

***A Holy Prayer -
"Our Father"***

**Catechism Q/A 120 & 121
Matthew 7:9-13**

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"Pray," says Jesus.
"Pray like this."
And he gives us a model.
Not a rigid form, but a guideline to follow.
Not one of endless repetition, or emptying mantra.
But of simple statements,
accessible to all,
to the point.

One set up - did you notice? - just like the ten commandments.
The first half dealing with God.
The second half dealing with us.

"Our Father in heaven"

I'd like to invite you on a prayer journey this evening.
We'll use the prayer method of *lectio divina*, or - "Holy reading."
Prayerful reading of a piece of scripture.
It contains 4 parts:

READ
MEDITATE
PRAY
CONTEMPLATE

READ the passage
MEDITATE on aspects of the text's meaning
PRAY through that meaning - out loud or silently
CONTEMPLATE, quietly, just sitting with the text, marinate in it.

READ
MEDITATE
PRAY
CONTEMPLATE

Ready?
Here we go!

READ

"Our father in heaven..."
OUR...father in heaven.

MEDITATE

So the prayer begins.
Begins... just as the 10 commandments were introduced,
"I am Yahweh, **your** God..." (Exod 20:2; Deut 5:6)
Not cold, formal and distant.
But warm, personal and near.
Right to me.

It involves me.
It connects with my life.
Meaningful!

And...not JUST me.

To whom was this prayer given?
This prayer of Jesus was given to a **community** of people.
A truly **diverse** community:
The soft-spoken and the loud,
The fisherman and the tax collector,
The impulsive and the deliberate.

Praying is a **together** experience.

Our Father.
Together prayer.
Communal prayer.

OUR...
Who does that include?
Believers in the past; the present; and the future.

Believers in the past –
This past week I was chatting with a believer who had recently lost a loved one. We reflected on Hebrews 12. Remember how that chapter begins?
"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us...run with perseverance the race that is set before us..."

A great chapter!! Joining us to a HUGE legacy of believers. Our stories all join in the great Story of Faith that has Jesus Christ at the fulcrum.
Abel, Abraham, Moses, Rahab, Ruth, and Isaiah.
We're joined to them in faith.
Peter, Paul, John, Mary, Lydia, the woman at the well.
We're joined to them in faith. Those who have gone before us.

Augustine, Thomas a Kempis, Theresa of Avila, John Calvin, Fanny Crosby, Watchman Nee, Karl Barth, Mother Theresa.
We're joined to them in faith.

Believers in Jesus who have gone before us - the great cloud of witnesses.
Including,
the loved one whom this friend of mine now misses so much.
And my grandparents. My son.
Also part of that great cloud of witnesses.

Who from your family is part of the legacy of believers who have gone to glory;
gone before us;
Part of the **OUR** in "*our Father*"?
Can you name them?

Our Father.
Believers in the past.
AND

Believers in the present.

Wang Peng, who leads worship in Shanghai.

Sally, who attends Sunday School in Arizona.

Bose, who teaches in Nigeria.

Doug, who prays under the downtown bridge he calls home.

We're joined to them in faith.

They, with us, are part of the **OUR** in "*our Father*."

Our Father.

Believers in the past.

Believers in the present.

AND

Believers yet to come.

If Jesus carries we will one day hand off our legacy of faith to someone else.

Perhaps the child that sat on your knee.

Or the ones you saw thundering to the front to join in the baptism celebration this morning.

Or your own children and grandchildren.

Or the person from your work who, through God's grace and your witness, is yet to become a believer.

Our Father.

Believers in the past.

Believers in the present.

Believers yet to come.

All of us sharing this call to the Father with the elder brother.

With Jesus.

Think of this holy prayer coming from the lips of Jesus.

Where first he might pray, "**My** father in heaven",

now, because of his victory over sin and death,

he prays "**Our** father in heaven."

Jesus makes the transition.

He welcomes us to himself.

All of us - believers past, present and yet to come.

He invites us to pray...

PRAY

OUR father

Thank you, God, for putting us into community with believers all through time. Believers past. Believers present. Believers yet to come.

Thank you, for believers we can rub shoulders with.

Thank you for not leaving us alone in our faith.

Thank you that your son, Jesus, will share his family status with us.

That he looks us in the eye, and refers to us as he prays to you,

"OUR father...."

[silent prayer]

CONTEMPLATION

READ

"Our father in heaven..."

...Our... **FATHER**... in heaven.

MEDITATE

What is a father?

The one responsible for his child.

guardian, provider, master.

close - and at the same time, strong.

God is Father.

He is, first of all the father of Jesus - both from all eternity in a mysterious sort of way. But also in a physical way.

Think about that - Through the Holy Spirit descending on Mary, God is the real biological father of Jesus, the human being born in Bethlehem.

God has been the father of a human child, a child who went through growing pains, learned to speak, played with friends, got hungry, blew his nose, needed sleep.... and experienced death.

He understands the challenges and joys of human life.

He is to one to whom we are urged to pour out our prayers.

And to do so with confidence - not fear.

Romans 8:14 –

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.

Every bit of status that Jesus has with the Father, we share.

We are as much children of God, as He is the Son of God.

God is the perfect loving and caring parent.

Which gives us a confidence. A confidence that may well not always be there with earthly fathers and mothers, because we parents aren't perfect.

God is the perfect parent: always with a handle on the situation.

Never losing his cool,

never becoming vindictive....

or selfish....

or forgetful.....

or distracted....

or too busy....

or unable to cope.

And as the Father He has room in His home for all comers.

His son said, "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." [Jn 6:37]

As the story of the Prodigal Son reminds us, the Father waits for even the greatest of sinners. He reserves the biggest hugs for those whose lives are the biggest mess.

John Calvin said -

"Our God gives Himself a name which suggests only gentleness and kindness, in order to take away from us all doubt and anxiety, and to give us **boldness** in coming to Him personally."

[quoted in Klooster]

Boldness to come to...

Let us pray...

PRAY

Our father in heaven...
...our FATHER...

Father...

making us one in the same family with Jesus
no fear
a sure and certain place for us
your arms open to receive us
your eyes on us, careful, care-giving

Father...

[*silent prayer*]

CONTEMPLATION

READ

"Our father in heaven..."
...our father **IN HEAVEN**...

MEDITATE

In English we translate "HEAVEN" in the singular. The Greek is actually plural - **heavens**. The word is best translated as "**the skies**." It is a term meant to have us look up at all that blue and cloud and sun and stars.

Have you ever stood under a prairie sky? It's bigness overwhelms. Sweeping across from east to west. A huge expanse.

And this prayer says, "Our Father is there - in all of that huge expanse."

He is everywhere.

He is over all.

He is that big.

He is that powerful.

And all the resources of that big, powerful God are within his reach as Father.

Every parent has had one moment or another where they wanted, with all their heart and love, to do something for their child but couldn't.

God has both the love - and the means to do what is right and best for all his children.
Nothing is beyond his reach.

We may not have all the answers for every problem we encounter in individual lives, or in our society.

But we do know where to bring those problems.

And we invite others to join us as we carry those problems, those aches, those burdens, to our Father of the skies.

Our Father of the heavenlies - who is also very near.

A reporter is said to have once approached G.K. Chesterton on a London street corner. "Sir, I understand that you recently became a Christian. May I ask you a question?"

"Certainly," replied Chesterton.

"If God suddenly appeared at this very moment and stood behind you, what would you do?"

Chesterton looked the reporter squarely in the eye and said, "He is."

(Brennan Manning *Abba's Child*, p.99)

As you pray, "*Our Father in heaven*" I encourage you to think of heaven not as some far-away place to be accessed by some spiritual rocket ship at warp speed, but actually very near by, just on a different plane, a different dimension.

Just around the corner.

I believe that to be so.

I believe that's why angels can come in and out of earthly view.

I believe that's why Moses and Elijah suddenly appeared with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration, without suitcases or the effects of jet lag.

Let us pray...

PRAY

Our Father -

You are vast...

...across the skies

...and yet just around the corner!

Father with huge treasure chest of resources

power incomprehensible

love deeper than deep

attention full and unwavering

heaven's riches

angel armies

...and ready to use it...

...as Father

[*silent prayer*]

CONTEMPLATE

...conclude with

"Our father in heaven..."

OUR father in heaven

our FATHER in heaven

our father IN HEAVEN. AMEN!