

LESSON 6

OUR FATHER: THE LAST FOUR PETITIONS

BACKGROUND READING



After we have asked God to draw us to Him in the first three petitions of the Our Father, we then pray the last four petitions for the needs of our life for both our body and our soul. As children, we ask in confidence and trust for our heavenly Father to care for us.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

“Give us” are the words of prayer uttered by trusting children that confidently ask their Father to give them what they need. But in this fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, it is not only for ourselves that we pray. We pray “give us,” not “give me.” In doing so, we acknowledge that our Father is also the Father of all people, and that we are asking Him to answer their needs as well. The word “us” not only identifies us as part of the human family, but also reminds us that we have a grave responsibility to those who lack the things they need in order to live a fully human life. These words remind us that we must work for justice in our world, so that the needs of all can be met. We become the hands and feet of Jesus as we enter into His mission to give daily bread to all. But even if we labor for the needs of all, we must recall that whatever we receive and give are gifts from our Father.

What are those things for which human beings hunger? Of course, we can readily identify the physical hunger that we feel when it is mealtime, and the needs that we have to be safe, to be clothed, and to have a home. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert to eat bread after He had fasted for 40 days, however, He spoke these words: “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

Our daily bread is much more than physical food. Human persons are dying of hunger, “not a hunger for bread, or a thirst for water, but for hearing the word of the Lord” (Amos 8:11). We are starving for the Word of God (Jesus) and His Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God brings life, and it is Jesus Himself who declared, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst” (John 6:35). As Christians we know that our hunger is only truly satisfied by Jesus Himself. We must be nourished by the Word of God that we read and on which we meditate in Sacred Scripture, and by the Body of Christ that we receive in the Eucharist at Mass. Then we must share the Word of God with all people, especially those who are

poor and needy. Notice that when we pray for “our daily bread,” we acknowledge that we need to be fed every day. That is why the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is celebrated each and every day. The Eucharist is our daily food as we anticipate the coming of God’s Kingdom in its fullness at the end of time. It is a “foretaste of the kingdom to come” (CCC 2837).

And Forgive Us Our Trespasses, as We Forgive Those Who Trespass Against Us

In this fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer we ask God for forgiveness for our sins, also known as our trespasses. But Jesus did not teach us to pray simply, “forgive us our trespasses,” but rather He said, “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” These are powerful words: if we do not forgive those who have offended us, then we cannot receive God’s forgiveness for our sins. The *Catechism* explains that this is not because God chooses not to forgive us; rather it is that we choose to close our hearts to His mercy because of our unwillingness to forgive:

Now— and this is daunting—this outpouring of mercy cannot penetrate our hearts as long as we have not forgiven those who have trespassed against us. Love, like the Body of Christ, is indivisible; we cannot love the God we cannot see if we do not love the brother or sister we do see. In refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father’s merciful love. (CCC 2840)

The forgiveness that God is asking of us is, in fact, a gift of grace from Him. That is why we ask in prayer for the power of God

in our hearts to forgive others—even our enemies. But forgiving is not forgetting, nor is it a feeling. Many think that they can never forgive someone who has inflicted a painful wound, and they fear that they will remember this wound all their lives. We can remember a wound, and even still feel hurt by it, yet still choose to forgive. Forgiveness from the heart is a decision. When we allow the grace of God to fill us and we take on the mind of Christ, then our sincere decision to forgive is what releases us from the bondage of unforgiveness and floods our hearts with God’s forgiveness.

Lead Us Not into Temptation

By asking God not to lead us into temptation, this petition might seem to imply that God could or might direct us in a way that leads to sin, since sin is a result of our saying yes to temptation. However, this understanding is not what the original Greek verb “lead” means in Scripture. The *Catechism* explains: “The Greek means both ‘do not allow us to enter into temptation’ and ‘do not let us yield to temptation’” (CCC 2846). God does not tempt anyone; instead, it is His will that we be set free from all evil. In this petition, we are asking God’s help in the battle against our own fallen nature that is attracted to sin.

We should also remember that temptation itself is not sinful. Every human person is faced with temptation. Even Jesus faced temptation, but He never sinned. Unless temptations are acted upon, or we willingly entertain thoughts of evil, then there is no sin. When we pray, “lead us not into temptation,” we are asking God to give us the grace to dismiss the thoughts or impulses that might lead us to sin. Through the power of the Holy Spirit living within us, we are

able, through grace, to say no to temptation and yes to God.

But Deliver Us from Evil

In this seventh and last petition of the Lord's Prayer we pray for the strength and grace to be victorious in the battle against the Evil One. The *Catechism* clearly states, "In this petition, evil is not an abstraction, but refers to a person, Satan, the Evil One, the angel who opposes God" (CCC 2851). The Church teaches that Satan is a personal being, an evil one, who always opposes God and His plan of salvation. In order to be on guard against the Evil One, we know that he does indeed exist and that his plan is to

lead us to hell. Having said this, it is equally important for us to know that as children of God living in grace, we are protected from the Evil One. Scripture assures that as great as Satan's power is in this world, God's power is always greater. Scripture says, "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). We have nothing to fear from Satan as long as we remain in God's grace. Christ defeated the Evil One in His victory on the Cross, defeating sin and death through His Resurrection. In this final petition, we ask the Father to deliver us from all the evils that plague humanity, as well as to bestow on us the gift of His peace and the grace to persevere in His grace until Christ's return.