

Seventeenth Sunday *per annum*
Year C, 2025

Gen 18:20-32 Col 2:12-14
Ps 138 Lk 11:1-13

What Jesus prayed.

We often call it the Our Father. It is commonly referred to as the Lord's Prayer. It is the prayer common to all Christians, irrespective of their denomination. The version of the Lord's Prayer that we have just heard is taken from the gospel of Luke and is slightly different, in wording and in form, and in the context in which it is given, than the Lord's Prayer found in the gospel of Matthew.

It is not my intention to go over each of the differences between the two versions of the Lord's Prayer found in the gospels, however interesting that might be. But I do want to examine a few aspects of this prayer we all know by heart, and, because of that, that we sometimes fail to notice. By bringing forward these overlooked aspects of the Our Father, it is my hope that we can pray this prayer with greater understanding, with greater faith and love.

In the gospel of Luke in particular, Jesus is frequently depicted as being at prayer. In fact, this passage is the sixth time from the beginning of Luke's gospel that we encounter Jesus at prayer (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 9:28): "Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples'" (11:1).

Now, before we go any further, imagine that someone who looked up to you came and asked you to teach them how to do something ... like make a gumbo. We all know that there many different types of gumbo and styles of gumbo and things you put in a gumbo or eat with it. But when someone asks *you* to teach them how to make a gumbo, they're really asking you to show them how *you* make a gumbo, because they want to learn from *you* – how *you* do it, personally.

In a like way, a disciple of Jesus, who had been watching Jesus pray – quiet, off on his own, away from others – makes a bold request of the Lord. Other spiritual leaders, like John the Baptist, had taught their disciples how to pray. Now Jesus's disciples, seeing their master so often and so fervently at prayer, want to learn from him how to pray. They want to pray like he prays. And so we must imagine that what he tells them to say when they pray is what he himself is saying when he prays.

And so the Our Father gives us access to the mind of Jesus, to the heart of Jesus, to his soul, to who Jesus is as one who prays to his Father, whom he teaches us to call our Father. Prayer is such an intimate thing, something deeply personal, that touches on our innermost being, our greatest fears and loves, our vulnerabilities, our desire for wholeness and oneness, with God, with others, with ourselves. The Our Father, then, is an intimate portrait of the interior life of Jesus himself.

In Luke, Jesus tells his disciples, “When you pray, say” and in Matthew, Jesus says, “This is how you are to pray.” What follows are a series of petitions in the Our Father, five in Luke, seven in Matthew, by which Jesus teaches us what to ask of the Father so that we may receive; what to seek, so that we may find; how to knock, so that the door of grace and life may be opened to us.

First petition. May your name be holy.

Second petition. May your kingdom come.

Third petition. May your will be done.

Fourth petition. May we have enough to eat today.

Fifth petition. May we be forgiven.

Sixth petition. May we not be subject to temptation.

Seventh petition. May we be delivered from all evil.

Jesus himself was concerned about each of these things. These were the things he prayed to the Father about for himself, for his disciples, and for all he met and knew. I wish we had the time to examine each one of these petitions in detail and to relate it to the life of Jesus so as to fill in that intimate portrait of his heart and soul.

But let’s take just one example: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” *May your will be done.* This is what Jesus taught his disciples to pray, which means that this was the content of Jesus’s own prayer. And this is ratified by what Luke tells us Jesus prayed in the hour of his greatest need, when his heart and soul were being ripped apart by the approaching agony of what he would have to suffer. In the garden, fervent in prayer, “his sweat ... like drops of

blood falling on the ground,” Jesus prayed, “Father, let this cup pass me by, but not my will, but yours be done.” *Thy will be done.* Jesus himself prayed as he taught his disciples to pray.

As I said earlier, we say the Our Father so often and often so fast, that we rarely have time to really pray it with meaning and intentionality. And even when we do actually *pray* it, we often overspiritualize some of the petitions and thereby fail to feel the real weight and moment that these words, the prayer of Jesus himself, convey. Take for instance the petition, “give us this day our daily bread.” Right away, we interpret this as referring to the holy Eucharist. And rightly so. But that is a rather spiritualized interpretation. How many times in the gospels, and in all the scriptures, and in all human history, have people been physically hungry with little or no prospect of finding food for themselves and for their children? How many prayers over the millennia do you think have been directed to God to provide food when people have nothing to eat and are starving?

Human hunger, real, physical hunger is something virtually unknown nowadays in our country, where in general we suffer not from lack of food but from its excess. But imagine yourself in a place, ravished by war or disaster, where famine – the lack of access to food – threatens your very existence. Today, I think immediately of Gaza, where the Israeli state has destroyed virtually all infrastructure and continues to make access to emergency relief food nearly impossible. The people of Gaza are starving, and now

so are some of the relief workers. When they pray – and some of them are Christian – “give us this day our daily bread,” I bet they hear, feel, sound those words far differently from any of us, whose bellies, on a whim, are overfull.

Or what about the petition, “lead us not into temptation.” Think about how deeply you would feel praying those words if you or someone you love dearly were struggling morally and spiritually to break away from an addiction or from some hated and unwanted sinful habit that had you in its grips. When every day, every hour feels to you like you’re being tested, tempted, when your weaknesses or addictions, which you do not want and which you repudiate, nonetheless, unwanted, obsess you and invade your thoughts and desires, you will pray these words with an intensity and meaning that may surprise you, both this petition and the next one as well: “deliver us from evil.”

The Lord’s Prayer deserves to be prayed with greater reverence than we usually give it. And hearing it in the Lucan form instead of the better-known Matthean form gives us a chance to slow down and examine more closely the prayer that Jesus gave his disciples simply because they asked him to teach them how to pray.

For the gift of the Our Father alone, it is right and just that we should pray that the kingdom, the power, and the glory be his, now and forever. Amen.