

LESSON 5

Our Father: The First Three Petitions

BACKGROUND READING

St. Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest Catholic theologians, said, “The Lord’s Prayer is the most perfect of prayers. ... This prayer not only teaches us to ask for things, but also in what order we should desire them” (CCC 2763). The opening words to the Lord’s Prayer, “Our Father, who art in heaven,” acknowledge God as our Father and so we worship and adore Him. The rest of the Our Father expresses seven petitions or requests to God our Father. The first three petitions carry us to glorify the Father; the last four express our needs in this life for both our body and our spirit. In this lesson we will examine the first three petitions: Thy name, Thy Kingdom, and Thy will.

Hallowed Be Thy Name

When we pray, “hallowed be Thy name,” we are not asking if we can make God’s name holy; only God can make something holy. Rather, when we pray “hallowed be Thy name,” we are asking to recognize God’s name as holy and therefore to treat it in a holy

way. To be holy means to be set aside in order to conform to God’s purpose. By praying that God’s name be made holy in us, we are asking to enter into the eternal plan that God has for the redemption of all humanity. Each and every baptized Christian is called to make God’s name holy in his or her life, so that the world can see the face of Jesus in how we live our lives.

God’s “work then, is realized for us and in us only if his name is hallowed by us and in us” (CCC

2808). God first makes us holy through our Baptism, where we are washed clean of our sin and claimed in the name of Jesus Christ. This call to holiness continues throughout our lives. When we live like sons and daughters of God, God’s name is blessed through our lives. The opposite is true, too. When we live sinfully, God’s name is blasphemed (to blaspheme is to disrespect that which is holy). We ask that God’s name be made holy in us so that we can be holy, and participate in the saving work that Jesus came into this world to accomplish.

Thy Kingdom Come

In the second petition of the Our Father we pray that God’s Kingdom will come. Our prayer here is primarily for “the final coming of the reign of God through Christ’s return” (CCC 2818). When Jesus comes in glory at the end of time, He will bring all things under His reign.

The book of Revelation expresses the heartfelt

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cry of the Church waiting for the coming of Christ, when it says: “Behold, I am coming soon. ... The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” Let the hearer say, “Come.” ... The one who gives this testimony says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:12, 17, 20). The Holy Spirit moves in the Bride of Christ, the Church, to cry out in prayer, “Maranatha,” which means, “Come, Lord Jesus.” This prayer is for the fullness of the reign of God that is “righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy Spirit”

(Romans 14:17). Praying that Jesus will come again in glory at the end of time does not diminish, but rather strengthens, our commitment to work for the reign of God in our lives and in the world. We are called to work in this world to bring God's justice and peace.

We live in a creative tension in which, on the one hand, the Kingdom of God is present, and on the other, the fullness of the Kingdom of God will come when Jesus returns to reign in glory. We are called both to work at furthering the reign of God's Kingdom through the way we live our lives, as well as to wait for the Kingdom in joyful expectation. As God's people we work and pray, "Thy Kingdom come," as we wait in joyful hope for the second coming of Jesus Christ and the fullness of His Kingdom.

Thy Will Be Done on Earth As It Is in Heaven

What is "God's will" that we pray will be done on earth as it is in Heaven? The *Catechism* tells us: "Our Father 'desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.' ... His commandment is 'that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.' This commandment summarizes all the others and expresses his entire will" (CCC 2822).

Jesus came to bring salvation to the whole world, and He did so by perfectly uniting His will to that of His Father's in Heaven. Jesus' love for us was so great that in the face of unspeakable betrayal and suffering, and indeed the loss of His very life, He consented to His Father's plan for

our redemption with the total yes of His will. As we saw before, Jesus' anguished prayer to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane was, "Not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). He knew that He must suffer and die to accomplish His Father's will. He consented to this great sacrifice out of love for the Father and love for each and every one of us.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are asking the Father to unite our will to His Son's will. When we say yes to the Father, we imitate Christ. We enter into the Father's mysterious plan that unfolds the salvation that Jesus won for us on the Cross. Of course, on our own we are totally incapable of this kind of surrender to the will of God. Only when we are united with Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit are we able to do God's will.

Praying this petition "Thy will be done" has a twofold purpose: first, we ask to be part of the plan that brings the perfection of God's will as it is found in Heaven to the earth; and, second, we ask to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven ourselves. Jesus tells us, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

Thy Name, Thy Kingdom, and Thy Will, prayed from our hearts, draws us into God's mysterious and wondrous plan for the salvation of the world. We pray that God's name will be made holy in our lives, that His Kingdom will rule our lives, and that His will be done in our lives. This prayer unites us to Jesus' prayer, and now one with Him, God uses us to accomplish the great unfolding of His eternal plan for all mankind.

LESSON 6

Our Father: The last Four Petitions

BACKGROUND READING

After we have asked God to draw us to Him in the first three petitions of the Our Father, we then pray the last four petitions for the needs of our life for both our body and our soul. As children, we ask in confidence and trust for our heavenly Father to care for us.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

“Give us” are the words of prayer uttered by trusting children that confidently ask their Father to give them what they need. But in this fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, it is not only for ourselves that we pray. We pray “give us,” not “give me.” In doing so, we acknowledge that our Father is also the Father of all people, and that we are asking Him to answer their needs as well. The word “us” not only identifies us as part of the human family, but also reminds us that we have a grave responsibility to those who lack the things they need in order to live a fully human life. These words remind us that we must work for justice in our world, so that the needs of all can be met. We become the hands and feet of

mealtimes, and the needs that we have to be safe, to be clothed, and to have a home. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert to eat bread after He had fasted for 40 days, however, He spoke these words: “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

Our daily bread is much more than physical food. Human persons are dying of hunger, “not a hunger for bread, or a thirst for water, but for hearing the word of the Lord” (Amos 8:11). We are starving for the Word of God (Jesus) and His Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God brings life, and it is Jesus Himself who declared, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst” (John 6:35). As Christians we know that our hunger is only truly satisfied by Jesus Himself. We must be nourished by the Word of God that we read and on which we meditate in Sacred Scripture, and by the Body of Christ that we receive in the Eucharist at Mass. Then we must share the Word of

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Jesus as we enter into His mission to give daily bread to all. But even if we labor for the needs of all, we must recall that whatever we receive and give are gifts from our Father.

What are those things for which human beings hunger? Of course, we can readily identify the physical hunger that we feel when it is

God with all people, especially those who are poor and needy. Notice that when we pray for “our daily bread,” we acknowledge that we need to be fed every day. That is why the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is celebrated each and every day. The Eucharist is our daily food as we anticipate the coming of God’s

Kingdom in its fullness at the end of time. It is a “foretaste of the kingdom to come” (CCC 2837).

And Forgive Us Our Trespasses, as We Forgive Those Who Trespass Against Us

In this fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer we ask God for forgiveness for our sins, also known as our trespasses. But Jesus did not teach us to pray simply, “forgive us our trespasses,” but rather He said, “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” These are powerful words: if we do not forgive those who have offended us, then we cannot receive God’s forgiveness for our sins. The *Catechism* explains that this is not because God chooses not to forgive us; rather it is that we choose to close our hearts to His mercy because of our unwillingness to forgive:

Now— and this is daunting—this outpouring of mercy cannot penetrate our hearts as long as we have not forgiven those who have trespassed against us. Love, like the Body of Christ, is indivisible; we cannot love the God we cannot see if we do not love the brother or sister we do see. In refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father’s merciful love. (CCC 2840)

CHRISTIAN PRAYER, ESSAY APPENDIX

The forgiveness that God is asking of us is, in fact, a gift of grace from Him. That is why we ask in prayer for the power of God in our hearts to forgive others—even our enemies. But forgiving is not forgetting, nor is it a feeling. Many think that they can never forgive someone who has inflicted a painful wound, and they fear that they will remember this wound all their lives. We can remember a wound, and even still feel hurt by it, yet still choose to forgive. Forgiveness

from the heart is a decision. When we allow the grace of God to fill us and we take on the mind of Christ, then our sincere decision to forgive is what releases us from the bondage of unforgiveness and floods our hearts with God’s forgiveness.

Lead Us Not into Temptation

By asking God not to lead us into temptation, this petition might seem to imply that God could or might direct us in a way that leads to sin, since sin is a result of our saying yes to temptation. However, this understanding is not what the original Greek verb “lead” means in Scripture. The *Catechism* explains: “The Greek means both ‘do not allow us to enter into temptation’ and ‘do not let us yield to temptation’” (CCC 2846). God does not tempt anyone; instead, it is His will that we be set free from all evil. In this petition, we are asking God’s help in the battle against our own fallen nature that is attracted to sin.

We should also remember that temptation itself is not sinful. Every human person is faced with temptation. Even Jesus faced temptation, but He never sinned. Unless temptations are acted upon, or we willingly entertain thoughts of evil, then there is no sin. When we pray, “lead us not into temptation,” we are asking God to give us the grace to dismiss the thoughts or impulses that might lead us to sin. Through the power of the Holy Spirit living within us, we are able, through grace, to say no to temptation

and yes to God.

But Deliver Us from Evil

In this seventh and last petition of the Lord’s Prayer we pray for the strength and grace to be victorious in the battle against the Evil One. The *Catechism* clearly states, “In this petition, evil is not an abstraction, but refers to a person, Satan, the Evil One, the angel who opposes God” (CCC 2851). The Church teaches that Satan is a personal being, an evil

one, who always opposes God and His plan of salvation. In order to be on guard against the Evil One, we know that he does indeed exist and that his plan is to lead us to hell. Having said this, it is equally important for us to know that as children of God living in grace, we are protected from the Evil One. Scripture assures that as great as Satan's power is in this world, God's power is always greater. Scripture says, "The one who is in you is greater than the one

who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). We have nothing to fear from Satan as long as we remain in God's grace. Christ defeated the Evil One in His victory on the Cross, defeating sin and death through His Resurrection. In this final petition, we ask the Father to deliver us from all the evils that plague humanity, as well as to bestow on us the gift of His peace and the grace to persevere in His grace until

Christ's return.