

THE LORD'S PRAYER

He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray." ~ Luke 11:1

JESUS, THE ETERNAL SON OF THE FATHER and our model of prayer, gave to those who would become the children of God through Baptism a prayer. When the disciples asked Jesus how they should pray, he taught them the prayer we know both as the Lord's Prayer and as the "Our Father" (see Mt 6:9-13; Lk 11:2-4). This prayer, the only one that Jesus taught us, is the fundamental Christian prayer. It summarizes the whole Gospel message, the "Good News."

Throughout his sojourn on earth, Jesus was always in close communion with his Father. He wants us to be just as close to his Father as he himself is. When Jesus gave us the "Our Father," he encouraged us to speak to his Father in the very same way that he himself does.

The "Our Father" establishes us in a familial relationship with the Trinity. Through Jesus' redemptive actions and our Baptism, we become adopted children of God (see Gal 4:5). The Son of God is begotten of the same substance as the Father (see Jn 10:30), but we who are adopted become truly sons and daughters of God and co-heirs with Christ (see Rom 8:15-17). When we pray to the Father, we are praying in communion with Jesus. Jesus also gives us the Holy Spirit so that we can truly call God "Father." St. Paul tells us, *"And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"* (Gal 4:6).

Because of our adoption by the Father, Jesus is the common brother of us all (see Mt 12:50). Through Baptism we become brothers and sisters, and so we can address the Father as a family, in communion with one another. When we pray the "Our Father," we pray not only for ourselves as individuals but also for all of the family of God. The "our," the "we," and the "us" in this prayer are all-inclusive. The Lord's Prayer thus be-

comes the common prayer of the Church and a prayer for Christian unity.

In addressing the Father, we acknowledge his utter transcendence — he is in Heaven, while we live on earth, yearning for our true home with him. By sin we were exiled from the Garden; by Jesus' saving death, we are reconciled with the Father (see Rom 5:10), if we repent of our sins and be baptized (see Acts 2:38), love God and one another (see Mk 12:30-31), and believe in Jesus and keep his commandments (see Rv 14:12).

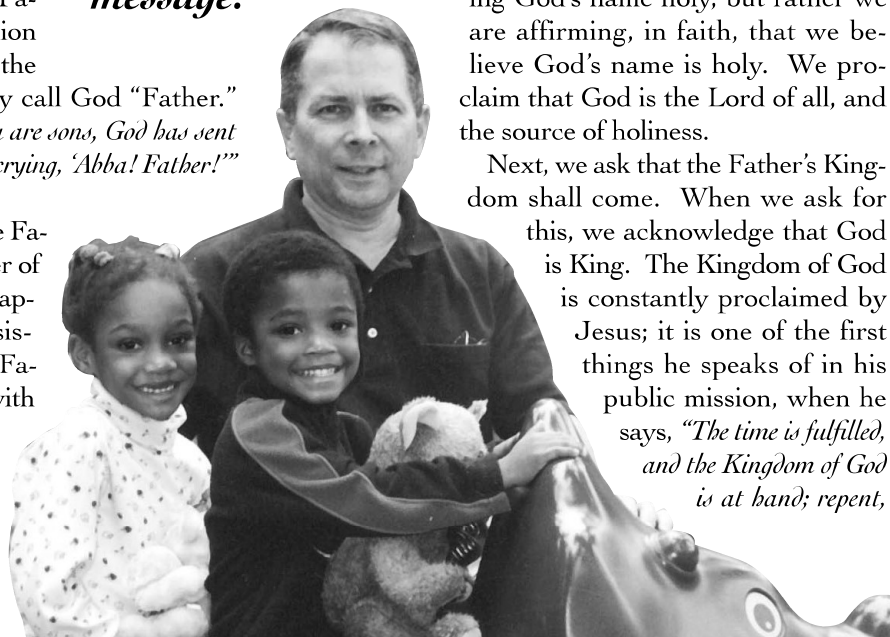
The "Our Father" has seven petitions. The seven petitions, and their order, show us the right order of life and prayer. The first three petitions are centered on the Father himself, without mention of ourselves: God always comes first. The last four petitions are concerned

with our needs, which come only after we have praised God for his own sake, and not only for what he can do for us.

We begin our prayer by saying that God's name is holy: we recognize God's holiness. It should be clear that, when we say "hallowed be thy name," it is not we who are making God's name holy, but rather we are affirming, in faith, that we believe God's name is holy. We proclaim that God is the Lord of all, and the source of holiness.

Next, we ask that the Father's Kingdom shall come. When we ask for this, we acknowledge that God is King. The Kingdom of God is constantly proclaimed by Jesus; it is one of the first things he speaks of in his public mission, when he says, *"The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent,*

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Father, daughter and son

and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15). Thus, when we ask for his Kingdom to come, we are saying that we are repentant and we believe in the Gospel. The "Kingdom to come" primarily refers to Jesus' Second Coming, when Jesus will come as the just judge. But it is also near to us in the person of Jesus, as St. Paul says, *"the Kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"* (Rom 14:17), and in this way it is already present.

Then we ask that God's will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. With this petition, we put God's will over and above our will. We also ask that our will be in conformity with God's, that his will may be done in us. Jesus has revealed to us God's will, and all that God wills is out of pure love. The will of God was perfectly fulfilled by Jesus, his Son. Jesus was obedient to the Father, and so should we be obedient: *"Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered"* (Heb 5:8). Further, it is through prayer, and through this prayer especially, that we can come to know and accept the will of God. Jesus tells us that we must love one another as he has loved us (see Jn 13:34); this love should prevail on earth as it does in Heaven, for God's will on earth and in Heaven is the same.

If we are children of God, we should have humble and trusting hearts, relying on the Father to take care of his children's needs. The final four petitions of the "Our Father" are concerned with our own needs. We first ask God to give us our daily bread. By making this petition, we acknowledge that God is the one who provides, and that we rely completely on him. This does not excuse us of the responsibility of working for our daily bread, since this is the primary way in which God provides it. "Our daily bread" refers also to the Eucharist, the Bread of Life that God gives us to nourish our spiritual life. In this petition, then, we ask God to sustain us both materially and spiritually.

In the next petition, we ask the Father to forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. When we ask God to forgive us, we are confessing our sinfulness, for we know God is infinitely loving, merciful, and forgiving. But this forgiveness is conditioned on our forgiveness of others. When we forgive those who have trespassed against us, we show the world that love is stronger than sin. This forgiveness must extend to all, even to our enemies: *"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" (Mk 11:25).

In the final two petitions, we ask that we not be led into temptation, and that we be delivered from evil. We ask that we be given the grace not to yield to temptation: *"O Lord, Father and Ruler of my life, do not abandon me to their counsel, and let me not fall because of them!"* (Sir 23:1). With these requests we show a desire not to sin, and thus to be more like God. The "evil" referred to is not illness, suffering, and death, but the Evil One, Satan, and all his works. We follow Christ's desire by asking the Father to free us from that most vile and vicious creature, Satan. God knows how cunning and seductive this once-glorious angel can be (see Jn 8:44). We live in a world that Satan has usurped as his realm, and it is in this world that we must live while seeking our salvation. Jesus defeated Satan by his death and Resurrection, and we ask that we might be delivered from his malicious attacks. In asking God to "deliver us from evil" we are begging him to save us from the greatest of evil, which is sin.

Although not found in the Gospel, in many cases the Lord's Prayer is concluded with a "doxology" (a short prayer of praise) that dates to the very earliest Christian literature. This doxology varies slightly depending on which Christian communion prays it, and it is found in the Mass following a brief prayer. It has the effect of returning to the first three petitions by acknowledging that the Kingdom, power, and glory are God's alone.

At the end of the "Our Father" we say "Amen!" When we say this we are saying "so be it." We acknowledge that we want all that we have asked for to come to be, and we thus reaffirm what we have prayed, and that we have made the Lord's Prayer our own.

In the earliest Christian times, Christian communities prayed the "Our Father" three times daily. This is still done by those who attend daily Mass and pray the Liturgy of the Hours, and can be done by anyone. Adults approaching Baptism are introduced to the Lord's Prayer as newborns into the family of God. Jesus knew the value of his Father's constant companionship during his lifetime on earth. In giving us this prayer, Jesus gave us the means of establishing and maintaining the closest familial relationship with his Father, identified for us by Jesus as not only his Father but our own as well.

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