

## Good Fathers

When you pray, what do you say to God? We have to be careful here. The Sermon on the Mount is not hoity-toity about what we say to God. Jesus knows we can be tongue-tied and talk nonsense when we pray. He remembered our weaknesses, but He made this generous promise: **“Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”** (Matthew 7:7-8)

“No! Wait! That’s too open-ended. What’s the catch? Ask for what? Seek what? Is this a bait-and-switch routine? I ask for one thing and get what I don’t want or get nothing at all.” Jesus still speaks to our suspicions when He says: **“Which of you, if his son asks for bread will give him a stone? Or if he asks for fish, will give him a snake?”** (Matthew 7:9-10) And you say: “Well of course I’ll give him bread and fish. But you don’t know my kids. They ask for stones and snakes like they were bread and fish. I don’t give them everything they ask for; it’s not good for them.” Jesus simply says: **“If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”** (Matthew 7:11)

Did you hear that? He just called us evil, but He did it so nicely and without any edge in His voice. I can’t object. He is comparing us with God, and measured that way, I am definitely lacking. At the same time He said that I do good things for my kids. I’m not all bad. I like that He said that. But I get it. Compared with God I am lacking, but I still do good things for my kids. But our heavenly Father is not lacking. Can we not trust Him to be as discerning about what we ask Him to do for us, as we are discerning about what our children ask us to do for them?” We try to teach them about the real world. Our heavenly Father does the same. He is the ultimate Realist. My take away from this is to ask God for what you want. He will give you something good. Prayer doesn’t end there, but it may be the only place where prayer can begin for most of us.

## The Prayer

That’s not all Jesus said about prayer. Did you notice the unifying theme in the scripture we read together? **“Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men.”** (Matthew 6:1) **“When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do to be honored by men.”** (Matthew 6:2) **“When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.”** (Matthew 6:6) **“When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.”** (Matthew 6:7)

Don’t be ostentatious about your piety. It is insufferable humbug, it is unbecoming to the majesty of God, and it gives the wrong impression about what a righteous person you are. Jesus taught an excellent way to avoid repetitive babbling, and He taught us what to say to God, when we tire of treating Him like Santa at the mall. **“This is how you should pray: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.”** (Matthew 6:9-13)

This is how we should pray, because it reminds us how needy we are. **“Give us this day our daily bread.”** Give us rain in the Central Valley of California. Give us rain in the Great Plains of the Midwest. Allow farmers to get their crops in the ground on

time. Give us truckers to haul the bounty of creation from farm to market. Give us computerized distribution centers so that food is on the shelf when we go to buy.

**“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”** We think it is okay to hold grudges. That’s why we are stunned when Jesus tells us to love our enemies. We had rather hate than to heal relationships. This part of the Lord’s Prayer forces us to ask what the world would be like if God treated us like that.

**“Deliver us from evil.”** We are more aware of our need for protection, because the world has become such a dangerous place. War, the threat of Jihadists, the violence done to women and children, and the collapse of national morality into political correctness make it urgent to pray for deliverance.

The Lord’s Prayer also reminds us that food, forgiveness, and protection are not the most important matters of life. **Hallowed by thy name!** Let even the profane use of your name call to mind our Lord and the Church and forgiveness and judgment to come. Help us to hallow what the world hollows out by its profane use of your name. **Thy kingdom come!** I love my country, but it needs a revolution greater than that of the founding fathers. Our first loyalty is to the coming King and the coming kingdom, not to the Constitution. **Thy will be done!** If it costs us what it cost Jesus in Gethsemane to do the will of God, give us grace to pay that price, until the relationships of heaven are replicated in the relationships of earth.

### Take Away

Jesus said over and over, **“The time has come. The kingdom of God is near.”** (Mark 1:15) In other words, watch Jesus, and you will see what God’s authority looks like in human life. Watch Jesus, and you will see God’s priorities on display. As we learn from the Lord’s Prayer, God’s authority will contradict human authority, and His priorities will contradict our priorities.

Unlikely disciples become extravagant disciples as they allow their priorities to be corrected by the Lord they follow. They learn sooner or later that His thoughts are not their thoughts, and His ways are not their ways. They learn sooner or later that they are doing Him no favors by following Him. Jesus is pouring out the new wine of heaven upon the earth. It remains to be seen, if disciples then and disciples now are wineskins that can stretch and not split under the pressure of His expanding presence in their experience.

The One who gave the world the prayer is here with us by means of the bread and cup. We hold in our hands the visible representations of Him who said to them and says to us, “Watch me, and you will see what God is like. God is with you. Don’t miss Him!”

We won’t miss Him, if we keep in step with the Holy Spirit. We keep in step with the Spirit, when we pray. There are many ways to do that. Let’s talk about one. Starting this week, offer the Lord’s Prayer every day for the rest of your life. You can start right now, as you commune with Jesus through Holy Communion.