

LESSON 4

OUR FATHER: THE SUMMARY OF THE WHOLE GOSPEL

BACKGROUND READING



When the disciples watched Jesus pray, they were so inspired that they wished to imitate Him. They entreated, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). There is a great lesson here for us as parents—if we want our children to pray then they must see us at prayer.

In response to the disciples’ request to learn how to pray, Jesus gave them the Our Father, also known as the Lord’s Prayer. The Our Father is the fundamental Christian prayer; it is the prayer given to us by the Lord Himself.

The Summary of the Whole Gospel

The *Catechism* tells us that the Our Father is at the center of the Scriptures, and is the prayer of the Church. It says, “The Lord’s Prayer ‘is truly the summary of the whole gospel.’ Since the Lord ... after handing over the practice of prayer, said elsewhere, ‘Ask and you will receive,’ and since everyone has petitions which are peculiar to his circumstances, the regular and appropriate prayer [the Lord’s Prayer] is said first, as the foundation of

further desires” (CCC 2761). Jesus gave us the Our Father to teach us to know what we need in order to live as sons and daughters of God. It shares with us the “Good News” that we are children of God, which is the message of the Gospel.

God Is Father

Perhaps the most striking, and certainly the most radical revelation of the Lord’s Prayer, is that Jesus calls God His Father and asks us to do the same. The God who in the Old Testament was shrouded in mystery, and whose name the Hebrew people were not even allowed to pronounce, is now revealed as our Father. This must have been hard for Jesus’ disciples to understand at first. In fact, this was one of the very reasons that the Jews tried to kill Jesus: “For this reason the Jews tried all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but he also called God his own father, making himself equal to God” (John 5:18).

Only in the power of the Holy Spirit can we truly call God our Father. The *Catechism*

explains, “Jesus not only gives us the words of our filial prayer; at the same time he gives us the Spirit by whom these words become in us ‘spirit and life’” (2766). This Spirit, sent into our hearts by God the Father, cries out, “Abba, Father!” (Galatians 4:6). The term “Abba” is a term of intimacy, and God invites us to enter into a familial relationship with Him.

What Does It Mean to Pray “Father”?

When we pray “Father,” we are acknowledging that we are God’s adopted sons and daughters. Through the grace of Baptism we have been reborn into life in Christ. This grace is a free gift given to us because of God’s great love for us and His desire that we spend eternity with Him in Heaven. Thus the opening words of the Lord’s Prayer are words of adoration to our God who has loved us so much that He has made us His children. Calling God “our Father” in prayer means that we relate to Him as His children. Recognizing our dignity as a child of God should cause us to “desire to become like him” (CCC 2784). We must respond to the grace that is given to us. As God’s children, we should always be experiencing conversion of heart. St. Cyprian, an early Christian theologian, said that, “We must remember ... and know that when we call God ‘our Father’ we ought to behave as sons of God” (CCC 2784).

If God who is the Creator of Heaven and earth has loved us enough to create us and to make us His children through Baptism, what would He not be willing to give to us if we ask? As the Scripture says, “If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him”

(Matthew 7:11). When we pray we must believe that God hears us and answers our prayers according to His will.

What Does It Mean to Pray “Our Father”?

When we pray “our Father” we are not expressing possession, “but an entirely new relationship with God” (CCC 2786). Through the New Covenant in Jesus Christ we have become “His” people and He has become “our” God. But these words express more than just a relationship with God in the here and now. Yes, we are God’s children through Baptism, but we shall also be God’s children for all of eternity in Heaven. Our Father “expresses the certitude of our hope in God’s ultimate promise” (CCC 2788).

“Our” also expresses the truth that we are united in faith, and through Baptism, with all other believers. We are indeed “one body,” and like the early Church, we should yearn for unity in the body of Christ. Even with all the divisions between various denominations in Christianity, we all hold the Lord’s Prayer in common. We can join together with Christians from other faiths and pray for the unity of all those who profess Jesus Christ as Lord. When we pray “our” we must strive to include “all those for whom he gave his beloved Son. God’s love has no bounds, neither should our prayer” (CCC 2793). We should pray that all those who do not yet know Christ, will come to know Him and live in Him, so that Christ may “gather into one the dispersed children of God” (John 11:52).

Our Father in Heaven

In the Our Father, Heaven doesn’t refer to a specific place; rather, it is a way of being.

To be in Heaven means to look upon the holiness and sacredness of God. Everything that makes us feel wonder and awe in our lives is only a small foretaste of the wonder and awesomeness of God, who created all things

and transcends everything. Heaven is our true homeland, toward which we are journeying. Because God is our Father, He desires us to enter into His home to be truly united with Him in love.