



Perfect Prayer

If we desire to pray effectively, it's essential to seek guidance from a teacher who can instruct us in the elements of perfect prayer. We recognize that our Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate Teacher who can show us how to pray perfectly. The perfect prayer is encapsulated in the "Our Father", or the Lord's Prayer.

Let us begin: "Our Father who art in heaven." The term Jesus uses to address God is "*Abba*", which translates to "Daddy" in English. This illustrates the relationship we share with God—a relationship akin to that of a child with a loving father. It's a deeply intimate bond. Many of us may remember disputes in childhood over whose daddy was the best, but we can confidently say that our heavenly Daddy is the best of all.

After we have addressed the Person to whom we are praying the next element is praise. All of our prayers should contain praise and give gratitude for all the blessings that we have received from a Father who loves us.

When we pray "Thy Kingdom come" we are asking for that relationship with the Father, always loving in both directions. Saint John Chrysostom and the Roman liturgy both refer to saying this prayer as daring. What gives us the right to call God our daddy? What gives us the right to say we want to be in a relationship with Him and are asking for that relationship? It is a God-given right that Jesus expressed to us in His prayer. He taught us to be daring in our prayer life.

"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We promise God that we will do His will just as His will is done in heaven: perfectly. This is the promise we make as a stipulation for the requests we present.

In our understanding of the phrase "Give us this day our daily bread," as reflected in the teachings of the Church Fathers, there are two interpretations. The first is that we should pray *every day* for what we need on that day for we will pray again tomorrow for what we need then. In our prayers, we

ask God for our needs, which can be spiritual—such as improving our prayer life or enhancing our love for our neighbors—or practical. A favorite example of mine comes from the Slavonic *Horologion*, which includes a prayer for the removal of dead rats from the bottom of a well. You can't get more practical than that! No matter how grand or how small our requests may be, they are made to our loving Father in Heaven.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." The word translated here is *anawim*, a term that describes a group of people who believe that everything they have is a gift from God, for which they are grateful. We should be grateful for every breath we take because it is given to us by God. We should be thankful for the food we eat, as it is provided by Him. We should also appreciate our ability to sustain our lives through our intelligence and strength because these, too, are gifts from God. This attitude of gratitude is what makes us truly children of God.

The second interpretation offered by some Church Fathers is that the term "daily bread" refers to a higher or elevated bread—the best of breads. This is often seen as a reference to the Eucharistic bread. Ideally, we should receive communion every day, and if that's not possible, we may make a spiritual communion on the days we do not receive. The bread we receive is more than just bread; it is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. This bread is powerful, as seen in the prayer the priest says to each communicant: "The servant of God ____ partakes of the Precious Body and Blood of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ for the remission of (their) sins and life everlasting." After receiving communion, the priest proclaims, "Behold, this touched your lips; may it cleanse you of your sins and wash away all your iniquity."

In the Eucharist, we are both physically and spiritually united with God. All the

graces we need to participate in the divine life are found in the Holy Eucharist. This is why, after receiving communion, we spend time in prayer with Christ within us. Jesus inspires us to pray through His presence, and the Spirit helps guide our words in the prayers we dare to say, as well as in any other prayers we offer. "May our lips be filled... so we may sing of Your glory".

We ask God to forgive us in proportion to how we forgive others. If we fully forgive everyone, we request that God grants us the same level of His forgiveness.

We also seek to be led away from temptation and delivered from the evil one. This request addresses both our earthly existence and the day of judgment. We ask for deliverance because we know we do not always succeed, although our intention is to do good and love God. On the day of judgment, temptation tries to lead us away from goodness and down the path to perdition. Ultimately, we face a choice between death—eternal separation from God—and eternal life with Christ in heaven.

In Judaism, it was customary for prayers to conclude with a doxology—a praise—or for sections of prayers to end with doxologies. It is likely that our Lord used a traditional doxology to conclude this prayer. All doxologies give praise to God, including the doxology we use when praying this prayer. "For Yours is the kingdom, power and glory..."

In our prayers, we should acknowledge to whom we are praying and begin and end with expressions of praise. We offer ourselves in prayer, asking God to shape us in His image through our obedience and through a metanoia, or a transformation of heart, that makes us loving and forgiving individuals. We strive to be an *anawim*, always placing our trust in God's gifts and expressing gratitude in both good times and bad.