



Wednesday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time



Date: Wednesday, October 9, 2024 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** B

First Reading: Galatians 2:1–2, 7–14

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 117:1bc, 2 | **Response:** Mark 16:15

Gospel Acclamation: Romans 8:15bc

Gospel Reading: Luke 11:1–4

Preached at: the Chapel of the Most Holy Name, Kolvenbach House in the Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia.

In today's Gospel from Luke, we hear the disciples approach Jesus with a simple yet profound request: "Lord, teach us to pray." This request speaks to their desire for a deeper communion with God, and Jesus responds by giving them—and us—the Our Father. This prayer is not merely a formula to be recited but a roadmap for living out our relationship with God and each other.

Addressing God as "Father" was, and still is, rather revolutionary. It reflects the intimate, trusting relationship Jesus had with God, and it invites us to approach God with the same confidence and love. As Jesuits, this intimate relationship with the Divine Majest lies at the core of our lives and missions as, like our forebards in the Society, we begged the Father to place us with the Son. We know, as St. Ignatius teaches, that it is in prayer where we discern God's will, it is in prayer where we find strength for our work, and it is in prayer that we deepen our love for Christ. So we too should not be strangers to the petition, "Lord teach us to pray!"

The Our Father is not a prayer we should gloss over too quickly. We say it every day at Mass, it was probably one of the first prayers we learned by heart, and St. Ignatius used it a lot in the Spiritual Exercises. He not only recommends that we end each colloquy in prayer with the Our Father, but he also integrates it deeply into his Three Ways of Praying in the supplementary material at the end of the Spiritual Exercises, which are meant to be three ways to help one pray after the 4th week. These ways provide practical, concrete ways for us to enter into prayers, and all three make use of the Our Father, thus encouraging us to make this prayer a part of our daily spiritual rhythm.

In the First Way of praying, Ignatius encourages us to “consider and think over” our faithfulness to the “Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins, the Three Powers of the Soul and the Five Senses of the Body”, while reciting three Our Fathers. This anchors our reflection on our own faithfulness and failings, and like the first week, is an examination of conscience of a sort. But notice how there is a shift from focusing on our actions to our sensory awareness of our very self, created for God’s glory and praise. There is a shift from self to others too in the Our Father itself, for as we pray this prayer, we are led to the petition, “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” This is not just a personal plea but a call to communal mercy and reconciliation—values essential in our Jesuit community life.

In the Second Way, Ignatius invites us to move from ‘considering’ to ‘contemplating’, by pausing and reflecting on each word of the Our Father, allowing it to resonate deeply in our hearts. Consider the word “Father” he says. This word alone can open up profound meditations on the trust, love, and security that come from knowing God as a loving parent. Ignatius encourages us to savor each word, letting it guide us toward deeper intimacy with God. When imaginative contemplation isn’t working after a tiring day at work in each of our apostolates, this way is a powerful way to cultivate a personal relationship with God, which is central to our Jesuit vocation.

In the Third Way, Ignatius synchronizes prayer with breathing, suggesting we say each word of the Our Father with every breath we take. We’re moving from contemplating what is outside to breathing in and becoming – to welcoming God into our very self. This way integrates prayer into the very rhythm of our lives, making each breath a prayer. It is especially helpful in times of busy apostolic work, when we may feel far from the the solitude of the chapel, but can still remain close to God through our breathing and prayer.

The three ways of praying St Ignatius proposed all used the Our Father in a deliberate way. Perhaps this was because it was a well-known prayer, but I also think it was because this was the way Jesus suggested his disciples pray, and if it was good enough for Jesus, that was enough for Ignatius, who desired only to serve the Divine Majesty and to know and do God’s will.

The Our Father is often thought of as the typical Christian prayer, but it is in fact arguably rather Jewish, at least in the beginning. The first two petitions of the Lord's Prayer — “hallowed be your name, your kingdom come” — are paralleled in the Jewish prayer called the Kaddish, which begins, “Magnified and sanctified be his great Name,” and goes on to say, “May he establish his kingdom during your life and during your days and during the life of all the house of Israel.” The Jewishness of Jesus gives us an insight into the controversy Paul reports in today's first reading from Galatians. The first followers of Jesus were Jews, like him. Their mission was limited to the Jews, like Jesus' mission during his earthly life. Paul's mission to the Gentiles challenged the nascent Church to make an imaginative leap of faith in a new direction. It would require an education of the heart. Perhaps a similar education of the heart, or conversion, is what is needed in our own day as we continue to pray for the men and women, clergy and lay, gathered together in Synod in Rome at the moment. They are aware, I am certain, of the necessity for their dependence on God the Holy Spirit at this moment. This dependence on the triune God, is really at the heart of our spiritual life – to always remember that we are God's beloved creatures. And when we sin or stray, we trespass or wander away from God. In praying the Our Father we are able to re-turn, to repent and through a converted heart, renew our dependence on God.

The structure of the Our Father itself reflects our dependence on God. We begin by honoring His holiness and asking for His kingdom to come—a reminder that, as Jesuits, we are called to work for the greater glory of God and the coming of His kingdom as we stand alongside His Son. We ask for daily sustenance, both physical and spiritual, which speaks to our trust in God's ongoing providence in our missions, and in our lives.

Forgiveness is central to the Our Father, and it is also central to our Jesuit life. As we pray, “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us” we are reminded of our call to extend mercy to one another. Living in community can be challenging, but forgiveness and reconciliation are essential for our unity and mission. St. Ignatius, aware of the struggles of communal life, emphasized the importance of forgiveness, urging us to reconcile with one another so that we can better serve Christ together.

Finally, in Luke's Gospel, Jesus follows the Our Father with a call to perseverance in prayer. He tells the parable of the persistent friend, teaching us that God is always listening and that we must persist in prayer, especially in times of difficulty. St. Ignatius echoes this teaching in the Exercises, reminding us that prayer is a constant, even when we may not feel consolation. In fact in those moments he recommends even more persistence in prayer. This perseverance is crucial for our Jesuit life, sustaining us in our mission and deepening our trust in God's providence.

In conclusion, the Our Father is a prayer that encapsulates the entire Christian life. Through St. Ignatius' Three Ways of Praying, we are given ways to immerse ourselves in this prayer, making it not just words we recite, but a way of life, a way of spending time with God, a way of breathing during our day. As we pray the Our Father together before Communion this evening, let us deepen our trust in God our Father, embrace forgiveness and reconciliation, perhaps even resolving to forgive and ask for forgiveness from one another, and to persevere in prayer, knowing that God is always with us, guiding our steps and sustaining our mission, offering us always the grace that we need to live our commitment to be Friends in the Lord, and companions in the company of Jesus.

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