

Introduction

This is a series on the *Our Father* which I presented on Mondays at the *Gaudium Et Spes* weekly *Monday Adoration* from 7.15pm to 8.45pm. Fifteen minutes is allotted at the end of the programme for discussion, sharing, comments, and questions from the participants on the topic presented. See 'Programmes' on *Gaudium Et Spes* website for details on *Monday Adoration*.

Monday Adoration: May 12, 2008
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The Lord's Prayer (1)

Preamble

I wish to begin a series on the *Lord's Prayer*. The *Lord's Prayer* commonly referred to as the *Our Father*, is a compendium of all Christian prayers. It is called the *Lord's Prayer* because it came from our Lord Himself. This is the prayer of Jesus the incarnate Word. By assuming our human nature, our Lord took to heart our needs and presented them to God in prayer. Thus the *Our Father* is a model of all prayers and Jesus is the model of our prayer. Prayer was indispensable in the life of Jesus.

Introduction to the Lord's Prayer

The *Lord's Prayer* is found in Matthew and Luke Gospels. The *Lord's Prayer* is shorter in Luke's Gospel than in Matthew's Gospel. Luke's version of the *Lord's Prayer* has five petitions while Matthew's version has seven petitions. The Church has retained Matthew's version of the *Lord's Prayer*. In Matthew, our Lord taught His disciples the *Lord's Prayer* within the context of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). The Sermon on the Mount which begins with the *Beatitudes* is the inaugural sermon of our Lord about the kingdom of God. The sermon highlights the new teachings of our Lord as distinct from the OT and the Jewish Laws. Jesus' inaugural sermon made a deep impression on the people because "he taught them with authority, unlike their own scribes" (Mt 7:29). In Luke's Gospel, our Lord gave the *Lord's Prayer* as a response to the request of one of the disciples: "Now it happened that he was in a certain place praying, and when he had finished one of his disciples said, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples. He said to them, 'When you pray, this is what to say'" (Lk 11:1-2).

The Order of the Lord' Prayer

The first three petitions of the *Lord's Prayer* have to do with God. The second three petitions concern our needs. That means that the worship, praise, and adoration of God should come first in our prayer before asking for our needs. Thus, in prayer, God comes first before our needs. Prayer is not only about asking for our needs but more so, about praising God and doing God's will. As William Barclay has succinctly noted: "Prayer must never be an attempt to bend the will of God to our desires; prayer ought to be an attempt to submit our wills to the will of God" (***The Daily Study Bible Series. The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 1, p. 199***). The second part of the *Lord's Prayer* concerns our needs as human beings. Having acknowledged God and the worship due to God, we are now confident to ask for our human needs. The second half of the 'Our Father' has to do with the present (Give us this day....), the past (forgive us our debts....) and the future (lead not into temptation). The prayer entrusts our present, past and future to God.

The Usage of the Lord's Prayer

The *Lord's Prayer* is used at Mass and at other times. It is the most commonly said prayer of the Christian life. Other Christian Churches pray the *Lord's Prayer* too. The *Lord's Prayer* is the prayer of the Church. From the beginning, the *Lord's Prayer* was said during the liturgy. At Holy Mass, the *Lord's Prayer* is placed between the Eucharistic Prayer and the Communion rite. The *Lord's Prayer* sums up the prayers and petitions expressed in the Eucharistic Prayer and it then knocks at the door of the banquet of the kingdom which holy communion anticipates.

The truth is that oftentimes we do not know how to pray (Rom 8:26). But our Lord Jesus has taught us how to pray, the order of prayer and what to pray for. No wonder the *Lord's Prayer* is regarded as the compendium of all Christian prayers.

Let us now look closely at the *Lord's Prayer*.

Matthew 6:9: "Our Father in Heaven"

One of the introductions to the *Lord's Prayer* at Mass goes thus: "Jesus taught us to call God our Father, and so we have the courage to say." The *Lord's Prayer* begins with an invocation of God as Father. Jesus addresses God as *Abba*, Father; an affectionate reference to God as a caring and loving God. God as Father is Father of all. Hence the *Lord's Prayer* does not teach us to address God as 'my Father,' but 'Our Father.' The *Lord's Prayer* never uses the personal pronouns 'I,' 'me,' 'mine,' etc, but uses 'us' and 'ours.' God as Father reveals that we are brothers and sisters to one another, that we are one in Christ Jesus. St. Paul points out in his Letter to the Galatians: "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor freeman, there can be neither male nor female---for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). This is one of the most revolutionary texts of the New Testament. God as 'Our Father,' makes God as not distinct but approachable for us. Through Christ Jesus, we can approach God our Father. Jesus revealed God to us as Father. However, the affectionate and approachable God as Father does not mean we forget the adoration and worship of God. As William Barclay puts it, "This God, whom we call Father, is the God whom we must still approach with reverence and adoration, and awe and wonder. God is our Father in heaven, and in God there is love and holiness combined" (***The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 1, p. 204***). Our Father in Heaven reveals the power, love, and holiness of God.

We call God our Father because Jesus reveals Him to us as Father and the Holy Spirit makes Him known. In the incident of the Burning Bush in Exodus, God revealed Himself to Moses as “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex 3:13). But in Christ Jesus, God revealed Himself as Father. Jesus, who knows the Father, now reveals Him to us His children (Mt 11:25-27). God has adopted us as His children through baptism. Thus, when we address God as Father, we must live as sons and daughters of God. As St. John Chrysostom has noted: “You cannot call the God of all kindness your Father if you preserve a cruel and inhuman heart; for in this case you no longer have in you the marks of the heavenly Father’s kindness.”

Praying the ‘Our Father’ compels us as Christians and God’s children to leave individualism behind and inspires us to rise above all forms of division and rivalry since we are all God’s children and no one is excluded from the family of God.

Conclusion: Undoubtedly, the *Lord’s Prayer* is not only rich but also challenges us as Christians to live out the ideals and values of the prayer. Let us strive to ponder every aspect of the prayer and practice it in our lives. This is difficult but not impossible, for with God all things are possible (Mt 19:26). And so, let us pray, *Our Father.....!*