

Lord's Prayer
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
(Lk 11:1-13)

The “Lord’s Prayer,” given in St. Matthew’s Gospel (the version used at Mass) and in St. Luke (slightly shorter version), is not only a prayer to say, but a guide for prayer. It is an outline that shows step by step how to approach God in prayer, and seek from Him the graces needed for Christian life.

“*Father.*” Prayer is not simply self-reflection, nor is it the invocation of some vague spirit of nature. Neither is it the impersonal submission to “Allah.” Prayer is the confident trust and love of a son before his Father, a sharing in the Trinitarian communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit manifested in Jesus, and a cooperative endeavor with God for the salvation of the world.

“*Hallowed be thy name.*” Prayer begins with reverence and honor. Though we come before God with many personal needs, God is always to be loved and not manipulated. All things, including our lives, exist for his glory, and are subject to His will. Thus prayer must begin not with a focus on ourselves and our needs, but on God and His glory.

“*Thy kingdom come.*” God sent His Son into the world to save the world from sin and evil, reestablishing His loving dominion in human life. Our purpose and mission is to continue this work of Christ in the Church, serving God by establishing His Kingdom in the world: in our lives, our families and communities. Much of our prayer and need before God will involve the situations we find ourselves in. We need to realize that the establishment of God’s Kingdom is a great battle between good and evil, in which we are foot soldiers. God will need us to be in situations where good is being challenged by evil, the very situations where the Cross of Jesus is most needed. Unless we understand our role in fighting and suffering for the Kingdom of God, beginning with our own soul, our petitions to God will never be correct. We need to focus our prayer on fulfilling this mission.

“*Give us each day our daily bread.*” Only now do we turn to ourselves and our needs. Even in making personal requests, however, the Lord’s Prayer teaches us to think of the needs of others (“*Give us...*”). Jesus teaches us to ask for the grace we need to fulfill our tasks; and not only request them but boldly expect those graces (“*Give us...*”). As His children we have a right to the nourishment and strength God provides, “bread from heaven.” Jesus will explain more fully in John’s Gospel, that this bread is himself (Jn 6:51). The Lord’s prayer thus directs us to the sacrament of the Eucharist as the source of all grace, nourishment, and strength for Christian life.

Moreover, the Lord's Prayer teaches us to seek "this day our daily bread." Prayer focuses us on the here and now, not yesterday which is gone, or tomorrow which does not exist. It is in the present that God needs us to serve Him.

"Forgive us our sins." As children of God, who honor and serve so good a Father, seeking his Kingdom, we quickly become aware in God's presence of our failing and inadequacy, our sinfulness. Prayer confronts us with the truth about ourselves. Through prayer we acknowledge this sinfulness, not unto despair, but unto healing. God the Father, through Christ, continually lifts us up and restores us to our dignity. God the Father is Truth but also Mercy.

"As we forgive those in debt to us." Throughout the Lord's prayer, Jesus teaches us to turn the focus away from our selves and our selfish needs. First by directing our prayer to the honor of God the Father and His will, and secondly by emphasizing communion with others ("our" "us"). A key part of prayer is the focus on our relationships, where the greater part of our mission lies. God's peace and blessings are to be shared and cultivated within relationships. The devil must not be allowed any victory in achieving hatred or division.

"Subject us not to the trial." This is also translated, "Lead us not into temptation." The fact is, God *does* lead us into situations where we face evil, are tempted by our weakness, and are in danger of being overcome – as He did when the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert to be tested by the devil. Prayer is necessary for this spiritual combat, so that we do not give in to temptation, and that we might be delivered from the evil one. It is usually the case that we pray because we desire God's help, deliverance, or relief of some sort. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus tells us how to make such requests: it is not the first thing we ask for, but the final thing we ask, after having considered the fuller picture of God's will and the purpose of our life.

Thus the Lord's Prayer is not only the best prayer to say as part of any time of prayer, but teaches the sequence of petitions to be made in our prayer. The Lord's Prayer teaches us how to pray.