

Question: Can you talk about the Lord's Prayer?

Answer: *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

The Our Father or Lord's Prayer is perhaps the best known and most popular prayer we have as Christians today. While the prayer may be one of the most commonly used, it is without a doubt the most profound. We pray the Lord's Prayer each Sunday liturgy, but do we really understand the words that we are praying? The Lord's Prayer is found in only two of our gospels (Matthew 6:9-15; Luke 11:2-4). Yet, the words of the prayer reflect all four canonical gospels in unique ways.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be they name. The first ten words of the Lord's Prayer are intended to remind us that we truly have only one father: God. Jesus calls God, Father when he prays (Mark 14:36), and when he speaks about God as he teaches (John 5:19-20). The important thing to remember is above all, God is Father who creates and sustains. In these words we are called to turn and approach God the Father as children do their own fathers, with love, trust, and confidence; for Jesus taught, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me" (Mark 9:37).

God's name is also to remain sacred. The emphasis on keeping God's name holy is found throughout all Christian and Jewish traditions. For the ancient Israelites in particular, God's name was so hallowed that they did not even speak it. YHWH (Yahweh) is the hallowed name of God. The word "Lord" in the Old Testament is the substitute noun for YHWH. Because the Israelites believed the official name of God was too sacred to speak, the word "Lord" was used in its place. Though we refer to God in many ways today (God, Yahweh, Abba, Father), it is important to remind ourselves how sacred God's name is, and that we should never use it irreverently or within a context that betrays the wonder and awe the name should provoke.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. This line is perhaps the most difficult for us as Christians to follow. We are awaiting God's kingdom, and when we pray the Lord's Prayer, we ask that God bring his kingdom to earth (as it is in heaven). As revealed in the Gospel of Mark, God's kingdom was initiated through the suffering, dying, and rising of Jesus the Christ (Mark 16:6). Yet, this was not enough, Jesus also *preached* the Kingdom of God when saying things like, "The Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15). We must also preach to others the coming of God's kingdom on earth by living our lives in Christ.

The second and the more difficult part to this line regards doing God's will. Doing the will of God means setting aside our own agendas and wants, and willingly submitting to what God wants. Searching for a model to emulate our own lives after, we need look no further than Jesus. The gospels are filled with instances of Jesus setting aside his own will to do that of God's. For example, when Jesus is in Gethsemane praying, knowing that he is about to be handed over, he says, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me, but not what I want, but what you want" (Mark 14:36). Jesus, clearly suffering, shows the interior conflict he is enduring between his own will and that of God's, he prays three times, that the pain, suffering, and death that he is about to endure not come to fruition. Yet, even when he asks God to take this cup away from him, he also says, "not what I want, but what you want." What does this mean? It means that even though it is difficult and scary, Jesus chooses to do God's will, not his own. When we pray "thy will be done" we are asking that *God's* will be done upon us like it was done upon Jesus; a great responsibility for anyone who prays the Lord's Prayer.

Give us this day our daily bread. This line asks God to give us those things which we need on a daily basis to survive as human beings. Mentioning bread also reminds us of Eucharist and the Last Supper in which Jesus takes a loaf of bread, blesses it and says, "Take, eat; this is my body" (Matthew 26:26).

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Trespasses may best be understood for us as sins (Sacra Pagina: Matthew, 95). In Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer, he uses the word "debts" instead of the word "trespasses." Debts within the context of prayer in Jewish antiquity were understood to be sins against God (Sacra Pagina: Matthew, 95). The idea is that we are asking God to release us from our sins and, we are also telling those who have sinned against us that they are forgiven (Sacra Pagina: Matthew, 95).

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. When saying this, we ask God to protect us from the temptations of evil. We all undergo temptations in our lives. When praying the Lord's Prayer, we ask God to give us the strength to resist those temptations. As Jesus resisted the vanity offered him by Satan (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-12), we too must avoid temptations to sin against God and others in order to deliver ourselves from the evil that follows it. By saying the Our Father, we are putting our trust and confidence in God, prayerfully hoping that it will lead us to the resistance of evil and the lures of temptation.