

Instructional Preface to the Prayer that was made by Lord Nersēs, the Brother of Grigor,  
Overseer [i.e. Catholicos] of Armenia

[*MH* 21:1204–06]

A prayer for common Christians — old and young, men and women — that all should learn and teach one another: priests their people, fathers their sons, mothers their daughters, and friends their friends. They should pray with it five times a day with twelve kneelings in the morning hour, at mealtime, at midday, in the evening, and at rest. But if someone is negligent or too lazy to perform five prayers, let that one pray four times, or three, or two, or even one time a day, so that at least that one might be recognized to be a Christian, and might recognize oneself to be a creature of God and bow down before Him. And if any are too indolent to learn all the words of the prayer — although they learn even many devilish ones with eagerness<sup>1</sup> — let them learn half of it or even less. For even if they learn just three stanzas and were to pray them with three kneelings at the hour of prayer, it would be received before God.

And if any Christians neglect learning and praying this, let them be reproved by the erroneous sect of Muhammad, who even in battles do not forgo the prayers which he taught them, let alone at a peaceful hour. Whereas our people when outside the place of prayer do not even remember the name of God, since they do not care about the order of prayer as do the worshippers of God<sup>2</sup> but love empty talk more than prayer. And even when some do come to priests to pray, they either stand with mouth closed or engage in dialogue with one another, for they neither know the words of the prayers nor listen attentively to the psalms and services of the priests.

For this reason, we composed this prayer in simple and clear language, so as to be easily grasped by the common folk. It is brief in words with twenty-four stanzas in accordance with the hours of day and night and in accordance with the letters of the holy prophets. It is powerful in meaning, since it contains in itself much more than the like of our usual requests to God. And we gave it to our people to study so that every Christian would memorize it, so that wherever one might happen to be at the hour of prayer, one might speak with God through it — whether at church or at home, whether in the field or some workplace or on the road. And they who learn and pray it sincerely — with fervent heart and tears — all the requests which are written in it will be fulfilled for them in life and after death. Whereas those who despise it and do not learn it, they themselves will see the harm that comes about to them.

We cut ourselves off from explaining why we made this prayer, because they may make one other excuse for themselves: “Because we don’t know the words of prayers — for that reason we don’t pray.” But let such people be informed that Satan endeavors to block no other good work of ours so much as prayer, because he knows that through our prayers he is driven off from us and God comes to dwell in us.

Now let us ask God, the doer of good, to open the eyes of your minds so that all of you will eagerly learn it and pray it with faith and be heard by God. And while praying, remember in Christ Grigorios,<sup>3</sup> the Catholicos of Armenia, and the same one’s brother, Lord Nersēs, the author of this prayer. And those of you who copy this prayer in a book, write also this

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps a reference to popular, contemporary songs.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps a reference to the Liturgy of the Hours performed in monasteries.

<sup>3</sup> Grigor III Pahlawuni (sed. 1113 – 1166).

instructional discourse. And those who copy this will be written in the book of eternal life. And those who learn and pray it will receive mercy from Christ. And those who teach it to their friend will have a reward from God. And those who copy it, let them not add a letter or word more or less or otherwise to this original copy, but may all copies be alike, wherever they copy it. And those unexperienced in letters, let them give it to be copied by those who know how to do it rightly, so that it may be done correctly.

The Words of the Prayer composed by Nersēs the Sage  
For Common Christian People  
Directed to the Holy Trinity and One Deity  
To Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[*MH* 21:1207–14]

1

With faith I confess and bow down to You,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
uncreated and immortal Nature,  
Creator of angels and humans and all that comes into being.  
Have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

2

With faith I confess and bow down to You,  
indivisible Light, united Holy Trinity and One Deity,  
Creator of light and Dispeller of darkness;  
dispel from my soul the darkness of sin and ignorance  
and illumine my mind at this hour,  
to pray to You according to Your pleasure,  
and to receive from You my requests.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

3

Heavenly Father, true God,  
Who sent Your beloved Son in search of the lost sheep.<sup>4</sup>  
I have sinned against heaven and before You.  
Receive me as the prodigal son<sup>5</sup>  
and clothe me with the primordial garment,<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 18:12–14, Luke 15:3–7.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 15:11–32.

<sup>6</sup> The primordial garment and clothing metaphors are part of the epic theological expression of Fall and Redemption in Syriac, from where it entered Armenian theological discourse. See Brock, “Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition,” in

which I stripped off of myself through sin.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

4  
Son of God, true God,  
Who humbled Yourself from the bosom of the Father<sup>7</sup>  
and took a body from the holy virgin Mary  
for our salvation;  
You were crucified and buried and You rose from the dead,  
and You ascended to the Father in heaven.  
I have sinned against heaven and before You.  
Remember me like the robber,  
when You come in Your kingdom.<sup>8</sup>  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

5  
Spirit of God, true God,  
Who descended in the Jordan<sup>9</sup> and in the holy upper room<sup>10</sup>  
and illumined me through baptism in the holy font;  
I have sinned against heaven and before You.  
Purify me anew with Your divine fire,  
as the apostles with fiery tongues.<sup>11</sup>  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

6  
Uncreated and sinless nature,  
I have sinned against You in my mind, in my spirit, and in my body;  
do not remember my previous sins,  
for the sake of Your holy name.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

7  
Seer of all,  
I have sinned by thought, by word, and by deed;  
expunge the manuscript of my transgressions,  
and write my name in the Book of Life.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

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*Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter*, edited by M. Schmidt, Eichstätter Beiträge, 4, Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1982, 11–40; Russell, “The Epic of the Pearl,” *Revue des études arméniennes* 28 (2001–2002): 29–100.

<sup>7</sup> Philippians 2:6–8.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 23:32–43 at 42–43.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 3:13–17 and parallels.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 1:13 and Acts 2.

<sup>11</sup> Acts 2:3.

8

Searcher of secrets,  
I have sinned against You willingly and unwillingly,  
knowingly and unknowingly;  
grant forgiveness to me, a sinner.  
For from my birth in the font until today,  
I have sinned before Your Divinity,  
with my senses and with my body parts.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

9

All-caring Lord,  
place holy reverence of You as guardian before my eyes,  
no more to look indecently,  
and before my ears,  
no more to listen eagerly to evil speech,  
and before my mouth,  
no more to tell lies,  
and before my heart,  
no longer to devise evil,  
and before my hands,  
no more to work injustice,  
and before my feet,  
no longer to walk in the ways of iniquity;  
but direct their movements  
to be always virtuous in accordance with Your commandments.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

10

Living Fire, Christ,  
inflame my being  
with the fire of Your love, which You cast to earth,<sup>12</sup>  
to burn up the vices of my soul  
and purify the conscience of my mind,  
to clean away the sins of my body  
and kindle the light of Your knowledge in my heart.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

11

Wisdom of the Father, Jesus,  
give me the wisdom to think, speak, and do good  
before You in every moment;  
and save me from wicked thoughts, words, and deeds.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

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<sup>12</sup> Luke 12:49.

12

Willer of good, Lord, Fulfiller of wills,  
do not let me walk according to my individual will,  
but guide me to be always a lover of Your good will.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

13

Heavenly King,  
grant me Your kingdom,  
which You promised to those who love You,<sup>13</sup>  
and strengthen my heart to hate my sins,  
love You alone,  
and do Your commands.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

14

Caretaker of creatures,  
protect by the sign of Your cross  
my soul and body  
from the deceptions of adversarial demons,  
from temptations to sin,  
from unjust men,  
and from all perils to soul and body.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

15

Guardian of all,  
may Your right hand be a shield above me  
day and night,  
while sitting at home and while traveling on a journey,  
in sleep and at rising,  
so that I may never be shaken.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

16

My God,  
Who open Your hand  
and fill all creatures with Your sweetness,  
to You I commit my being;  
take care of and provide for the needs of my soul and body  
from this time forth unto the end of the Age.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

17

Converter of the wayward,

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<sup>13</sup> John 14–16.

Convert me from evil habits to good habits,  
and nail into my soul the dreadful day of death,  
the fear of Gehenna,  
and love for the kingdom,  
that I may repent of my sins  
and work righteousness.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

18  
Fountain of goodness,  
make tears of repentance flow from my heart  
like the prostitute,<sup>14</sup>  
so that I may wash away my individual sins  
before I depart this world.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

19  
Bestower of mercies,  
grant that I may come to You  
with orthodox faith,  
with good deeds,  
and in communion with Your holy body and blood.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

20  
Lord, Doer of good,  
commit me to a good angel  
to give up my soul gently,  
and to pass undisturbed through the evil spirits of wickedness  
that are below heaven.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

21  
True Light,  
make my soul worthy  
to see the light of Your glory  
at the day of calling,  
and to repose in the hope of good  
in the lodgings of the just  
until the day of Your great coming.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

22  
Just Judge,  
when You come in the glory of the Father

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<sup>14</sup> Luke 7:36–50 at 38.

to judge the living and the dead,<sup>15</sup>  
do not enter into judgement against Your servant,  
but save me from the fire of the Age,  
and allow me to hear  
the blissful calling of the just into Your heavenly kingdom.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

23

All-merciful Lord,  
have mercy upon all those who trust in You,  
my own and strangers,  
those I know and those unknown to me,  
the living and the dead;  
grant also forgiveness of transgressions  
to my enemies and those who hate me,  
and turn them from the malice  
they bear toward me,  
so that they may be worthy of Your mercy.  
And have mercy upon all Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner.

24

Glorious Lord,  
receive the petitions of Your servant  
and fulfill my requests for good  
through the intercession of the holy Mother of God,  
John the forerunner,  
Saint Stephen the protomartyr,  
Your holy apostles and prophets,  
martyrs,  
vardapets,  
holy patriarchs,  
holy ascetics,  
virgins,  
and all Your holy ones, heavenly and earthly.

Glory, honor, and worship to You,  
indivisible Holy Trinity,  
unto Ages. Amen.

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<sup>15</sup> Matthew 16:27, 1 Peter 4:5.