

## Pondering More Deeply the Words of the Lord's Prayer

This week in our Gospel, we are given a blueprint if you will on how to be thinking about our faith and actively engaged in it: The Lord's Prayer.

For me, it was one of the first prayers I learned growing up, and I'd pray it with my dad before going to bed every night. I remember Mrs. Barta, my kindergarten teacher, also explaining it to us using pictures in 1983. It's a prayer I say at least three times a day; at Mass, in morning and evening prayer, and it's a wonderful prayer. But I must admit it's a prayer that I sometimes haven't thought about as much as I should have. And I can't help but wonder how many of us are the same way. What does it mean to say these words?

The prayer begins "**Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name.**" This part of the prayer helps us to center on how our God is both imminent and transcendent. Certainly God is close to us, but we need a balance. As Fr. Dittberner reminded us on our first day of foundational theology, Jesus is not defined as our brother or our friend, but rather He is our redeemer. This helps us to think about how we view God. If God is just in heaven and distant, we can't think of him as close to us. If God however is just thought of as a friend, we can forget all that He can do and has done for us. A friend can do a lot for you, but a friend can't create you or redeem you. Thus, we are close to God and can call him "Father" and have a deep union with Him, but we also believe He is in heaven and it is only there that we can actually look upon His face.

We also give respect to the name of God. In seminary, we had a tradition of always bowing at the name of the Father, Son and Spirit in our prayers; and our Jewish brothers and sisters respect God's name so much that Yahweh is not even uttered. When we think about keeping the name of God holy, we are mindful of not disrespecting it by using it in a profane way, and also I encourage people to try to substitute "gosh" and not to casually throw the name around. But at a deeper level, we keep the name of God holy by doing what Mary did last week: seeing God as everything, as the highest value in our lives. Remember, both Martha and Mary are saints, but sometimes we are so busy we forget it all has to start with God. Mary realized that God was to be placed before everything, and when we say "hallowed be thy name," we give ourselves that reminder as well, a reminder to place God above work, sports, committee meetings, and that our whole lives need to be anchored in God.

We then say "**Thy Kingdom Come, thy will be done.**" We aren't praying here that Jesus will return and this world will end soon. Rather, we pray that we can bring about God's will in the world. This will ultimately is a way of love, of peace, of non-violence, of inclusion to the stranger and outsider, of healing and compassion. We cannot fully understand death, or natural disasters, or why bad things happen to good people. But we can see how God is at work in how people love and help one another, whether it's helping people cope with loss, helping someone rebuild after a natural disaster, or helping pass on the faith to the less fortunate. If we start as Mary did last week with God and honor His name, we then move on to trying to make this world a better place.

Because people take these words seriously, we get involved in the world. Heaven, where there is perfect love between people and God, is what we try to bring about here on earth.

That leads us to our next petition, **“on earth as it is in heaven.”** The world is a wonderful place, but we also have a lot of problems. Whereas in heaven we have perfect love and peace, the world can often be filled with violence, self-centeredness, and cruelty. This is an important petition to say as we start or end the day and look to the day ahead. Heaven is not to be thought of as merely up in the clouds, we try to bring about the Kingdom in the here and now. So much of what the day brings though we can be prone to do the opposite; from how we treat the person giving us coffee or helping us at the store, to how we treat our siblings and co-workers, to how we treat the person in front of us on the freeway. Essentially we are saying here “Lord, as I go about my day, may your will be mine.” This helps to bring us closer to God.

We then ask **“give us this day our daily bread.”** This isn’t a petition about food so much to fill the stomach, or about getting a salary, but it’s an anticipation of the Eucharist. We pray for the food that will feed the soul. As we pray this petition, may we be mindful to appreciate the gift of the Eucharist, and think about how through Holy Communion, God brings us closer to Him and helps us to separate ourselves from sin. But, again, we need to not make Holy Communion mechanical, but need to carefully think about its significance. We need to let the food from heaven we are given feed our soul. As that happens, it can bring us closer to Christ and help to free us from sin and deepen our relationship with God.

Next up comes forgiveness - **“forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”** This is something we ask for all the time from God, and reminds us of how much we are loved by God and that no matter what our story might be or what we may have done, if we are sorry in our heart for it and want to do better, our Lord will forgive. But the prayer is also a challenge. Forgiveness is required to help repair broken relationships, and we must remember too the daily bread we pray for - Communion - is also symbolic of our unity with one another. If we are asking for forgiveness, we also need to strive to give it. It’s not easy, but it is possible. So when we get to this part of the prayer, maybe we can think about our broken friendships and relationships and reflect on what we can do to help bring about healing.

The final part of the prayer is to **“lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.”** It’s the perfect end to the prayer because after we say this prayer, we typically go about the rest of our day or go to bed and prepare for the day ahead. As good as the world is, as we all know there are a lot of problems too. Temptation is always before us daily, from joining in to make fun of someone at school or work, to gossip, to make self-centered decisions, to doing so-called private sins that many argue affects no one else. There is also the temptation to keep our faith private too - to not speak out about important moral issues because they make other people feel uncomfortable. Every day is spiritual combat, and we can’t be oblivious to that. Sin is very subtle, and changes to someone often happen over a lifetime or more. Not standing up for someone can lead

one to never do the right thing; looking at something on the Internet we shouldn't "just once" can cause a slippery slope; missing Mass one week can snowball as well. Daily, temptations are before us to turn inward and towards ourselves and away from God. We need to focus on the fact that our desire should be to be in heaven with our God at the end of our earthly life, and that requires a daily commitment to unify ourselves to God and one another by trusting that God can help us through the daily struggles and temptations of life.

Especially in our Catholic faith, as for so many of us we learned it at an early age, I think it can become for us something we don't put a lot of thought into. It's not to say we don't care about it, but as life happens it can just become so easy to focus on sports, careers, school, friends or the daily grind of life. Saying traditional prayers and going to Mass can almost become second-nature. This is especially true in our day and age when we are busier than ever and every day add things to further multitask in our lives. Every time we gather at Mass, we profess our faith and pray together this beautiful prayer given to us by our Lord, and for many of us, it's a daily part of our routine. The challenge for us is to make this prayer personal and have it deepen our relationship with our Lord, truly thinking about each of these petitions and then applying them to our lives. A timeless prayer that links us to so many others who have said it over the years, the Lord's Prayer is really God's playbook to us if you will about how we can live through the daily battles of life and conform our lives closer to Him. Hopefully for us these are not just words, but truly words that speak to the head and our heart and help us become more aligned to the purposes of Jesus.