

GENERATIONS OF FAITH



“The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”

Exploring the Heart of Jesus' Words

What did Jesus preach? In the Gospel of John, the main topic of Jesus' preaching is himself. For example, it's in John's Gospel that you'll find Jesus' many "I am" statements: "I am the bread of life," "I am the good shepherd," etc. In the Synoptic Gospels - Mark, Matthew and Luke - the focal point of Jesus' preaching is not himself but rather the *basileia tou theou*, which is most often translated as the *kingdom of God*. As E.P. Sanders notes, for the past 150 years biblical scholars "have almost unanimously ... concluded that the teaching of the historical Jesus is to be sought in the synoptic gospels and that John represents an advanced theological development, in which meditations on the person and work of Christ are presented in the first person, as if Jesus said them."

What is the kingdom of God? In the first place, it's important to note how language can act as a barrier to understanding. And in fact, when we hear the word "kingdom," our imaginations often conjure up images of political rulers and stately palaces. But the kingdom of God that Jesus preached is not contained within geographical borders. For this reason, many theologians opt for the language of *reign* or *rule of God* when explaining Jesus' vision of the *basileia tou theou*.

"In the Lord's Prayer we say, "Thy kingdom come, they will be done on earth as it is in heaven, and we are asking for the same thing



in two different ways. The reign of God is the situation that results when God's will is really done. What is God's will? As revealed in Jesus, God's will is our well-being. God wants the wholeness, the healing, and the salvation of every creature and all of us taken together. The reign of God, then, involves justice and peace among everyone, healing and wholeness everywhere, fullness of life enjoyed by all. It is what the scriptures call the situation of *shalom*, peace experienced not only as the absence of war but peace as the fullness of life. God wills this to come, God wants the world to be this way." -Elizabeth Johnson, *Consider Jesus*

If you search the Gospels in the hopes of uncovering a passage in which Jesus presents his listeners with a succinct, eloquent definition of the kingdom of God such as the one offered by Johnson above, (spoiler alert:) you're sure to come up short. Instead, you'll most often find short sayings such as those contained in the Sermon on the Mount (think: the Beatitudes) as well as an abundance of stories - such as the parable of the Good Samaritan. For Jesus used the language of his 1st century, Palestinian Jewish world to proclaim the heart, soul and purpose of his life (and ultimately of his death and resurrection): that, as Richard McBrien puts it, the "kingdom of God ... exists wherever God's will is at work. And God's will is at work wherever people are faithful to the command that we love one another as God first loved us..."

Seasons of Faith: The Lectionary

The Lectionary is composed of the readings and the responsorial psalm assigned for each Mass of the year. Individual readings in the Lectionary are called *pericopes*, from a Greek word meaning a "section" or "cutting." Because the Mass readings are only portions of a book or chapter from the Bible, introductory phrases, called incipits, are often added to begin the Lectionary reading, for example, "In those days," "Jesus said to his disciples," etc. Not all of the Bible is included in the Lectionary. The Lectionary is arranged in two cycles, one for Sundays and one for weekdays. The Sunday cycle is divided into three years, labeled A, B, and C. 2018 is Year B. In Year A, we read mostly from the Gospel of Matthew. In Year B, we read the Gospel of Mark and chapter 6 of the Gospel of John. In Year C, we read the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel of John

is read during the Easter season in all three years. The first reading, usually from the Old Testament, reflects important themes from the Gospel reading. The second reading is usually from one of the epistles, a letter written to an early church community. These letters are read semi-continuously. Each Sunday, we pick up close to where we left off the Sunday before, though some passages are never read. The year of the cycle does not change on January 1, but on the First Sunday of Advent (usually late November) which is the beginning of the liturgical year.

To learn more about the Church's liturgical calendar, visit: <http://www.usccb.org/about/divine-worship/liturgical-calendar/index.cfm>

Pray It Forward

Making the Old New: Creative Ways to Pray The Lord's Prayer

Option One

Pray by paying attention to your breathing. Say each phrase slowly. Let your breath hit the pause button after each inhalation and exhalation:

{inhale} Our Father
{exhale} who art in heaven
{inhale and exhale} hallowed be Thy name
{inhale} Thy kingdom come
{exhale} Thy will be done
{inhale} on earth
{exhale} as it is in heaven
{inhale} Give us this day
{exhale} our daily bread
{inhale} and forgive us our trespasses
{exhale} as we forgive those who trespass against us
{inhale} And lead us not into temptation
{exhale} but deliver us from evil
{inhale and exhale} Amen

Option Two:

Slow down! Try Praying the Lord's Prayer phrase-by-phrase, pausing after each one to meditate more deeply on it. Or spend your entire prayer time meditating on just one phrase. You may be surprised by the food for thought and the bounty of fruits that come from your labor!

"The Sermon on the Mount is teaching for life, the Our Father is a prayer; but in both the one and the other the Spirit of the Lord gives new form to our desires, those inner movements that animate our lives. Jesus teaches us this new life by his words; he teaches us to ask for it by our prayer. The rightness of our life in him will depend on the rightness of our prayer."

-Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2764

Catholicism 101: A Deeper Look at The Lord's Prayer

The Lord's Prayer is the only prayer formula attributed to Jesus himself in the Gospels. You'll find it in two places: Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. The Lord's Prayer may be the most fundamental statement of faith a Christian can utter. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes it as a "summary of the whole Gospel." (CCC, 2761) Although the Lord's Prayer is arguably the most well known of all Christian prayers, do we really understand its meaning? Let's take a deeper look...

OUR FATHER

We call God **Father**, just as Jesus did. When we call God "Our Father," whom do we mean? Do we mean that God is the Father of just the people in this room? All the people in our Church? Only the people in our country? We mean **everyone**. God is the Father of all five billion people on earth. God made us all, and loves us all.

WHO ART IN HEAVEN

What does "art" mean? It is an old way of saying "is," so we are saying, "Our Father, who is in heaven." Where is heaven? Some people think of heaven as up in the sky or up among the stars. That's one way to think of heaven; as a place. We can also think of heaven as being with God. We are with God when we love each other and do the kind things God wants us to do. Heaven is wherever God is.

HALLOWED BE THY NAME

What does "hallowed" mean? Hallowed means holy or sacred or saintly. What does "thy" mean? This is an old way of saying "your." So we are saying, "God, your name is holy." We respect God's name and say it with reverence. We do not use God's name in anger.

THY KINGDOM COME

We are talking about **God's kingdom**. What would be different about our world if it were truly God's kingdom? No one would be hungry. No one would be poor. Everyone would take care of each other. No one would be excluded. Everyone would be included. There would be no fighting and no wars. There would be peace, and everyone would love each other. The world would be a beautiful place. God's kingdom can be here and now because of the way we act.

THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

"Thy will be done," means we do what God wants; we live like God wants us to live. God gave us his son, Jesus, who came to show us how we should live. Jesus said to love God with all your heart and to love your neighbor as yourself. If we love as Jesus taught us to do, then God's will be done on earth as it always is in heaven. Together, we can work for a time when all people will do what God wants.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

What does this mean? We are asking God to provide for us and make sure we are fed. God, in turn, wants us to care for each other and make sure all are fed. We are God's hands on earth. We pray not only for our needs but the needs of others. We pray that all people will have food to eat and whatever they need to get through the day. And we do our best to help God make this happen.

AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES

Have you ever seen a sign that says: "No Trespassing"? What does this mean? It means to stay off someone else's property, because you might harm or hurt it. Here God is not talking about property; God is talking about people. God doesn't want us to harm or hurt people. We can hurt people by saying mean things or by physically hurting them. We can also hurt people by not taking care of them, by not feeding them or giving them clothes or shelter. When we hurt someone, we ask God to forgive us.

AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US

*These are daring words. In **The Lord's Prayer**, we ask God to forgive us as much as we forgive others. We better forgive others a lot then! We are all called to be like God by forgiving others.*

AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL

What is temptation? Temptation is wanting to do something that you know is wrong. When we ask God "to lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil," we are asking God to help us make good choices, to keep us safe, and to protect us from the things that hurt others and keep us away from God.

Living the Lectionary

January 7, 2018

Solemnity of the Epiphany

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

Adults: When have you found the presence of Christ in an unexpected place?

Kids: Where and in whom will you look for Jesus this week?

January 14, 2018

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel: John 1:35-42

Adults: What qualities do you have that would cause others to recognize you as a disciple of Jesus?

Kids: What does it take to be a follower of Jesus?

January 21, 2018

3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

Gospel: Mark 1:14-20

Adults: What part of your life is Jesus calling you to change right now?

Kids: In what way do you think you can be a better follower of Jesus?

January 28, 2018

4th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Gospel: Mark 1:21-28

Adults: What can you tell others about Jesus with most assurance?

Kids: What is the most important thing you would like others to know about Jesus?

From RCL Benzinger

<http://rclblectionary.com>

We Recommend...

Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology, Elizabeth A. Johnson

Accessible, engaging, and widely regarded as the finest general introduction to Christology (the branch of theology dealing with the nature, person and deeds of Jesus Christ.)

The Berenstain Bears Living Lights Series, Stan Berenstain

Many of the books in this beautifully written and illustrated series are modern retellings from the Sermon on the Mount, with Scripture references!