

The “Our Father”

Q. 268. Why is the “Our Father” a prayer of perfect and unselfish love?

The “Our Father” is a prayer of perfect and unselfish love because it is the prayer that God’s Incarnate Son taught us. In saying the Our Father, we offer ourselves entirely to the Father and ask Him for the best things, not only for ourselves, but also for our neighbor. The Our Father summarizes the entire Gospel and praying it brings us into communion with Jesus Christ, His Son.

God the Father wants to give us the graces that will enable us to carry out His will and plan, His New Covenant with us for our salvation and divine adoption. The Lord’s prayer contains seven petitions which ask for the graces necessary for our salvation and that the gifts given to us in Baptism will grow and develop. The first three petitions remind us of God’s glory and are directed in hope toward the fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation in Christ Jesus. The last four petitions draw on God’s mercy and love and ask for His grace to nourish, heal and protect us. Each petition is a prayer not only for the good explicitly asked for, but also for the grace we need to bring about this requested good.

This prayer begins by invoking God as our Father.

Our Father, Who art in heaven. God is our last end. To possess Him on earth, and someday in heaven, is our true happiness. To possess Him, we must have child-like trust and love. We address God as Father because Jesus has revealed Him to us and taught His disciples to pray in this way. By addressing God as *our* Father, we pray not only for ourselves but for all mankind. “Heaven” referred to here is the heaven of the hearts of the just, hearts that are a temple in which God dwells (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2794).

Hallowed be Thy name. We hallow God’s name by showing reverence to God and to each other and by living our lives as God’s loving children. We pray that everyone will come to know of God’s holiness and goodness and for mankind’s sanctification.

To help us come to know and believe in God and all that He has revealed, we ask for an increase in the the gift of knowledge and the infused virtue of faith. Only then can we hallow and praise God and His Name—by our words, songs, and hymns, etc., by our deeds and lives of obedience to the Faith, and by our witness to the Gospel.

Thy Kingdom come. Since love seeks intimate union, we ought to desire that God should rule more and more both our minds and hearts. God’s Kingdom is in our midst now in the Eucharist and in our hearts and minds. Yet, we await with long-

For commentaries on each question with Cardinal Arinze, Sr. John Vianney and Fr. Straub (in Spanish), see Appendix E.

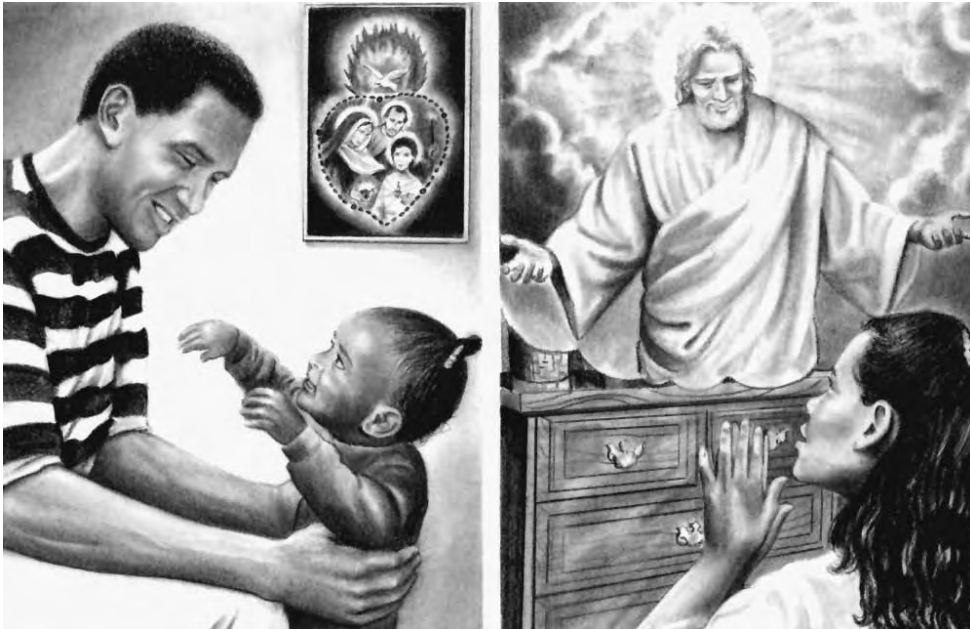
ing the coming of God’s Kingdom, when Christ shall come again. We pray that we can be instruments of the Holy Spirit to complete God’s work on earth and hasten the coming of our Lord in glory.

To become effective instruments of the Holy Spirit, we ask, especially, for an increase in the gift of understanding and the infused virtue of hope. These supernatural gifts enable us to understand what God is asking of us and give us the power to make firm commitments in fulfilling the work that God gives us to do.

Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven. United with Jesus’ perfect obedience to the Father, we pray for the grace to surrender our wills to Him so that His loving plan for our and our neighbor’s salvation can come to fulfillment. We ask the Father to help us do His holy will in all things, as His will is accomplished by the Blessed Virgin Mary and the angels and saints in heaven. This life in heaven is a model of perfect union between Creator and creature.

For God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, we especially ask for an increase in the gift of piety and the infused virtue of charity. These supernatural gifts enable us to see and understand our identity in, through, and for Jesus so that we desire to do what God wants and to love Him, ourselves, and one another with a deep, unselfish love.

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Give us this day our daily bread. In this petition, we acknowledge the goodness of God and pray for the material and spiritual needs of ourselves and our neighbor.

There are three kinds of “bread” referred to in this petition. The first and most obvious is the material bread that nourishes our bodies. The second is the bread of Truth and of the knowledge of God’s will. As Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew

4:4), and, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me” (John 4:34). Finally, there is the divine Bread of the Eucharist.

We especially ask for an increase in the gift of Wisdom and the infused virtue of prudence. Wisdom enables us to discern God’s will, to nourish ourselves with the truths revealed by God, and to appreciate the reality of our need for the true Bread from Heaven, the Flesh of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Supernatural prudence helps us to plan means for supporting ourselves and our dependents, arrange effective ways and means for carrying out God’s will, and arrange our lives so that we receive the sacraments often, attend Mass, and adore Jesus truly present in the Eucharist.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. In this petition, we admit we are sinners. We pray for God’s forgiveness and mercy and for His grace to help us grow in holiness. Jesus teaches us that in order to be forgiven, we must forgive those who have hurt us, just as the Father has forgiven us.

To obtain the light and the power we need to recognize our own sins, to forgive ourselves and others, and to make reparation for sin, we especially ask for an increase in the gift of counsel and the infused virtue of justice.

Lead us not into temptation. St. James says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire” (James 1:13-14). When our desire finds joy in that which displeases God or when we feel aversion to that which God wills, we fall into temptation. In this petition of the Lord’s Prayer, we unite ourselves with Jesus and ask God for the grace to recognize and resist temptation and for the strength to be vigilant and to choose the way that leads to everlasting life.

We especially ask for the light and the power of the gift of fear of the Lord and the infused virtue of temperance. These supernatural gifts enable us to control our minds and imaginations so we can focus our emotions of delight, desire, and joy on what pleases God, and our emotions of dismay, aversion, and sorrow on what displeases God.

But deliver us from evil. In this petition, we entrust ourselves and the whole human family to our loving Father and implore His protection and deliverance from Satan and all evils. We pray for peace and for perseverance as we await Christ’s return.

We especially ask for the light and the power of the gift of fortitude and the infused virtue of fortitude. These supernatural gifts enable us to fill our minds and imaginations with images of Jesus, Mary, and the saints so that we can perseveringly focus our emotions of courage, trusting commitment, and enthusiasm on what God wants us to do, and focus our emotions of fear, despair, and anger on sin, false hopes, and all that is opposed to God’s Kingdom.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

2763 All the Scriptures—the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms—are fulfilled in Christ.¹ The Gospel is this “Good News.” Its first proclamation is summarized by St. Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount;² the prayer to our Father is at the center of this proclamation. It is in this context that each petition bequeathed to us by the Lord is illuminated: “The Lord’s Prayer is the most perfect of prayers.... In it we ask, not only for all the things we can rightly desire, but also in the sequence that they should be desired. This prayer not only teaches us to ask for things, but also in what order we should desire them.”³

Papal Teaching

We who now form the Church of Christ on earth... must meet in the dimension of truth of the kingdom of God: Christ came to reveal this kingdom and launch it on this earth, in every place of the earth, in men and among men.

This kingdom of God is in our midst (cf. Luke 17:21), as it was in all the generations of your fathers and ancestors. But like them, we too still pray in the “Our Father” every day: “Thy kingdom come.” These words bear witness that the kingdom of God is still ahead of us, that we are moving towards it, advancing along the confused paths, and in fact sometimes even the wrong ones, of our earthly existence. We bear witness with these words that the kingdom of God is being continually realized and is approaching, even if we often lose sight of it and no longer see its form, described by the Gospel. It often seems that the one and only dimension of our existence is “this world”: the “kingdom of this world” with its visible form, its breathtaking progress in science and technology, in culture and in economy... breathtaking and often also worrying! But if we kneel down to pray every day, or at least from time to time, we always utter, amid these circumstances of life, the same words: “Thy kingdom come.” *Homily by Pope John Paul II, November 15, 1980*

Doctrine • Moral • Worship Exercise (see Appendix B for answer key)

1. How does the Our Father prayer teach us to love God and our neighbor perfectly and unselfishly?
2. Pick one part of the Our Father prayer and meditate on it. In concrete terms, how will you live this part of the Our Father in your relationship with God and with the members of your family, school, workplace, and community?
3. Pray the Our Father slowly and think of the spiritual meaning of each part. Ask Our Lord to increase your desire to unite your intentions to the petitions of this prayer.

Chapter Summary Prayer

Jesus, give us the grace we need in order to understand the depth and beauty of the prayer You taught us. God is our Father, since You, the Son of God, became our Brother through the Incarnation. By our sacramental union with You, we are made members of Your Mystical Body, the Church. May the Name of God be hallowed by all men. May we grow to know more and more about His infinite goodness, and learn to love Him and praise Him above all things.

May Your Kingdom come for us, the Kingdom promised us by the Father and purchased for us by Your holy Passion: the Kingdom of grace here, and the Kingdom of glory hereafter.

Help us, Jesus, to renounce our own wills so that we may do the will of God as it is done in heaven, for such obedience is the heart and soul of all holiness. May neither sin nor carelessness ever prevent us from partaking of the daily Bread of Life in Holy Communion, that we may continually be with You and live for You.

Forgive us our guilt and help us to be reconciled with our brethren.

Guard us, Lord, from such temptations as might prove too strong for us, and deliver us from the evil of sin and all that leads to or results from it.

Jesus, give us the spirit of forgiveness which is expressed in Your prayer. We gladly pardon all who have hurt us in any way. We forgive them their offenses with all of our hearts, that we may deserve to be forgiven by Your heavenly Father, Whom we have grieved by our many sins more than anyone can grieve us. To You, to the Father, and to the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory now and forever. Amen.

#P26-5



Thought Provokers

Please see Appendix C for the answers.

Q. 268: The Lord’s Prayer or the Our Father, as we all know, begins with the words, “Our Father Who art in Heaven”. In what sense can we human creatures refer to God the Father as our Father?