

The Seven Petitions: The Lord's Prayer

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud)

Opening Prayer

Jesus, the source of all prayer, through your life and ministry you taught us how we are to pray. So very simple, personal and direct. Be with us this day as we explore the wisdom of the Lord's Prayer. Amen.

Scripture

In Matthew's gospel the evangelist states "This is how you are to Pray: 'Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom com. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'" (*Matthew 6:9-13*). Matthew gives a more detailed version than Luke (Luke 11:2-4), which the Church has retained as its liturgical tradition.

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

Christian thinkers and people of prayer have explored the depth of these words and what they reveal to us about Christ's innermost being. In essence, the Lord's Prayer presents a summary of the whole gospel. It offers us insights into Jesus and His relationship with the Father and the divine treasures that are a part of the kingdom of God that Jesus preached. Such attention has been given to the Lord's Prayer because it comes to us from the Lord Jesus, the master and model of prayer and has been one of the most important prayers of our Church. It is one of the first prayers taught to us in religious education classes. It holds a very central place in our sacramental celebrations, and is recited in many public and private prayer experiences by many Christians around the world. This program identifies the structure of the Lord's Prayer and clarifies the meaning of the petitions.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

The Catechism of the Catholic Church addresses the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer. While each petition holds a rich treasure of divine wisdom, together they offer us the prayer style of Jesus by defining two different sets of petitions. The "Thy Petitions" and the "Us Petitions". An analysis of these petitions reveal that the Lord's Prayer is a parallel construction that brings us into communion with the Father and with the Son, while at the same time reveals us to ourselves.

The three "Thy Petitions" can be found in the first part of the prayer. "Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The intent of these petitions is to worship and welcome the glory of God in heaven and coming of the kingdom on earth. With God's will being experienced on earth each petition in some way addresses the reality and role of one of the three persons in the Trinity. To call upon the Father, whose name is hallowed, is indeed to call upon the almighty Father. Thy "kingdom come" is of the kingdom embodied by the Son of God made flesh, and "Thy will to be done" is the reign of the Holy Spirit in the life of the world, church and individual lives. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2804*)

The four “Us Petitions” are a different tone and expression. “Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. The “Us Petitions contain the essence of all petitionary prayer. Reliance on God for sustenance, forgiveness, guidance and deliverance makes up the basic attitude of faith. These statements reveal the most necessary assistance in the most serious of life’s temptations. These petitions parallel the three temptations of Christ. Jesus is tempted to turn stones into bread, to test God’s special love and protection for Him, and the promise of all earthly Kingdoms. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2805)

The Bible shows us the unique understanding that Jesus had of the Father. Its implication is not merely world shaking but world remaking. It is what defines Jesus’ message and teaching about the relationship that we are to have with God. In a unique way the Our Father is a theological statement about relationship and interdependence that leaves humanity both loved and healed.

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What new insights do you have on the Lord’s Prayer?
2. How has praying the Our Father influenced your relationship with God?
3. How does Serra live out the two sets of petitions found in the Lord’s Prayer?

(If time permits invite the small groups to share with the large group any insights that they gain from the group discussion, then read the Closing Reflection.)

Closing Reflection

In summary, if we follow the order of the words in the Lord’s Prayer, we discover a wonderful rhythm, carrying with it a sense of completeness, vital and rousing in its unity and form. It becomes the merging of the two great worlds of divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus. This prayer lays the foundation for our image of the Body of Christ, whole, healed, and restored to the Father.

Bibliography

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