to love also the needy, the hungry and those who grieve. Help us to show that love and care, wherever and whenever we have the opportunity. We thank you that organisations like Christian World Service, Presbyterian Support and Christian Blind Mission enable us by our donations to share in showing that love to a wider circle and we thank you for everyone who works for them.

Television lets us see so much that is bad in this world – we see the ordinary men, women and children in Syria suffering the worst effects of their war; we see people in the Horn of Africa facing hunger, disease and starvation. We have seen people in many places devastated by floods. We see families in Kiribati grieving for the loss of loved ones in their ferry disaster. Father we pray for them even though we feel so helpless to do anything about it.

In our own country, we thank you that our government wants to create a better living environment for everyone, but particularly for those who find it difficult to feed and house their children. Grant them the wisdom, we pray to do this in an effective and sustainable way and to develop a really caring society in which every individual is valued and we all share the cost. We pray also for our own people – the shut-ins like Ena Milroy, for Hilary as she begins her new ministry at Kilwinning in Scotland, for Anne and Tony as they cope with his illness, for Pauline and Ian's mothers as they adjust to living in care. We are all conscious of our frailties and our strengths and we thank you for your love and for the example and teaching of Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen

Forgive us, oh my God,  
for having distorted your image as a loving Father.  
We believed that in order to know and understand you  
we should imagine you  
endowed with infinite power and authority,  
of the kind that we humans too often seek.  
Thinking of you and speaking about you,  
we have used words that are alright in themselves,  
but in our closed hearts they have turned into traps  
and we have translated:  
omnipotence,  
the will of God,  
commandment,  
obedience,  
judgement. . .  
into the language of arrogant men and women  
who dream of dominion over their brothers and sisters;  
and we have assigned to you:  
punishment,  
suffering and death,  
while what you wish for us is  
forgiveness,  
happiness and life.  
Forgive us, oh my God,  
because we haven't had the courage to believe that, through your love for us,  
you have always wanted us to be *free*,  
free not just to say yes or no  
to what you have decided for us in advance,  
but free to reflect,  
to choose,  
to act as independent beings  
throughout our lives.

We haven't had the courage to believe  
that you wanted our freedom so much  
that you risked sin, allowing us the freedom to sin,  
that you risked evil,  
suffering,  
spoiled fruits of our misused freedom,  
awful consequence of our rejection of your love,  
that you risked losing,  
in the eyes of many of your children,  
your halo of infinite goodness  
and the glory of your omnipotence.

We haven't had the courage to understand  
that when you wanted to reveal yourself to us definitely,  
you came on this earth,  
small,  
weak,  
naked,  
and that you died on a cross,  
abandoned,  
powerless,

naked,  
to signify to the world that your only power  
is the infinite power of love,  
love which frees us,  
so that we can love.

I know now, my God, that you can do everything  
. . . except take our freedom away from us!

Thank you, my God, for this beautiful and frightening freedom,  
supreme gift of your infinite love.

We are free!

Free!

Free to harness nature, little by little,  
and to use it in the service of our sisters and brothers;  
free to abuse it  
by exploiting it for our own advantage;  
free to protect and develop life,  
to fight against suffering  
and sickness,  
or free to squander intelligence, energy, money,  
to manufacture weapons  
and to kill each other;  
free to give or not to give children to you;  
free to organize the sharing of our wealth,  
or to allow millions of human beings  
to die of hunger on fertile land;  
free to love  
or free to hate,  
free to follow you  
or to reject you.

We are free. . .  
but loved *infinitely*.

So I believe, my God,  
that because you love us and because you are our Father  
you have always wanted us to be happy forever,  
that you always propose  
but never impose.

I believe that your Spirit of love  
at the center of our life,  
whispers to us, faithfully, each day,  
the desires of your Father.  
And I believe that amid the great dove-tailing  
of human freedoms,  
the events that touch us, all our involvements,  
those we have chosen  
and those we haven't chosen,  
sources of joy or of cruel suffering,  
all of these,  
through us and for us,  
with the help of your Spirit who is with us,  
thanks to your love for us in your son,  
thanks to our freedom to be open to your love,  
all of these can be providential,  
each time they become part of us.

Oh my great and loving God,  
so humble and unobtrusive before me  
that I cannot reach out and understand you  
unless I become like a little child,  
let me believe with all my strength  
in your only omnipotence:  
the omnipotence of your *love*.  
Then, one day, in union with my sisters and brothers,  
proud of having lived my life as a free human being,  
supremely happy,  
“Go my child, your faith has redeemed you.”