

July 27, 2025
Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

“Father in Focus”

Luke 11:1-13

It was the norm in first-century Israel for rabbis to have a form or method of praying which they taught their students, so the disciples’ request, “Lord, teach us to pray...” is to be expected. I’m not sure if the form Jesus gives is at all novel; several Old Testament prayers address God as Father. However, when Jesus says we should open with “Father,” it is truly revolutionary.

Think about it. What is unique about Jesus using the word “Father”? It is literally true! Jesus is addressing His true Father. And He is telling those who believe in Him that they are to address Almighty God in this very same fashion! While all Rabbis would say that a Jew could address God as one of His chosen people, Jesus places His followers in the very family of the divine Himself!

This shouldn’t really surprise us. St. Paul makes it crystal clear we are baptized into Christ; His life, death to sin and resurrection to eternal life. We stand more than reconciled; we have been adopted into His family by grace.

But the prayer makes clear that to be in the Father’s family means seeking to do His will, follow in His design, abide in His glory. It doesn’t matter if you go with the version of the Lord’s Prayer we are used to from Matthew’s Gospel or the shortened version from Luke. Everything prayed for is about our Father’s glory, our Father’s design or our Father’s gifts. His name hallowed, His kingdom coming, His provision for our lives, His forgiveness for our failures, His will that we forgive others and that we avoid temptation to sin; to violate His holy law of love.

This is a very important aspect of proper prayer. Who is it that we have a tendency to make the focus of our prayers? Me. Right? We are praying to the Father, but we’re usually all about me and mine; those things and people I care deeply about, those desires and hopes that I believe are right, proper and good for my situation.

This is how we’re taught from our youth. “Dear God, please bless Mommy and Daddy and my brother and sister and our doggie, etc.” In a crisis we go straight to what we see as our greatest need. “Dear God, I really messed up this project at work. Please don’t let me get fired!” I don’t know about you, but my default when I’m beginning to pray is usually about myself, and how I have no business coming before God in prayer because I’m such a poor, miserable sinner. In so many ways, probably because our fallen nature is indeed self-centered, our prayers tend to be all about us, those we love, and about people and issues and problems of this oh-so-fallen world that have to do with “me”.

And of course, praying for such things is not wrong. I am most certainly not saying that. St. Paul writes to St. Timothy, “*I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people...*”

But when the Son of God is asked to teach us how to pray, see where He places the focus: Father—Our Father. Don’t think “Here I am, praying.” First consider to whom this prayer is addressed and your relationship to Him—a relationship you in no way deserve! It is as Luther says in the catechism: “God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.”

Your God, your heavenly Father, literally is love. He adores you. He saves you from all that would destroy you. He sacrificed Himself in Christ to this end. Is not He your greatest good? Is not His will for you best? Is not His kingdom the only one in which you desire to abide? Your heavenly Father seeks only to bless you. Is your prayer all about receiving His blessings, His will and abiding in His kingdom...or are you coming with a somewhat altered agenda?

What I mean is this: We often come before God in a situation in our lives with an attitude that says, "I know how things should be. Father, make it happen." In other words, "My will be done." This happens in relation to a lot of things; acceptance to a college, promotion at work, going to Disneyworld, whatever. There is nothing wrong with that request itself, but our attitude is kind of...arrogant...dictating to God what His will should be for us when we should humbly accept that His will, even if it be the opposite of what we desire, is always best for us.

This point isn't just being knit-picky about prayer either. If one prays for, let's say a promotion at work, as if God must come through for us or something is wrong with the universe, has not that promotion now become that which you love and trust above God's will...and thus above God...and thus it has become your idol? And if that promotion falls through, then the attitude might be that God failed you. You set up and then fell into a trap of wrong thinking that can be harmful to your faith.

Father knows best. Father is God. Father loves you and all things work out for good for those who love God. His will isn't that His children receive every material thing of the kingdom of the world that they desire. His will is that we receive His kingdom in Christ that endures forever. He very often does this through want, loss, tribulation and suffering. We humbly accept this as believers because God works this way through Christ crucified for our sake. We pray for the good things and we pray to avoid the bad, as Jesus Himself did. But we do so humbly and faithfully, as Jesus did, knowing that whatever the outcome it will work for our salvation, our resurrection in Christ.

I believe the Holy Spirit has led me to make this point through my having just been to a forum entitled "Dying Well in Christ" at the seminary in St. Louis. What came up a few times there is how believing, praying Christians who are facing imminent death sometimes simply refuse to face that death is God's will for them. Their hope and their prayer is all focused in the doctors and the medicines that just have to do something to stop death. I've personally dealt with this as a pastor and it is heart-wrenching. To see someone who in life seemed to so fully trust in their heavenly Father suddenly at the end of life turn and cling to the world as if their will must be done; it's tragic.

When this Gospel text came up it got me thinking that maybe people fall into such error after a lifetime of praying with an attitude of "my will be done," and thinking that's how it works, because life goes along more or less pretty nicely. But clearly, God's will is not that we live forever as fallen sinners in a broken world under the influence of the prince of darkness. God's will is that we die to sin in Christ, that when we die to this world we would rise again to perfect life forever in His kingdom. His will is obviously best...always.

So when you pray, maybe don't jump into all the petitions asking for blessings so quickly; Jesus didn't. Pause and ponder to whom you are praying. Father, our Father, my Father. Be reminded that you are His beloved child, and He knows what is best for you, even if it whatever it is doesn't look so great to your eyes. Be humble and trust that whatever He brings, whatever answer to prayer He gives, it will be best for you in the eternal sense that really matters.

Then pray to His glory, His honor, seeking all the good gifts He wishes to give you, most especially those higher gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation. And then sure, let your lesser requests be made known to your Father; deliverance from tribulation, prosperity in your living, even a trip to Disneyworld. It's all fine. He is your dear Father and does give good gifts of all sorts to His beloved children.

But come to Him humbly in faithful hope and trust, acknowledging His will is best; His kingdom is best, and His intent is that you dwell within it forever. Your Father is the one true God of love. You know your Father has sent the Son who has saved you for life in His kingdom by means of the cross and empty tomb. This is His will for you, so however He answers your prayers, it is surely for the best.

Amen.