

Proper 12C 2019 SSP Jesus's Perfect Prayer

St. Luke 11:1-13

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

As Jesus is leading his disciples on the way up to Jerusalem as narrated by Saint Luke in today's Gospel, the disciples ask him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John [the Baptist] taught his disciples. And Jesus responds with a short version of what we know as The Lord's Prayer. He leaves out "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" and other phrases, although in what he says later he addresses these matters.

The fuller version of The Lord's Prayer that we know and use was taught by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount in Saint Matthew's Gospel. The Book of Common Prayer orders that full version to be used in virtually every one of its appointed services: Morning and Evening Prayer, various pastoral offices such as Holy Matrimony and the Burial of the Dead, the Visitation of the Sick, Holy Baptism, and most crucially, at the very heart of the Holy Eucharist – right after the consecration of the Bread and Wine and just before the Breaking of the Bread and Communion.

Great spiritual writers have called the Our Father "the perfect prayer of our Lord." I have come to believe and know that The Lord's Prayer is just that, but like you (I suspect) we use it so frequently that our familiarity actually leads us to miss its simple, comprehensive profundity. Let me tell you how I have come back around to cherishing The Lord's Prayer more than I ever have in my life.

I started some years ago to use familiar devotions to help myself fall asleep when, as an older person, I would awaken at midnight and/or various wee hours of the morning; and I would want to fall back asleep. So I started with The Lord's Prayer, Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep, the Gloria Patri, then the Hail Mary, then the Apostles' Creed, and even the Ten Commandments.

Often, I would doze off before I got to the end. It wasn't foolproof, but it helped, and at least I was praying, so I felt closer to the Lord in this state.

But as this practice went along for quite a while, I began to notice something about The Lord's Prayer. It is a perfect summary of Jesus's teaching and ministry. If you follow it from start to finish, it gives you his Gospel in one prayer. Let me show what I mean.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. This is the distinguishing teaching of Jesus about God. You can count on your fingers the times God is called or likened to a father (or a mother) in the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament. But in the small New Testament, especially on the lips of Jesus, God is called – and often directly addressed – as Father, a total of 170 times. And that name, Father, is hallowed, because it is the name given by Jesus, by God the Son himself.

Thy kingdom come. How much of Jesus's teaching was taken up in parables and stories and illustrations designed to give us various glimpses of the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven? From the Parable of the Sower at the start all the way to the Picture of the Last Judgment with the sheep and the goats, the Gospels, especially Matthew, Mark and Luke, are filled with these pictures of God's Kingdom, as contrasted with the ways of our earthly kingdoms. And then in Saint John as well, there is a direct confrontation of those kingdoms as Jesus is faced with Pontius Pilate.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus said that those who hear the word of God and keep it, who do God's will, are his true brothers and sisters. And Jesus told his disciples that his food was to do the will of "him who sent me" and to accomplish his work.

Give us this day our daily bread. Speaking of food, Jesus tells us to ask God for our needs each day. He had much to teach against anxiety, principally teaching us to seek first God's

kingdom and goodness, and that “all these things” (food, clothing, shelter, etc.) would be “added unto you.”

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. How many times does Jesus stress this point? Repentance and forgiveness are the only ways forward in our fallen world. They create the possibilities of new life. And they go right together, even as Jesus based so much of his ministry on the forgiveness of sin to heal what’s wrong with us.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Save us in the time of trial. Our Lord said God would send us the Holy Spirit to give us the thing to say and do when we are on the spot for our faith and integrity. We are simply to settle it in our minds that we are the Lord’s.

And then the Church adds the doxology.

There it is. If you are stranded without a Bible, The Lord’s Prayer contains the whole teaching of Jesus for you. Just unpack it phrase by phrase. It is his perfect prayer. I have come to thank the good Lord for those sleepless hours, because in them he has taught me how to summarize the Gospel in his own words.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.