

Sunday 17-C6

The Lord's prayer, or also known as the 'Our Father', which Jesus gave us, is the summary of the whole Gospel. Most importantly it tells us that God is a Father, not a policeman to catch you, not a ruler to take away your real freedom, but He is a Father, in fact He is 'our' Father, not just my Father and your Father (cf. Jn 20:17), but 'Our Father'.

When Jesus asks us to address God as our Father He also affirms our true identity; namely that we are children of God, and that He is our heavenly parent. Through His whole life Jesus revealed to His disciples that God is Father and the Holy Spirit now helps us to know Him as our Father. In fact St. John in his 1st letter chapter 5 verse 1 says that believers are born of God, and if we are born of Him then He is our Father and we are his children. God adopted us as His children through His Son when we were baptised.

As His children we are a community, a family of the Father. In accord with the Apostolic tradition the Our Father is a prayer of the community and not of the individual, because Jesus taught it to the community of the apostles, and also because He didn't tell them to pray 'My Father, who art in Heaven...', but 'Our Father...' So the person who does not go to Church, thinking that it is enough to pray at home, can never say the Our Father truthfully, because he or she doesn't want to pray to the Father with his or her Christian brothers and sisters, so then how can you call God at home as 'Our Father'. (cf. CCC 2768).

From where do we receive the confidence in the first place to address God as Our Father, since we are nothing compared to God? However we have received the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, and He is the Spirit of our sonship (Rom 8:9) who cries in us: 'Abba, Father' (Rom 8:15), and that gives us the confidence to dare to call God as our Father, and that can be an uplifting and liberating thing to know, especially for those who do not know their earthly father, or didn't have a good relationship with their father or have lost their father. Still the Holy Spirit cries to God the Father inside your heart: 'Abba, Father!', and affirms you that you have a loving, merciful Father.

The fact that God is our father also should remind us when we feel we have committed a terrible sin again and again that God is merciful and there is no sin against Him and others that He cannot forgive, because if our parents can normally forgive us our sins against them how much more our heavenly Father can and wants to forgive us in his merciful love when we repent! Jesus tells the apostles in the Gospel reading: 'if you ...know how to give your children what is good, how

much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit [for the forgiveness of sins] to those who ask Him.’

The knowledge that we are children of God and that we can address him as Our Father should lead us to develop two very important things in us: first of all the desire to become like our heavenly Father, true images of Him: generous, always merciful and creative. St. Cyprian says: ‘When we call God as ‘Our Father’ we need to remember that we should behave ourselves as children of God.’ To achieve this St. Gregory of Nyssa gives a very important advice: ‘We must contemplate the goodness of our heavenly Father all the time and let it soak our entire soul’ (CCC 2784, translated from the Hungarian version). Secondly we need to be humble and trusting in our hearts, because that’s the only way to become like little children (cf. Mt 18:3), because as we read in Matthews Gospel chapter 11 the Father reveals Himself only to the little ones (v. 5).

Finally let me add to this what St. John Cassian says: ‘only the gaze of a child upon his or her Father is full of the fire of love. In that gaze the soul melts and sinks into the ocean of holy love and speaks to God as its own Father, trustingly and with tender meekness (cf. Coll. 9:18). What a beautiful picture!