

Our readings today give us a glimpse into the importance of what it means to know God and acknowledge him. The gospel today highlights the importance of prayer, but not any prayer, prayer that allows us to communicate with God. You would think that the people who followed Jesus must have been men and women who knew how to pray, they were mostly devout Jews. There must have been something about the way Jesus prayed that caught the attention of the disciple that was unlike anything he had seen. What was it about his prayer that caught his attention? I believe the answer lies in the prayer itself. I will walk you through the prayer and highlight the points being made.

It was very tempting for me to quote from Pope Benedict XVI's book, "Jesus of Nazareth" which Benedict does an amazing job of breaking down the Our Father. However, I've quoted from Pope Benedict in almost every homily I've given so I thought I would let you discover his writings on this topic yourselves. Instead, I will use other sources for guidance, the Church Fathers and the Catechism.

Jesus starts with "Father." What does this word mean to you? What images come to mind? We don't just call anyone "Father." To call someone Father means there is a bond or connection which can be by blood relationship or adoption. It's a title that come with a purpose. Someone who is to take care of you, watch over your, prepare you,

encourage you, but most of all, it is a title of love not fear. This is the example for all human fathers. In our baptism, we become adopted children of God. In the Letter to the Romans it states, *“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, ‘Abba, Father!’ The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...”*¹ The Church Father Origen of Alexandria, who lived in the late second to mid-third century, noted on this passage, *“Throughout the Gospel, the disciples will observe Jesus’ relationship to God the Father and come to realize that through the Son of God they are children of God and that all prayers to the Father are always through the Son”* How should we speak to a father? Is it not with respect? Respect is given here out of love, not servitude like a slave to a master. And when we do that, we learn to love and honor our own father and mother as the fourth commandment teaches us.

The next instruction, “hallowed be your name,” is a recognition of who God is and the holiness of his name itself. The Jews will not pronounce God’s name, which was given to Moses on Mount Horeb.

¹ Rom 8:14-17

God tells Moses his name is, "I AM WHO I AM,"² and goes on to say "*...this is my name forever, this is my title for all generations.*"³ In the writings of St. Catherine of Siena, she wrote after a mystical experience that God had communicated to her the words, "I AM, and you are not!" This is a recognition of who God is and who we are not. God is the creator, and we are the created. St. Cyril of Alexandria, who lived in the late fourth to mid-fifth century commented, "*When it is our settled conviction and belief that he who by nature is God over all is Holy of the Holies, we confess his glory and supreme majesty. We then receive his fear into our mind and lead upright and blameless lives. By this we become holy ourselves, and we may be able to be near unto the holy God.*" In the sacrament of Confirmation, we receive the gift of "Fear of the Lord." This gift allows us to understand the greatness and awesomeness of God. From that we will want to serve Him because of who He is. "Once a person understands who God is and desires to please Him, they can begin to understand things from God's point of view and have Wisdom."⁴

² Exodus 3:14

³ Exodus 3:15

⁴ <https://www.stjmod.com/7-gifts-of-the-holy-spirit.html>

The next statement in the Lord's instruction is, "your kingdom come." The Catechism teaches that this statement, "...refers primarily to the final coming of the reign of God through Christ's return."⁵ St. Augustine, who lived in the mid-fourth to early fifth century notes on this statement, *"In this petition, this is what you desire and long for, namely, that you may so live as to have a share in the kingdom that will be given to all the saints. When you say, 'Thy kingdom come,' you pray for yourself, because you pray that you may lead a good life."* However, we have to also recognize this foreshadows the kingdom of God here on earth bought by Christ and his sacrifice on the cross which is manifested most presently in the world today through the Church and the sacraments, specifically the Eucharist.⁶

"Give us each day our daily bread." This is a statement of how we must trust that God will provide. The first Sunday of this month, our Gospel was about the sending out of the seventy-two disciples. If you recall, he sent them out with no money, no sandals no sack or food.⁷ The point was they were to trust completely in God's providence. We too must depend on no one, but God alone. In the Beatitudes of Luke's

⁵ CCC 2818

⁶ CCC 2816

⁷ Luke 10:4

Gospel, we are told, “*Blessed are you who are now hunger, for you will be satisfied.*”⁸ Three chapters later in Luke’s Gospel, we have the miracle of feeding the five thousand from five loaves and two fish. From Exodus when the Jews were wondering in the desert for forty years, our Lord provided them bread from heaven, manna. Their instruction was to only take what they would need for the day. If they took more than needed, it would go foul and stink and have worms in it.⁹ All was to teach to trust that God will provide. And in the Bread of Life discourse in St. John’s Gospel, our Lord tells us, “*I am the bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever.*”¹⁰ We will partake of that same bread from our Eucharistic celebration shortly.

The next instruction in the prayer is “...and forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us...” From the beatitudes in St. Luke’s gospel, we are taught, “*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*”¹¹ Quoting again from St. Cyril of Alexandria, and speaking in the context of the disciples, Jesus asks of his disciples to apply, “*The same gentleness that they show to their fellow servants, they pray that they may receive in equal measure from God, who gives justly,*

⁸ Luke 6:21

⁹ Exodus 16:20

¹⁰ John 6:51

¹¹ Luke 5:7

and knows how to show mercy to everyone.” In St. Matthew’s Gospel, we read from chapter seven, *“For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you.”* This pattern follows the commandment of Love of Neighbor.

The final instruction is, “do not subject us to the final test.” Our Catechism states *“We are engaged in the battle ‘between flesh and spirit’; this petition implores the Spirit of discernment and strength.”*¹² In chapter four of Luke’s Gospel, we read about the temptation of Jesus in the desert by Satan himself, Satan tempted Jesus’ human nature, a true battle of flesh and spirit. However, in the desert, Jesus was fasting and praying for the forty days and taught us how to use these two great weapons in our battle with Satan.

Now that we’ve gone through this prayer, let’s go back to the two questions I brought in in the beginning of this reflection. How did Jesus pray that caught the attention of the disciple and what can we take away from the prayer he taught us? To the first question, the answer lies in the very first line where it states, “Jesus was praying in a certain place.” Jesus often separated himself for one-on one-prayer with the Father. Two examples, first from Luke’s gospel in chapter 9, we read after the

¹² CCC 2846

miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish, Jesus went to pray in solitude. Second, after the Last Supper, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives before his passion where he prayed alone in the Garden of Gethsemane. So silent prayer is important to make that connection with our Lord and Father. To further this thought, Jesus himself teaches us in Matthew's Gospel the following on how to pray, "*When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And the Father who see in secret, will repay you.*"¹³ It's important that the prayers we ask, are meant to better us and get us closer to God, not to win the lottery.

As for the Our Father pray itself, it is a summation of the three great theological virtues we receive in our baptism, which are faith, hope and charity. To say, "Father, hallowed be your name," is an acknowledgement of God himself. We will reaffirm that faith in the very first line of the Creed we will profess after this homily. We express our faith to know God, to love him and ultimately serve him. To have hope in the context of the virtue is the hope of the resurrection when we say,

¹³ Matthew 6:5-6

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle C
July 27-28, 2019
Deacon Stuart Neck

“your kingdom come.” Finally, charity is the expression of love of neighbor. A very essential component of love of neighbor is to “...forgive everyone in debt to us.”

In closing, if you are looking to further your prayer life in a way that gets you closer to God, I would recommend you get a spiritual director. We are very fortunate in this parish as one of our parishioners is a spiritual director. Take advantage of this resource and contact the office or see me after mass. As we say the Our Father prayer in our mass today, try not to just recite the words out of memory, but dig deeper and say this prayer from your heart so when you ask, you will receive, when you seek, you will find, and when you knock, the door will be opened to you.

Amen