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# How Fairy Tales and Scripture Give Meaning to and Sustain Vocation

Gregory Glazov

This essay aims to take some bearings from Tolkien's modern folklore and from Scripture to identify principles that inspire a sense of a divine calling to a mission in life, which is how I understand "vocation," give this mission meaning, and sustain it in difficult times.

Why Tolkien? Because *vocation*, theologically speaking, is a mystery, a profound truth; inklings of it are often best expressed in story form by myths and fairy tales and Tolkien, being a master "Inkling," was an expert at exploring and communicating these inklings. The bearings in particular I will take from two snippets of his writings, one from *The Hobbit*, the second from the *Lord of the Rings*. I will then proceed to take more bearings on the subject from the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures by focusing on commentaries on the Lord's Prayer. By comparison and contrast, I hope to elucidate some of the ways in which Scripture inspires a sense of vocation, gives it meaning and sustains it.

## 1. The Stories that Really Matter – Bearings from Folklore.

The hero of the *Hobbit* is Bilbo Baggins, a half-sized human, a "halfling," and scion of the home-loving Bagginses and the adventure-loving Tookes. The book begins with Gandalf, a wizard, knocking at his door to call him to help a group of Dwarves steal back their treasure from Smaug the Dragon. Hobbits, we are given to understand, given their padded feet, size, endurance and other qualities, have great talents for burglary. Particularly enjoyable is Tolkien's portrayal of how Bilbo's home—and adventure—loving tendencies play up in his response to Gandalf's call:

"... I am looking for someone to share in an adventure that I am arranging, and it's very difficult to find anyone."

"I should think so – in these parts! We are plain quiet folk and have no use for adventures. Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner! I can't think what anybody sees in them." ... Then he took out his morning letters, and began to read, pretending to take no more notice of the old man... But the old man did not move... till Bilbo got quite uncomfortable and even a little cross..."

So much for the Baggins side. The Tookish side is stirred up once Gandalf introduces himself:

"Gandalf, Gandalf!... Not the wandering wizard... who used to tell such wonderful tales at parties, about dragons and goblins and giants... Not the man that used to make such particularly excellent fireworks! I remember those! Old Took used to have them on Midsummer's Eve. Splendid!... Not the Gandalf who was responsible for so many quiet lads and lasses going off into the Blue for mad adventures... Bless me, life used to be quite inter - I mean, you used to upset things badly in these parts once upon a time. I beg your pardon, but I had no idea you were still in business."

“Where else should I be?” said the wizard. “All the same I am pleased to find you remember something about me. You seem to remember my fireworks kindly, at any rate, and that is not without hope. Indeed for your old grand-father Took’s sake, and for the sake of poor Beladonna, I will give you what you asked for.”

“I beg your pardon, I haven’t asked for anything!”

“Yes, you have! Twice now. My pardon. I give it to you. In fact I will go so far as to send you on this adventure. Very amusing for me, very good for you and profitable too, very likely, if you ever get over it.”

The reader may easily identify with the struggles in Bilbo’s soul here and on subsequent occasions for, notwithstanding the fact that the Tookish side wins here, Bilbo will have many occasions to wish to be done with adventures and return to the womb-like safety of his Hobbit-hole. Once on the road, however, there is no going back again, save by completing the quest.

In the course of his adventure, he gets lost in some underground caverns where he chances upon a magic ring that grants its wearer invisibility and longevity. As we discover in time, the ring also corrupts the wearer’s character. This is evidenced by *Gollum*, the creature who treasured the ring for hundreds of years earlier and used it to spy and hunt, and who speaks interchangeably of himself and of the ring in the third person as “the Precious.” His name comes from the swallowing noise with which he frequently finishes his sentences: *gollum, gollum*. Thanks to the ring, Bilbo escapes from his clutches. Gollum survives thanks to a surge of *pity* that wells up within Bilbo at a crucial moment, and overcomes his temptation to kill the creature. This *pity* and Gollum’s survival become foundational for the sequel trilogy-epic *The Lord of the Rings*.

This epic begins with Gandalf’s identification of Bilbo’s ring as an evil creation of Sauron, an incarnate demon. The reader learns that, in addition to granting invisibility and longevity, the ring also grants its wearer power over the wills of others. The catch, however, is that it is, in that process, designed to subject the will of the wearer to Sauron’s, containing as it does a part of his life-force. The temptation to wearing the ring being so great, but its effects so corrosive, that victory over Sauron requires the ring’s destruction in the volcanic fire of Mount Doom, deep in Sauron’s kingdom of Mordor. As humility is the prerequisite for safe handling of the ring, Gandalf discerns hope in entrusting the mission of its destruction to hobbits, namely to Bilbo’s nephew Frodo, his gardener Sam, and a fellowship of friends, including himself, to guide and help him on his way.

Midway through their journey, they begin to be tracked by Gollum, at which point Gandalf narrates his story to Frodo. When Frodo exclaims what a pity it was that Bilbo didn’t kill him, Gandalf corrects him by explaining that, on the contrary, this pity is crucial and foundational to their success. This “pity” “has to do with everything.” “Even Gollum,” he asserts, “may have something yet to do.”

This turns out to be the case and in more than one way. For a start, once Frodo and Sam split off from the Fellowship due to internal divisions and enemy attack, it is Gollum who guides them into Mordor. Gollum’s attitude to Frodo see-saws between loyalty and treachery. The first is strengthened by Frodo’s acts of kindness and pity to him, the latter by Sam’s brusqueness. The treachery finally takes the upper hand but it too turns out to be providential, for when Frodo finally reaches the fiery pit where the ring is to be destroyed, he succumbs to the temptation to wear the ring, and would have jeopardized

his mission had it not been for Gollum, who reappears at this moment, grapples with him, bites the ring off his finger, and losing balance in the process, totters over the precipice, thereby bringing Frodo's and the Fellowship's task to success. Thus, in spite of Frodo's ultimate failure before the overwhelming power of the Ring's temptation, the story is brought to a good ending. In this way, Gandalf's wisdom and hope is realized. Salvation hinged all along on Bilbo's and Frodo's pity for Gollum. But for those acts of pity, evil would have triumphed. Thanks to those acts of pity, all things are wondrously turned to good.

Frodo and Sam anticipate this wondrous resolution in a conversation at the entrance into Mordor. This conversation illustrates Tolkien's insight into the power of fairy tales to grant escape, spiritual exodus from the drab and grey of this world, and sustain the soul with hope and consolation:

"I don't like anything here at all," said Frodo, "... Earth, air and water all seem accursed. But so our path is laid."

Yes, that's so," said Sam. "And we shouldn't be here at all, if we'd known more about it before we started. But I suppose it's often that way. The brave things in the old tales and songs, Mr. Frodo: adventures... I used to think that they were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for... because they were exciting and life was a bit dull... But that's not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually – their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn't.... We hear about those as just went on – and not all to a good end, mind you; at least not to what folk inside a story and not outside it call a good end. You know, coming home, and finding things all right, though not quite the same – like old Mr. Bilbo. But those aren't always the best tales to hear, though they may be the best tales to get landed in! I wonder what sort of a tale we've fallen into?"

"I *wonder*," said Frodo. "But I don't know. And that's the way of a real tale. Take any one that you're fond of. You may know, or guess, what kind of a tale it is, happy-ending or sad-ending, but the people in it don't know. And you don't want them to."

The first of many points in this dialogue that all resonate with Scripture and what it tells of human vocation is the observation that our *earth, air and water all seem accursed....* and that *we shouldn't be here at all*. This is true inasmuch as, following the way Scripture would have us re-imagine things, God created the world very good, rather than accursed, and intended human beings to live in communion with, not in exile from, Him. To this extent, Sam's words apply to each of us. We, too, *shouldn't be here at all*, but we are, and there is no crawling back into the safety of the womb or hobbit-hole until the quest is achieved.

The second point clarifies what makes an adventurous story one that *really matters*. Very simply it is a story that *stays in the mind*, i.e., that gets remembered. But more interestingly, we may note that the story that gets remembered results not from its hero's power of will to make it happen, but from his *landing* or *falling* into such a story and persevering in it without *turning back*. As may be corroborated via Abraham, the adventure into personhood begins with a response to a call. What distinguishes a story worth telling, a story that matters from one that doesn't, however, is the hero's not turning back, perseverance, "character." Is it not this that distinguishes the "truly important" stories of the Bible, inasmuch as it is full of characters who "fell" or "landed" into stories that were not of their choosing, but got stuck in

them by staying and not turning back, often not by their own works, but through holy counsel, and so made those stories “really important?” *Falling*, in the most general sense, is reminiscent of Adam’s *Fall*. In this sense, all of us have *fallen* into Adam’s story and have, as a consequence, little choice as to our starting point. If we are called to fulfill a destiny, we start with a “lot” regarding which we have little choice. What we are given repeatedly, however, are chances *to not turn back*. It is to be inferred that perseverance will make the story of our life one that “really matters,” one that’s memorable, and worth retelling. It is crucial to know that there will be moments when the pressure of evil may prove too much and break us down, physically and morally, as happened to Frodo. But for such occasions it is also crucial to remember the extent to which pity and loyalty have been the pivot of a person’s life, the expression of their true character. The anniversaries of his victory will prove bitter sweet and painful to Frodo, but the story’s final end promises a divine healing to him.

The third point is that ignorance of how one’s own story ends is *the way of a real tale* that people are *fond of*. Clearly, such ignorance is essential to the makeup of a good story. The reason must be that ignorance of this sort stirs up *wonder* about the end, and establishes the conditions for the end to be *wonder-full*. This is why Sam wonders how their own story will turn out and whether or not it will be retold. The ending of course is *wonderful* inasmuch as a sense of awe arises in the reader, as it must have in the author, in contemplation over the way in which so many elements, seemingly discordant with jarring to the sensibilities of the story’s protagonists and readers and author, have been so harmoniously integrated. It is significant that this reflection, which reflects much of what Tolkien has to say about stories, is placed on the lips of Sam, the character who repeatedly shows himself to be a lover of stories, and who himself “lands” and “falls” into his adventure because Gandalf catches him eavesdropping on his conversation with Frodo, and pulls him in through the window by his “ears.”

Fourthly, ignorance of how one’s story will end is, in Frodo’s and Sam’s case compounded with ignorance of the consequence of acts such as the sparing of Gollum. To have mercy on someone and let them go is to renounce the temptation to exercise control and power over them. Consequently, ignorance of the outcome of one’s good choices is essential to making them more than interesting and surprising, but really or doubly good and wonderful and thereby somehow interconnected with the longer and ultimate story of the battle between good and evil. This point emerges in the conclusion of Frodo’s and Sam’s recollection of the tale of Beren and Luthien, (a key tale in their world, narrated in Tolkien’s *Silmarilion*, about a man and an elfin maiden who, for love of each other, descended into Hell to wrest a jewel of living light (a *Silmaril*) from its dark Lord), and realizing, to his amazement, the continuity between their stories:

“No, sir, of course not. Beren now, he never thought he was going to get that Silmaril from the Iron Crown in Thangarodrim, and yet he did, and that was a worse place and a blacker danger than ours.... And why, sir, I never thought of that before! We’ve got – you’ve got some of the light of it in that star-glass that the Lady gave you! Why, to think of it, we’re in the same tale still! It’s going on. Don’t the great tales never end?”

“No, they never end as tales,” said Frodo. “But the people in them come, and go when their part’s ended. Our part will end later – or sooner.”

“And then we can have some rest and some sleep,” said Sam. He laughed grimly. “And I mean just that, Mr. Frodo. I mean plain ordinary rest, and sleep, and waking up to a morning’s work in the garden. I’m afraid that’s all I’m hoping for all the time. All the big important plans are not for my sort. Still, I wonder if we shall ever be put into songs or tales. We’re in one, of course; but I meant: put into words, you know, told by the fireside, or read out of a great big book with red and black letters, years and years afterwards. And people will say: ‘Let’s hear about Frodo and the Ring!’ And they’ll say: ‘Yes, that’s one of my favourite stories. Frodo was very brave, wasn’t he dad?’ ‘Yes, my boy, the famosetest of the hobbits, and that’s saying a lot.’”

*The book with red and black letters* recalls to us our Bible and may serve to prompt us *to wonder* whether *we shall ever be put into its songs or tales*. The preceding argument suggests that this will happen if we, however “half-size” in the eyes of the world we may be, nurture a love and a wonder for the stories that matter, and practice pity and perseverance. The narrative aids this understanding by disclosing that Sam is the story’s chief unsung hero:

“It’s saying a lot too much,” said Frodo, and he laughed, a long clear laugh from his heart. Such a sound had not been heard in those places since Sauron came to Middle-earth. To Sam suddenly it seemed as if all the stones were listening and the tall rocks leaning over them. But Frodo did not heed them; he laughed again. “Why, Sam,” he said, “to hear you somehow makes me as merry as if the story was already written. But you’ve left out one of the chief characters: Samwise the stouthearted. ‘I want to hear more about Sam, dad. Why didn’t they put in more of his talk, dad? That’s what I like, it makes me laugh. And Frodo wouldn’t have got far without Sam, would he, dad?’”

“Now, Mr. Frodo,” said Sam, “you shouldn’t make fun. I was serious.”

“So was I,” said Frodo, “and so I am. We’re going on a bit too fast. You and I, Sam, are still stuck in the worst places of the story, and it is all too likely that some will say at this point: ‘Shut the book now, dad; we don’t want to read any more.’”

“Maybe,” said Sam, “but I wouldn’t be one to say that. Things done and over and made into part of the great tales are different. Why, even Gollum might be good in a tale, better than he is to have by you, anyway. And he sued to like tales himself once, by his own account. I wonder if he thinks he’s the hero or the villain?... ‘Gollum!...Would you like to be the hero – now where’s he got to again?’”

What a marvelous passage! The *clear laugh from his heart* illustrates the consolatory power and purpose of good tales. They grant spiritual escape from this world and sustain one who recognizes by their power of being *stuck in the worst places of the story* with hope on account of the knowledge that *things done and over and made into part of the great tales are different*, so different as to make those of us who are like *Gollum ... good in the tale*. All this illustrates the necessity for us too, when reflecting on our vocations, to re-imagine how our own stories can be made part of the tale that really matters, the one with the *red and black letters*, for such imaginings have the power of clearing the heart, and allowing us to laugh, even in the worst of places.

As for Gollum, the question of his redemption and the extent to which he was “good” in the story occupied Tolkien to no end. It is clear that Gollum’s betrayal of Frodo might have been averted had Sam been kinder to him. This is the point in the story where Gollum has skulked off to set up his betrayal. It is ironic then that it is also the point at which Sam finally turns to offer him some dignity: “would you like to be the hero?” Goading questions of this sort echo some of the crucial questions by

which God goads biblical characters: “Adam, where are you?,” “Who told you that you were naked?,” “Where is your brother?,” “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?... and should I not pity Nineveh... (full of) people who do not know their right hand from their left, not to mention the animals?,” “O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me!,” “Will you condemn me that you may be justified?,” “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?...” Crucial to fulfilling one’s vocation is the desire to stay close to the source of such questions, so as to hear and answer them, for they are wondrously powerful in transforming us and giving us new faces:

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides (*paramaino* = abide, stay, continue, persevere) being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing. (James 1:22-25)

In sum, the vocational aspects which these points stress seem to be the following:

First, vocation is a reality consequent to the fact that all of us have fallen into a great tale, which never begins or ends, within which each of us may play a role. The world’s indeed a stage. Ironically, however, because of the fall, it is our lot to begin in places “where we shouldn’t even or really be” (by destiny).

Secondly, just as Bilbo sets off on his journey through the arousal of his sense for adventure, and as Sam is drawn into it by his ears, so our landing in this story turns on our aptitude for wonder, our interest in and desire for heaven, for inheritance of good things, and therefore on our discernment of the call to these. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” The trick is to have the wisdom to discern the importance of seemingly minor, “halfling” roles. Quite often, it is our own smallness, in particular, that may prove quite crucial and be the ingredient to make the story interesting and wonderful. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven; blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

Thirdly, what differentiates a story-worth telling is staying in it and not turning back, even in the seemingly “worst places of the story.” “He who perseveres to the end shall be saved.” This perseverance hinges on the belief that we are in fact in a good story which, when “over and done” will make things different, i.e. good. Perseverance thereby depends on a thirst for goodness – “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...” – and on faith: “the just by faith will live.”

Fourthly, the breakthrough to success hinges on little “halfling” acts, such as those of pity or mercy. To pity someone and give them mercy is, in fact, to renounce the temptation to exercise total control over them and the outcomes of their actions and hence to practice giving “beforehand,” i.e. forgiveness: “If you forgive, you will be forgiven, if you do not forgive, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you.” Pity and mercy are also grounded upon a value, the commitment to goodness in the world’s creatures, and hence on the perception of their value and on the capacity to mourn as tragic the occasions when it fails to be recognized: “Blessed are those who mourn...;” “Blessed are the merciful;” “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.”

Fifthly, the temptation to exercise control over everything hinges on having the attitude or character of a “half-ling,” a child, thanks to which one can laugh at oneself, delight in one’s role in things, and

wonder about how one's deeds are to be fitted into the larger drama by its author and creator. Consequently, what some, for failure to see that greater picture, might regard as defeat, may prove to be the hinge of victory in the final and intended scheme of things: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.... Rejoice and be glad when people abuse you for my sake, for yours is the kingdom of heaven."

## 2. The Vocational Import of *The Lord's Prayer*.

Being the cumulative focal point of *The New Catechism of the Catholic Church*, following the Creed, the Sacraments, and the Ten Commandments, the *Lord's Prayer* is an inspiring Biblical reference point for discussing the theology of vocation. My reflections on it draw on those of Vladimir Solovyov, Romano Guardini and Jean Marie Cardinal Lustiger.

According to the Gospel of St. Matthew 6:9-13, the *Lord's Prayer* seems to have two parts, describing by means of three and then four petitions, the conditions in heaven and on earth respectively:

Our Father who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come.  
Thy will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.

\*

Give us this day our daily bread,  
And forgive us our debts  
As we also have forgiven our debtors  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil (or "the evil one" - *poneros*).

Heaven seems to be the place where God's name is hallowed, where His kingdom stands and His will is done. The prayer turns on the aspiration that earthly conditions be transformed to resemble the heavenly. But what is the hinge of this transformation? Its impediments are identified in part two which speaks of needs: the needs for bread, forgiveness from debts, guidance in temptation, and delivery from evil. The last petition might summarize everything but it could also allude to another impediment to attaining the Kingdom, the one that gives evil its mystery, namely demonic opposition. The word for evil here, *poneros*, could, as in Slavic translations, designate "the evil one." In His interpretation of the parable of the sower, Jesus used the same word to describe the devil. (cf. Matthew 13: 38, 39)

By means of this final petition, the prayer teaches that conquest over evil is beyond us. But while making "evil" the last word, the Prayer does not give it the last word. That word is reserved for the first word, *Our Father*, and the prayer is indeed sustained by faith, hope, love, and praise of Him. This confidence or faith requires explanation. On what does it hinge?

In His parable of the Sower in the Gospel of St. Luke, Jesus explained that such faith originates in a word of God which enter the heart as seed enters soil:

...the parable is this: The seed is the *word of God*. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock ... *receive the word with joy*; and... have no root... and in time of *temptation* fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which...are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the *good* ground are they, which in an *honest* and *good* heart, having heard the word, *keep it*, and bring forth fruit with patience. (Luke 8:11-15)

Accordingly, our faith derives from some *divine word* which was *received with joy* when first sown in our hearts, but whose flourishing temptation and hardness of heart presently impede. The parable underscores that capitulation to temptation ruins the soil of our heart and prevents the divine word from bearing fruit in it. St. Paul, a friend of St. Luke, memorably describes this tragedy in his Letter to the Romans. It would have been interesting to hear them compare notes on the subject:

I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will *deliver* me from this body of death?  
(Romans 7:18-24)

St. Paul here possibly identifies the existential point at which the Lord's Prayer begins: in a cry for deliverance. He also corroborates that evil and temptation are a mystery infecting us from within. It would be easier to conquer evil were we to avoid temptation altogether. It would also be easier to avoid temptation had it no hooks to attach or ability to bind itself to us and within us. As things stand, it is dangerous to pretend that anything but the most difficult of scenarios obtains. External evil has power over us because it exercises power within us. The kingdom of God must then require the contrary. But how is this to be achieved? How is one to reach this goal if even willing the good is compromised by temptation dividing the will? Integration and strengthening of will must be the hinge. But how?

To return to the dire picture just painted, the problem is that evil has a foothold within us. Our loyalties are divided. In this state, it is easy for religious people to cause offense and distress. A strong example of such distress is furnished by the parable of the unforgiving servant who failed to reciprocate the forgiveness of debt he received from his Master. (Mt 18:29-31) According to biblical and Jewish idiom, evil doing by people claiming to be religious prompts their victims to curse them and their actions, their principles, their religion and thereby to "blaspheme God's Name." When the contrary occurs, when godly deeds are witnessed, those who experience them are prompted to bless their principles, religion and God. Leviticus 22:31-32 is the classic text illustrating that this is the biblical meaning of sanctifying and blaspheming God's name:

You shall keep my commandments and do them: I am the LORD. *And you shall not profane my holy name, but I will be hallowed among the people of Israel; I am the LORD who sanctify you.*

Consequently, the petition that *God's name be hallowed* turns out to be a request to God to help one keep His commandments (do his will), in such a way as to bear fruit and be of benefit for other people, so as to prompt them to bless God as their ultimate source or Father. The passive form of the petition underscores that we do not presume but hope to attain this goal, with God's help, by cooperating with Him, and in His good time. Given the reality of temptation and the acknowledgment of the power of evil over us, the petitionary form of the first part of the prayer constitutes the first and honest stage towards preparing for God's Kingdom. Prayer of this sort is therefore the first step in its realization, the step that serves to enliven prayer and strengthen our *faith* in God. This must be why, when it comes to temptation, Christ advises us first and foremost to be on our guard and to pray:

And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Mt 26:40-41)

The good news that God's kingdom is coming to earth will strengthen our *hope* that evil may be conquered, but we will get closer to conquering evil in our own lives when we begin to resist evil ourselves, even if only by praying for the *coming of God's kingdom*, for such prayers will make God reign not just *over* us, from heaven only and by constraint or threat, but *in* us, in our earthly selves, on earth, by our cooperation and will.

The call that we should prepare for God's kingdom (Mt 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15) corroborates that our will can indeed resist its arrival and highlights again that the will is the problem. On the other hand, the good news that the kingdom is coming towards us and that Christ instantiated it in our midst – in light of the understanding of the gulf that He has crossed to do so, the gulf between His Will and ours, His love and our hard-heartedness, a gulf between Heaven and Earth – serves to define the distance He has traveled and to give it a measure, the sorrowful measure of His unrequited *love*, as expressed by St. Paul in Romans 5:8: "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." (cf. Gal 2:20-21) Empathetic reflection on this love and its measure will help us requite it and prepare for His coming by praying that *His will be done* more sincerely.

Sincere desire makes it *possible* for the kingdom to begin to work in us but this work requires *actual* conditions: our spirit and flesh must *today* be strengthened and tamed, and the hold of *past* sins disabled to enable us to sidestep *future* temptations so as to be delivered from evil. Strengthening the body and soul by physical (quotidian) and spiritual (supersubstantial) bread serves to assist the renunciation of past evil choices which, in turn, provides inoculation against future temptation. By asking Our Father to *forgive* our past trespasses, we are reminded of His identification with our neighbor in the Law: "You shall not take vengeance... you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD." (Lev 19:18) By making forgiveness of others the condition to receiving forgiveness from God, the Lord's Prayer suggests that the practice of forgiveness, pity and mercy is the instrument of the realization of the kingdom. It will be when we forgive as God forgives that God's name will be hallowed, His kingdom will come and His will will be done on earth as in heaven. The measure of divine forgiveness turns out to be astonishing:

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. (Mt 18:21-22)

As defined by Jesus, the measure encompasses the mythical measure of retribution governing the earth from the times of Cain's descendant, Lamech:

Lamech said to his wives: "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, hearken to what I say: I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold." (Genesis 4:23-24)

The kingdom of heaven is therefore scheduled to come not just when we are forgiven "seventy times seven," but also when we forgive so. Surely, the D-Day of its instantiation, in both senses, was made manifest by Jesus in His death, as grasped and highlighted by St. Luke:

And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:42-43)

And, perhaps, this is the nature of the baptism through which He means to reveal the glory of God's love and infuse it deep into our hearts:

I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished!  
(Luke 12:50)

He said "it is accomplished." (John 19:30)

The corroboration that forgiveness is the effective sign and instrument of the coming of His kingdom, and the essential concomitant of prayer, is supplied by what seems to be St. Mark's version of the Lord's Prayer, boiled down to one verse:

And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. (Mark 11:25)

Forgiveness must be pivotal, because by renewing our ties with God and neighbor it brings us closer to the goal of our existence – to know and love God who is the reason of all that is and in Whom all are one. (1 Cor. 15:28, John 17:21) By attaining such love and cleaving to God by it, we will be *delivered from evil*, the irrational force that aims to fragment, isolate and destroy our reason for being. To resist it, demands allegiance to God and preparing for temptation:

My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation. Set your heart right and be steadfast, and do not be hasty in time of calamity. Cleave to him and do not depart, that you may be honored at the end of your life. (Sirach 2:1-3)

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God;" for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death. (James 1:13-15)

As in the first part of the prayer, so in this part, preparation for resisting temptation begins with following Jesus' example, and praying *to not be led into temptation*:

And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done." (Matt 26: 40-42)

In this way, the Lord's Prayer maps out the stages of the spiritual journey and answers clearly the questions with which the last section ended: Where is God? Why is He not on earth as He is in heaven? When and where will He and His kingdom come here? How does Scripture sustain a Christian sense of vocation in the face of evil? What is our key calling in life? We may note that the hinges and pivots of success turn on the integration of the will, the faculty that God will not constrain, and which can resist Him. Conversely, success depends on the integration of one's will with His will, on the purification of the heart and its desire, on "wanting to."

### Synthesis

There are remarkable resonances between the spirituality of Tolkien's tales and Jesus' Prayer. One important common motif, whose presence I failed to stress in Tolkien's tales, is that of temptation and division of loyalty and will. Perhaps it was too obvious to be noted and commented on, but it is clearly crucial to reflection on what needs to be thought about in discerning and sustaining vocation. The sequence of petitions in the Lord's Prayer reveals a deep spiritual logic explaining why temptation is a serious threat and how it is to be avoided: body and soul need to be strengthened and past sins forgiven via the practice of forgiveness and active love, if temptation is to be withstood and fragmenting senseless evil conquered.

Tolkien's works inspire the reader to imaginatively experience the coherence, wisdom and power of the Beatitudes as stages of the spiritual journey, and instruments by which evil is to be conquered. The clarification, from the discussion of the Lord's Prayer, that "evil" is better rendered as "the evil one" is worth drawing to emphasize another point we failed to stress in Part 1, namely, that evil is not just absence and privation of good but a mysterious personal intelligence and force. Most probably I failed to stress it on account of Sauron's "mythical" character in the epic, but the Lord's prayer suggests that what is said about Sauron by Tolkien is an inkling of what Christ says about the real universe. Naive disbelief in "the evil one's" reality stands to blind one as to the source of many temptations and bouts of despair that one will encounter in life. The stakes involved are highly personal, for him/her/it and us.

The pivotal role attributed to forgiveness in both writings may surprise those who may be tempted to believe that vocation turns on the discernment and nurturing of talents. Nothing said above has minimized the importance of talents. But both parts of the discussion emphasize that, evil being personal and bent on subduing us by latching on to our self-love, victory over it pivots on conjoining prayer with acts of pity-forgiveness. The reason for this would seem to be that pity-forgiveness is grounded on a belief in the goodness of creatures and on trust in its eventual triumph. To forgive is to surrender the desire to control everyone and everything, and to give precedence to faith in God's providence. Also implicit in this faith is a predisposition to wonder, laugh and rejoice in the roles He has in store for us.

Like Tolkien's tales, the Lord's Prayer pinpoints the fundamental problem as the realization of the kingdom and the understanding that one's vocational role in it has to do with the will. Willful opposition to God's will is not something that God will resolve through force or constraint. If then, division of the will is the chief impediment to accomplishing one's vocation, the secret of success must reside in

its integration, in stirring up the secret fire of the heart for God's own will and kingdom. We thus return to stressing the motif with which we began, the importance of Bilbo's Tookish penchant for adventure and Sam's sensibilities for persevering and not backing out even in the worst parts of the story. His use of the word "over" in the statement: "Things done and over and made into part of the great tales are different," suggests that the use of this word in Gandalf's statement to Bilbo: "Very amusing for you, very good for me and profitable too, very likely, if you ever get over it" carries an inkling of God's own attitude to our role in the grand tale He has scripted for us, the one written in red and black letters, which never ends.