

## PUBLIC PRAYER.

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ness of detail. The pastor may feel that, in asking temporal blessings, after the example of the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," he may appropriately ask for "rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness;" but good taste should prevent his descending to such particulars as that the bloom of the peach might escape the spring frosts. To pray nominally to God, but really at a fellow-creature, to flatter or revile in prayer, to insinuate a witticism or sarcasm, to arouse by allusions to party strifes, political prejudices and asperities,—all these are nauseous to a true taste and a genuine piety as well. The man who is really inspired with the spirit of prayer will be incapable of such crimes against propriety. What must be the unbelief and irreverence of that man who can make a pretext of approach to a God so pure, majestic and good, for displaying his smartness or his malice, or for loading the ear of the eternal Judge with flatteries of a fellow-culprit?

Half-educated or spiritually proud men frequently indulge in an indecent familiarity with the Most High, under the pretence of filial nearness and importunity. It is the amazing privilege of justified believers to call this exalted Being their "Father which is in heaven," and, through their divine Advocate, to approach him with filial trust; but this joyful affection should always be tempered with adoring reverence and tender contrition. The proper language for the accepted sinner before the mercy-seat is, therefore, that of profound veneration. Especially are all fondling and amatory expressions, addressed to either person of the Trinity,

abhorrent to the truly pious heart. Our affection for the Author of our redemption should be too unique, and elevated by its sanctity too far above all carnal emotions, to borrow their language. The prophets and apostles surely apprehended God, and knew how to praise him better than we; but they are never found addressing Jesus Christ or the Father or Spirit in any of these fulsome terms: they speak only the language of holy adoration.

Vague and aimless language indicates very clearly a vacant mind devoid of true spiritual affections. Too often the prayers offered before sermon are such as to suggest no other real purpose, than to comply with an expected form and fill decently the allotted time. So, the prayer which closes the sermon is often so pointless, that it amounts to nothing more than a mechanical mark for the ending of the ceremonial. Sometimes there is an absence of any intelligible order in the prayers; and we hear petitions for a mixed medley of objects, interspersed with thanks, confessions and praises.

Now, in opposition to all these faults, I would point out to you the proper mode of performing this duty, by referring you to the instruction of our Directory for Public Worship.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I. It seems very proper to begin the public worship of the sanctuary by a short prayer; humbly adoring the infinite majesty of the living God; expressing a sense of our distance from him as creatures, and unworthiness as sinners, and humbly imploring his gracious presence, the assistance of his Holy Spirit in the duties of his worship, and his acceptance of us through the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

II. Then, after singing a psalm, or hymn, it is proper that, before sermon, there should be a full and comprehensive prayer: *First.*