

OUR FATHER: THE FIRST THREE PETITIONS

BACKGROUND READING



St. Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest Catholic theologians, said, “The Lord’s Prayer is the most perfect of prayers. ... This prayer not only teaches us to ask for things, but also in what order we should desire them” (CCC 2763). The opening words to the Lord’s Prayer, “Our Father, who art in heaven,” acknowledge God as our Father and so we worship and adore Him. The rest of the Our Father expresses seven petitions or requests to God our Father. The first three petitions carry us to glorify the Father; the last four express our needs in this life for both our body and our spirit. In this lesson we will examine the first three petitions: Thy name, Thy Kingdom, and Thy will.

Hallowed Be Thy Name

When we pray, “hallowed be Thy name,” we are not asking if *we* can make God’s name holy; only God can make something holy. Rather, when we pray “hallowed be Thy name,” we are asking to recognize God’s name as holy and therefore to treat it in a holy way. To be holy means to be set aside in order to conform to God’s purpose. By praying that God’s name be made holy in us, we are asking to enter into the eternal plan that God has for the redemption of all humanity. Each and every baptized Christian

is called to make God’s name holy in his or her life, so that the world can see the face of Jesus in how we live our lives.

God’s “work then, is realized for us and in us only if his name is hallowed by us and in us” (CCC 2808). God first makes us holy through our Baptism, where we are washed clean of our sin and claimed in the name of Jesus Christ. This call to holiness continues throughout our lives. When we live like sons and daughters of God, God’s name is blessed through our lives. The opposite is true, too. When we live sinfully, God’s name is blasphemed (to blaspheme is to disrespect that which is holy). We ask that God’s name be made holy in us so that we can be holy, and participate in the saving work that Jesus came into this world to accomplish.

Thy Kingdom Come

In the second petition of the Our Father we pray that God’s Kingdom will come. Our prayer here is primarily for “the final coming of the reign of God through Christ’s return” (CCC 2818). When Jesus comes in glory at the end of time, He will bring all things under His reign.

The book of Revelation expresses the heartfelt cry of the Church waiting for the

coming of Christ, when it says: “Behold, I am coming soon. ... The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” Let the hearer say, “Come.” ... The one who gives this testimony says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:12, 17, 20). The Holy Spirit moves in the Bride of Christ, the Church, to cry out in prayer, “Maranatha,” which means, “Come, Lord Jesus.” This prayer is for the fullness of the reign of God that is “righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). Praying that Jesus will come again in glory at the end of time does not diminish, but rather strengthens, our commitment to work for the reign of God in our lives and in the world. We are called to work in this world to bring God’s justice and peace.

We live in a creative tension in which, on the one hand, the Kingdom of God is present, and on the other, the fullness of the Kingdom of God will come when Jesus returns to reign in glory. We are called both to work at furthering the reign of God’s Kingdom through the way we live our lives, as well as to wait for the Kingdom in joyful expectation. As God’s people we work and pray, “Thy Kingdom come,” as we wait in joyful hope for the second coming of Jesus Christ and the fullness of His Kingdom.

Thy Will Be Done on Earth As It Is in Heaven

What is “God’s will” that we pray will be done on earth as it is in Heaven? The *Catechism* tells us: “Our Father ‘desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.’ ... His commandment is ‘that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.’ This commandment summarizes all the others and expresses his entire will” (CCC 2822).

Jesus came to bring salvation to the whole world, and He did so by perfectly uniting His will

to that of His Father’s in Heaven. Jesus’ love for us was so great that in the face of unspeakable betrayal and suffering, and indeed the loss of His very life, He consented to His Father’s plan for our redemption with the total yes of His will. As we saw before, Jesus’ anguished prayer to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane was, “Not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). He knew that He must suffer and die to accomplish His Father’s will. He consented to this great sacrifice out of love for the Father and love for each and every one of us.

When we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we are asking the Father to unite our will to His Son’s will. When we say yes to the Father, we imitate Christ. We enter into the Father’s mysterious plan that unfolds the salvation that Jesus won for us on the Cross. Of course, on our own we are totally incapable of this kind of surrender to the will of God. Only when we are united with Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit are we able to do God’s will.

Praying this petition “Thy will be done” has a twofold purpose: first, we ask to be part of the plan that brings the perfection of God’s will as it is found in Heaven to the earth; and, second, we ask to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven ourselves. Jesus tells us, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

Thy Name, Thy Kingdom, and Thy Will, prayed from our hearts, draws us into God’s mysterious and wondrous plan for the salvation of the world. We pray that God’s name will be made holy in our lives, that His Kingdom will rule our lives, and that His will be done in our lives. This prayer unites us to Jesus’ prayer, and now one with Him, God uses us to accomplish the great unfolding of His eternal plan for all mankind.