

*The Knights of Columbus presents
The Luke E. Hart Series
Basic Elements of the Catholic Faith*

THE LORD'S PRAYER

PART TWO • SECTION NINE OF
CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY

*What does a Catholic believe?
How does a Catholic worship?
How does a Catholic live?*

Based on the
Catechism of the Catholic Church

by
Peter Kreeft

General Editor
Father John A. Farren, O.P.
Director of the Catholic Information Service
Knights of Columbus Supreme Council

Nihil obstat:
Reverend Alfred McBride, O.Praem.

Imprimatur:
Bernard Cardinal Law
December 19, 2000

The *Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur* are official declarations that a book or pamphlet is free of doctrinal or moral error. No implication is contained therein that those who have granted the *Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur* agree with the contents, opinions or statements expressed.

Copyright © 2001 by Knights of Columbus Supreme Council
All rights reserved.

English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for the United States of America copyright ©1994, United States Catholic Conference, Inc. – Libreria Editrice Vaticana. English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica* copyright © 1997, United States Catholic Conference, Inc. – Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Scripture quotations contained herein are adapted from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, 1971, and the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

Excerpts from the Code of Canon Law, Latin/English edition, are used with permission, copyright © 1983 Canon Law Society of America, Washington, D.C.

Citations of official Church documents from Neuner, Josef, SJ, and Dupuis, Jacques, SJ, eds., *The Christian Faith: Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 5th ed. (New York: Alba House, 1992). Used with permission.

Excerpts from Vatican Council II: *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, New Revised Edition edited by Austin Flannery, OP, copyright © 1992, Costello Publishing Company, Inc., Northport, NY, are used by permission of the publisher, all rights reserved. No part of these excerpts may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without express permission of Costello Publishing Company.

Cover: © 1997 Wood River Gallery

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. Write:

Catholic Information Service
Knights of Columbus Supreme Council
PO Box 1971
New Haven CT 06521-1971

Printed in the United States of America

A WORD ABOUT THIS SERIES

This booklet is one of a series of 30 that offer a colloquial expression of major elements of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Pope John Paul II, under whose authority the *Catechism* was first released in 1992, urged such versions so that each people and each culture can appropriate its content as its own.

The booklets are not a substitute for the *Catechism*, but are offered only to make its contents more accessible. The series is at times poetic, colloquial, playful, and imaginative; at all times it strives to be faithful to the Faith. Following are the titles in our series.

Part I: What Catholics Believe (Theology)

- Section 1: Faith
- Section 2: God
- Section 3: Creation
- Section 4: The Human Person
- Section 5: Jesus Christ
- Section 6: The Holy Spirit
- Section 7: The Holy Catholic Church
- Section 8: The Forgiveness of Sins
- Section 9: The Resurrection of the Body
- Section 10: The Life Everlasting

Part II: How Catholics Pray (Worship)

- Section 1: Introduction to Catholic Liturgy
- Section 2: Introduction to the Sacraments

- Section 3: Baptism and Confirmation**
- Section 4: The Eucharist**
- Section 5: Penance**
- Section 6: Matrimony**
- Section 7: Holy Orders and the Anointing of the Sick**
- Section 8: Prayer**
- Section 9: The Lord's Prayer**
- Section 10: Mary**

Part III: How Catholics Live (Morality)

- Section 1: The Essence of Catholic Morality**
- Section 2: Human Nature as the Basis for Morality**
- Section 3: Some Fundamental Principles of Catholic Morality**
- Section 4: Virtues and Vices**
- Section 5: The First Three Commandments: Duties to God**
- Section 6: The Fourth Commandment: Family and Social Morality**
- Section 7: The Fifth Commandment: Moral Issues of Life and Death**
- Section 8: The Sixth and Ninth Commandments: Sexual Morality**
- Section 9: The Seventh and Tenth Commandments: Economic and Political Morality**
- Section 10: The Eighth Commandment: Truth**

SECTION 9: THE “OUR FATHER”

1. The perfect prayer

“The Lord’s Prayer is the most perfect of prayers. . . . In it we ask not only for all the things we can rightly desire, but also in the sequence that they should be desired. . . .¹²” (St. Thomas Aquinas; C 2763). “Run through all the words of the holy prayers [in Scripture], and I do not think that you will find anything in them that is not contained and included in the Lord’s Prayer⁹” (St. Augustine; C 2762).

This is the prayer that is Christ’s answer to his disciples’ plea: “Teach us to pray” (Lk 11:1). That is why it is called “the Lord’s Prayer.” It is the perfect prayer because it comes from the Perfect Prayer. We learn to pray by going to Jesus’ school of prayer. And in that school the single teacher wrote the single textbook, one with just 45 words.

Instead of giving us psychological techniques, Christ gives us the actual words of a prayer. “But Jesus does not give us a formula to repeat mechanically.¹⁴ . . . Jesus not only gives us the words of our filial prayer; at the same time

he gives us the Spirit by whom these words become in us ‘spirit and life’¹⁵” (Jn 6:63; C 2766). Christ gives us these words not like a book to read, but like a piece of sheet music to sing.

We must pray this prayer not just with our words but with our minds, and not just with our minds but with our hearts. In fact, we will understand it with our minds only when we will it with our hearts. We will understand what God reveals only when we will what God wills. (That’s what Jesus says in Jn 7:17 and Mt 5:8.)

2. “*Our*”

When St. Teresa of Avila prayed the “Our Father” she found it almost impossible to get beyond the first two words, for they were like a beautiful country that she wanted to dwell in forever. Until we feel that way, we have not understood these two words.

One of life’s greatest mysteries is contained in the first little word, “our.” It is the mystery of solidarity. Each individual who prays is instructed to call God not just “*my* Father,” but “*our* Father.” Each individual is to pray in the name of the whole Church, for each Christian is a cell in the one Body of Christ, a member of God’s family, a child of the same Father. “‘Our’ . . . does not express possession [who could possess God?], but an entirely new relationship with God” (C 2786). “The *Church* is this new communion of God and men. . . . In praying ‘our’ Father, each of the baptized is praying in this communion. . . .” (C 2790), the Communion of Saints. We pray *with* all the saints and

angels, surrounded by the “great cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1).

“[I]n spite of the divisions among Christians, this prayer to ‘our’ Father remains our common patrimony . . .⁵⁰” (C 2791). “If we are to say it truthfully, our divisions and oppositions have to be overcome⁵¹” (C 2792).

Because of the mystery of solidarity in this Body, all prayers *echo*. My prayers will have effects on my great-grandchildren, on strangers I have never met, on the most abandoned soul in Purgatory. My prayers, ascending like mist today, will descend like rain at another time and place, wherever God directs it, where thirsty soil needs it. My prayers can help feed souls far removed from me in space and time, just as truly as my work or my money can help feed bodies. Spiritual transportation systems are as real as physical ones, for the spiritual universe is as real as the physical universe, and just as unified; and its gravity is as strong as physical gravity. It is called love.

3. “Father”

Before Jesus taught it, “the expression God the Father had never been revealed to anyone. When Moses himself asked God who he was, he heard another name. The Father’s name has been revealed to us in the Son . . .³¹” (Tertullian; C 2779). We cannot improve on this word for God, for “Father” is the name Jesus used consistently, and Jesus the “Word of God” knew the right word for God!

Jesus *calls* God our Father because he “*makes*” God our Father. Through Jesus, God is also our Father. Without Jesus, God is *not* our Father. Jesus radically changes our

relationship with God: he makes us children of God, thus makes God our Father. (Of course, he does not change God, he changes us.)

And the word is not just “Father” but “Abba” – the intimate word, “Daddy.” Jesus restores the intimacy we lost in Eden.

We can appreciate how incredible this intimacy is only if we have first appreciated the opposite truth, God’s awesome holiness and inaccessible transcendence. Only after we know God in awe and adoration can we know him truly in intimacy. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prv 9:10), but filial intimacy is its end. Jesus has made it possible for us to address truly the infinite abyss of eternal perfection as our Daddy!

“Father” means “giver of life.” Animal fathers give animal life, human fathers give human life, and God gives divine life. At the very heart of our religion is the astonishing “good news” that we are called to share in the divine life, the divine nature, without losing our human nature; to become like Jesus our brother: both human and divine.

The fact that we can conceive this astonishing transformation is evidence that we have experienced it. No one could be expected to conceive the transition from non-being to being except one who has been born. So no one could call God “Father” and conceive the transition of the “new birth” (Jn 3:3) except one who has been “born again” into God’s family. “. . . When would a mortal dare call God ‘Father,’ if man’s innermost being were not animated by power from on high?”²⁸ (St. Peter Chrysologus; C 2777). “We can adore the Father because he has caused us to be

reborn to his life by *adopting* us as his children in his only Son: by Baptism, he incorporates us into the Body of his Christ; through the anointing of his Spirit who flows from the head to the members, he makes us ‘other Christs’” (C 2782). “Thus the Lord’s Prayer *reveals us to ourselves* at the same time that it reveals the Father to us³⁶” (C 2783).

If we really believe this, our lives are transformed. “We must remember . . . and know that when we call God ‘our Father’ we ought to behave as sons of God³⁸” (St. Cyprian; C 2784). We act out our perceived identities. “We must contemplate the beauty of the Father without ceasing and adorn our own souls accordingly⁴⁰” (St. Gregory of Nyssa; C 2784). An infinitely more powerful reason for “self-esteem” than any secular psychology can give us!

There are many instructive aspects of this analogy between God and a good human father. One of them is that God, like a good human father, is “easy to please but hard to satisfy,” pleased with the first faltering steps of his spiritual toddlers yet not satisfied even with the heroics of his saints until they reach perfection, “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13; cf. Mt 5:48). Jesus, the perfect mirror of the Father (“like father, like son”), manifests both of these attitudes in greater strength and greater union than any man who ever lived: he is terribly tender and terribly tough, infinitely patient and infinitely demanding. He is what we find it so hard to be: gentle without being weak, and strong without being harsh.

It is harder to know and love God as our Heavenly Father if we do not first know and love our earthly fathers, God’s own chosen image and analogy. If “father” is no

longer a word that is loved, understood, and revered in our society, the solution is to make it so, not to change divinely revealed language. We should not bend God's Word to conform to our brokenness, but straighten out our brokenness to conform to God's Word.

To call God "Father" is certainly not "male chauvinism." For if it is, then Jesus Christ was a chauvinist, and the One who was able to transcend all other sins in his culture was unable to transcend just one sin, the "sin of sexism."

Another reason why "God the Father" is not male chauvinism is that the image of God's "masculinity" entails the "femininity" of all human souls in relation to him. The Church is the Bride of Christ.

Also, there was a human woman perfect enough to be Christ's Mother, but there was no human male perfect enough to be his father.

4. "Who art in Heaven"

What is "Heaven?" "This biblical expression does not mean . . . that God is distant but majestic. Our Father is not 'elsewhere': he transcends everything we can conceive . . ." (C 2794).

What difference does God's transcendence make? For one thing, it prevents idolatry, the worship of any finite and graspable creature instead of the infinite and ungraspable Creator. It also elicits humility and awe, worship and adoration.

Heaven is a *real* place, but not a *spatial* place: it is not anywhere in this universe. God's revelation tells us much more about how to get there than about what it is, for it

tells us what we most need to know. There's time enough to understand it once we get there. One thing we do know about Heaven is that it is our home, our destiny, our happiness; and that even now Jesus is preparing a place there especially for us (Jn 14:2-3).

5. *The structure of the seven petitions of the "Our Father"*

"The first series of petitions carries us toward him, for his own sake: *thy* name, *thy* kingdom, *thy* will! It is characteristic of love to think first of the one whom we love. In none of the three petitions do we mention ourselves...." (C 2804)

"The second series of petitions . . . concern[s] us . . . 'give *us* . . . forgive *us* . . . lead *us* not . . . deliver *us* . . .'" (C 2805).

The structure of this prayer is parallel to the structure of the Ten Commandments, because both follow the structure of reality. Both are divided into two parts: God first, man second. And both are concerned above all with love. The first three Commandments tell us how to love God, and the last seven how to love our neighbor. The first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer also tell us how to love God: how to adore and worship and praise him. The other four tell us how to love our neighbor, since they tell us to pray for "our" needs, not just "my" needs. Intercessory prayer has no separate petition here because the whole second half of the prayer is equally for neighbor and self.

6. *"Hallowed be thy name"*

"Hallow" is an old word. We have forgotten much of its meaning. It means "making holy," and "holy" means "set-

apart,” sacred, special, superior, worthy of worship. “The holiness of God is the inaccessible center of his eternal mystery. What is revealed of it in creation and history, Scripture calls ‘glory’ . . .⁶⁸” (C 2809).

“The term ‘to hallow’ is to be understood here not primarily in its causative sense (only God hallows, makes holy), but . . . to recognize as holy . . .” (C 2807). It confesses that God *is* holy and asks that all men recognize it and adore him. We do not make him holy; but we do make his “name,” his “reputation,” his being-known on earth, holy. We do this by being saints. Saints are the unanswerable argument for Christianity. And sinners are the strongest argument against it. We make God’s name holy or unholy. Though God is not dependent on us, other people are for their knowledge of God. They cannot see God, except through us. They cannot see our faith except through our works (Jas 2:18).

“The sanctification of his name among the nations depends inseparably on our life and our prayer: ‘We ask that this name of God should be hallowed in us through our actions. For God’s name is blessed when we live well, but is blasphemed when we live wickedly. . . .’⁸²” (St. Peter Chrysologus; C 2814).

“‘When we say ‘hallowed be thy name,’ we ask that it should be hallowed in us . . . but also in others . . . that we may obey the precept that obliges us to pray for everyone, even our enemies. . . .’⁸³” (Tertullian; C 2814).

Adoration is a permanent psychological necessity. It lets us transcend ourselves, and this self-forgetfulness produces the purest joy. It enables us to turn away from our-

selves and our problems, to turn all our attention to the God who is perfect beauty, letting his light shine into our darkness. For in adoration we stand with our face turned toward God, toward the light, and our backs turned toward ourselves and our darkness. The alternative is standing with our backs toward the light and our faces toward our own darkness, i.e. standing in our own shadow. Even the small moon can eclipse the great sun because it is so close to the earth. Even a little problem can distract us from God because it is so close, so subjective, so much ours.

Although adoration is a psychological need, our motive for it must not be that we need it, but that God deserves it. We worship not to play psychological games with ourselves, but to make an honest response to reality. Only when we do this do we find joy; only when we forget ourselves do we find ourselves.

We must begin with God rather than self because “that’s the way it is,” that’s the way reality is ordered. God is First, and to treat him as second, or as a means to our ends, is to reverse reality’s order, and to have a false God, an idol; and all idols break.

Adoration is training for Heaven. There is only a difference of degree between the worship of any ordinary believer and the greatest mystic’s highest flight of ecstasy; between the tiny spark of joy kindled in our soul by every act of adoration and the fire that will eternally consume us in Heaven when we “enter into the joy of your Lord” (Mt 25:21). Heaven’s music is a “*Hallowed Be Thy Name*” sung by every creature, from angels down to stones. Jesus says that if we do not praise God, the very stones will take our

place (Lk 19:40). The only place there is no praise is in Hell.

The desire to hallow God's name by adoration and praise is "an acquired taste," a habit our fallen nature needs training in, especially today. We modern egalitarians find it hard to bow. We have little earthly training for Heaven's life. In any era, our "original selfishness" does not want to get out of the way and put God first. We need to work at it.

7. *"Thy kingdom come"*

"In the New Testament the word *basileia* can be translated by 'kingship' (abstract noun), 'kingdom' (concrete noun) or 'reign' (action noun)" (C 2816).

"In the Lord's Prayer, 'thy kingdom come' refers primarily to the final coming of the reign of God through Christ's return.⁸⁸ But, far from distracting the Church from her mission in this present world, this desire commits her to it all the more strongly" (C 2818).

On the other hand, "Christians have to distinguish between the growth of the Reign of God and the progress of the culture and society in which they are involved. This distinction is not a separation. Man's vocation to eternal life does not suppress, but actually reinforces, his duty to put into action in this world the energies and means received from the Creator to serve justice and peace⁹³" (C 2820).

The major obstacle to "thy kingdom come" is "my kingdom come." Every person who has ever lived has one absolute choice: "thy kingdom come" or "my kingdom come," letting God be God or playing God. "My kingdom

come” is doomed to death and futility. “Thy kingdom come” is guaranteed immortality and success. This petition is always answered.

8. *“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”*

The key to the fulfillment of the petition “thy kingdom come” is the fulfillment of the next one, “thy will be done.” The way for God’s kingdom to come is the easiest thing in the world to understand and the hardest thing in the world to do: simply turning over all our will to God. We can *begin* to do this, even though it is incomplete. To choose to begin this is our “fundamental option,” our most absolute choice. As C. S. Lewis says, “there are only two kinds of people, in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘*thy will be done.*’”

Sin means that my will is in rebellion against God. By saying (and meaning) “thy will be done,” I declare my will to end this rebellion and make peace with God by submitting my will to his, by willing what he wills.

But what does God will? Two answers are certain:

- 1) “His commandment is ‘that you love one another; even as I have loved you (Jn 13:34) . . .’⁹⁷ This commandment . . . expresses his entire will” (C 2822).
- 2) “Our Father ‘desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’⁹⁵ [1 Tm 2:34]. He is ‘. . . not wishing that any should perish’⁹⁶” (2 Pt 3:9; Mt 18:14; C 2822).

“[H]e did not say ‘thy will be done in me or in us,’ but ‘on earth,’ the whole earth, so that error may be banished from it, truth take root in it, all vice be

destroyed on it, virtue flourish on it, and earth no longer different from heaven¹⁰⁷” (St. John Chrysostom; C 2825).

When God’s will is done perfectly on earth as it is in Heaven, earth will become Heaven.

Do we truly will “Thy will be done” when we *submit* to God or when we *act* in the world? “Thy will be done” is both submissive and active. For his Kingdom comes by our submitting to his will *and* our working to carry it out. It must be both, for any work that is not submitted to God’s will is not his kingdom but ours; and any submission to a God who does not send us out to work for our neighbor is not submission to the God of Jesus Christ but to a figment of our own fancy.

9. “Give us this day our daily bread”

This petition expresses “[t]he trust of children who look to their Father for everything” (C 2828). It gives God a “blank check” – “our daily bread” means “whatever you see we really need.”

There is a solid basis for such total trust: God has become our Father. Christ shows us how reasonable this total trust is when he argues, “What man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?” (Mt 7:9). Does God love us less than our earthly fathers? Or does he have less power to give us what we need? Or less wisdom to know what that is? Put the three non-negotiable dogmas of God’s love, God’s power, and God’s wisdom together with the fact that Christ has made God our Father, and you get

a totally realistic, reasonable, and non-sentimental basis for the total trust that this petition expresses.

But this total trust is not passive. “He is not inviting us to idleness,¹¹⁶ but wants to relieve us from nagging worry and preoccupation” (C 2830). We must trust, but we must also “pray and work” (*ora et labora*: the motto of St. Benedict) for our daily bread, and “Pray as if everything depended on God and work as if everything depended on you¹²²” (attributed to St. Ignatius Loyola; C 2834). When we submit our will to God in trust, that does not make us flabby, but strong; for God is not our rival but our Father, and fathers want their children to grow to maturity. “Grace perfects nature.” The more submissive to God’s grace we are, the more free and strong our human will becomes. Our will’s strength and courage and freedom are the effect of our trust and submission to God, for God is the first cause of all good things, including those.

The petition “Give us this day our daily bread” is to be prayed in the total certainty that it will be answered. For Christ promised to answer every prayer we ask in his name (Jn 14:13), and his own prayer is certainly in his name. So when we do not get what we ask for, we know that that is not our “daily bread,” not what we need this day. Either God or we are mistaken about what we need. Which is more likely?

Our needs and our wants are not identical. We need some things we do not want (e.g. to pray more, to fast, to relax, to trust, to be tested, to suffer) and we want some things we do not need (luxuries, creature comforts, self-indulgence). We really need only one thing: “one thing is

needful” (Lk 10:42). That is why God offers us only one thing: himself, in Christ (see Phil 4:19).

“[T]he presence of those who hunger because they lack bread opens up another . . . meaning of this petition. . . the parables of the poor man Lazarus and of the Last Judgment¹¹⁸” (C 2831).

“This petition . . . also applies to another hunger from which men are perishing: ‘Man does not live by bread alone, but . . . by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’¹²³ [Mt 4:4] . . . There is a famine on earth, ‘not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD’¹²⁴” (Am 8:11; C 2835).

The petition tells us only to pray for today’s bread, for Christ tells us, “Do not be anxious about tomorrow... let today’s own trouble be sufficient for today” (Mt 6:34). Pray for today’s bread today; pray for tomorrow’s tomorrow – that is, when tomorrow becomes today. Christ lived in the present, and we are to do the same. Otherwise, if we are always *planning* to be happy or good, we never are. For “tomorrow is always a day away.” Christ warns us with striking frequency against worry and fear, for that is a most powerful enemy of faith, of hope, and of love.

The Greek word here for “[d]aily (*epiousios*)” occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. . . . Taken literally (*epiousios*: ‘super-essential’), it refers directly to the Bread of Life, the Body of Christ “The Eucharist is our daily bread. . . . so that, gathered into his Body and made members of him, we may become what we receive. . . .”¹³¹ (St. Augustine; C 2837). We are thus to pray for the gift God has

already given us. As we pray “give,” we must take heed to receive what has been given.

10. “And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us”

“This petition is astonishing . . . for the two parts are joined by the single word ‘as’” (C 2838). If we think carefully about it, we realize that Christ is commanding us to pray for our own damnation if we do not forgive all the sins of all who sin against us.

All sins. “There is no limit or measure to this essentially divine forgiveness¹⁴⁶” (Mt 18:21-22; Lk 17:34; C 2845).

Never did Jesus emphasize a point more dramatically. “This petition is so important that it is the only one to which the Lord returns and which he develops explicitly in the Sermon on the Mount¹³⁷” (C 2841).

The reason for his insistence is that “this outpouring of mercy [God’s forgiveness] cannot penetrate our hearts as long as we have not forgiven those who have trespassed against us. . . . In refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father’s merciful love . . .” (C 2840). Put plainly, Jesus Christ guarantees us that if we do not forgive our neighbors, we cannot go to Heaven.

It’s not that God arbitrarily decided to make our forgiving others the prerequisite for his forgiving us. Rather, it is intrinsically impossible for us to receive God’s forgiveness if we do not forgive others, just as it is impossible for someone with a closed fist to receive a gift.

The difference between a forgiving and an unforgiving soul is like the difference between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The same water – the Jordan River – flows into both, but the Sea of Galilee is full of life (fishermen work it still, as they did in Jesus’ day), while the Dead Sea lives up to its name; nothing lives there. The difference is that the Sea of Galilee has an outlet; it passes on the living waters that it receives, while the Dead Sea does not. Forgiveness is like that water: the gift can be received only if it is also given.

What is it to “forgive”? It is not a *feeling* or a *thought*, but a *choice*. “It is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offense; but the heart . . . turns . . . the hurt into intercession” (C 2843). To forgive is to will good to those who do not deserve it, as God does to us.

And even before they repent, as God also does to us. Forgiveness “takes” only when its recipient accepts it, that is, confesses the wrong and repents of it. But just as God gives forgiveness even before we accept it, we are to do the same to those who wrong us. That is the clear implication of the formula “Forgive us... *as we forgive*.”

But what if we don’t think we need forgiveness? We may think that only if we don’t know God. That’s why the petitions are arranged in the order they are: the way to come to know this necessary truth about ourselves – that we are sinners in need of forgiveness – is to get to know the all-holy God by adoring him, thus understanding ourselves in his light rather than trying to understand him in ours. For by human standards, most of us seem pretty good, and God’s demands seem much too high. If we use human

standards, we naturally wonder “why bad things happen to good people,” but when we come to know God, we come to know ourselves better, and then we wonder instead why good things happen to bad people! For we do not deserve God’s forgiveness. It is simply a wonderful and baffling mystery why he forgives so much. It’s “just the way he is.” And we must treat each other in light of this mystery.

“Forgiveness also bears witness that, in our world, love is stronger than sin” (C 2844). It may seem like weakness, but it is the greatest power in the world. To fools it seems like foolishness, but to the wise it is divine wisdom (1 Cor 1:18-25).

11. “Lead us not into temptation”

“This petition goes to the root of the preceding one, for our sins, which need to be forgiven, result from our consenting to temptation; we therefore ask our Father not to ‘lead’ us into temptation” (C 2846).

But God never actively leads anyone into temptation; that is the work of the Evil One. “‘God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one’¹⁵¹ [Jas 1:13]; on the contrary, he wants to set us free from evil” (C 2846). The Greek word for “lead” here means “both ‘do not allow us to enter into temptation’ and ‘do not let us yield to temptation’¹⁵⁰” (C 2846).

“Temptation” could also be interpreted as “trials,” so that this petition means we humbly confess our weakness and ask God to be gentle to us, as promised: “A bruised reed he will not break” (Is 42:3). It would be arrogant to ask God for trials, thinking we were strong enough to endure them.

It is God's business, not ours, to decide each person's quantity of trials. It is our business to avoid them when possible and endure them in faith when it is not. Even Christ asked, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup of suffering pass from me." Only then did he add, "If this cup cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done" (Mt 26:39, 42). We are not to pretend to be stronger or holier than Christ!

But we *are* to believe that "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, so that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor 10:13).

"The Holy Spirit makes us *discern* between trials, which are necessary for the growth of the inner man,¹⁵² and temptation, which leads to sin and death.¹⁵³ We must also discern between being tempted and consenting to temptation. Finally, discernment unmasks the lie of temptation, whose object appears to be good, a 'delight to the eyes' and desirable,¹⁵⁴ [Gn 3:6] when in reality its fruit is death" (C 2847).

12. *"Deliver us from evil"*

Every religion in the world promises deliverance. Not all religions believe in a God, or a divine law, or a life after death, or even a soul (Buddhism, for example). But all offer deliverance.

In Christianity, deliverance is not an abstraction, an ideal, or a state of mind, but a relationship with a Person: the Deliverer, the Savior. And evil is a relationship with his enemy. "In this petition, evil is not an abstraction, but refers to a person, Satan, the Evil One, the angel who opposes

God” (C 2851). “‘A liar and the father of lies,’ [Jn 8:44], Satan is ‘the deceiver of the whole world’¹⁶⁵ [Rv 12:9]. Through him sin and death entered the world and by his definitive defeat all creation will be ‘freed from the corruption of sin and death’” (C 2852). “Therefore . . . [we] pray: ‘Come, Lord Jesus’¹⁷³ [Rv 22:17, 20], since his coming will deliver us from the Evil One” (C 2853).

“When we ask to be delivered from the Evil One, we pray as well to be freed from all evils, present, past, and future, of which he is the author or instigator. In this final petition, the Church brings before the Father all the distress of the world” (C 2854), confident that earth has no sorrows that Heaven cannot heal.

Christ puts this petition last. We tend to put it first. The child puts it first; his first prayer is usually: “God, help me!” This is a perfectly good prayer, and the greatest saints never outgrow it; but they outgrow putting it first. Instructed by the Lord’s Prayer, they wrap it in adoration. For the God we petition without adoring and loving and trusting is not treated as a person but as a machine, not as an end but as a means. When we don’t get what we want from a machine, we abandon it. When we don’t get what we want from a person whom we love and trust, we do not abandon him. Much less with God.

Adoration changes not only the *place* of our petition but also its *quality*; changes it from demanding or cajoling or complaining (all of which are self-centered) into trusting (which is God-centered). We are to confront and acknowledge our needs honestly, and then place them all

in God's hands and leave them there, turning our attention away from ourselves and our problems and back to him.

We are promised deliverance, but not instant deliverance. Our deliverance is not instantaneous because our being is not instantaneous. If a machine does not work immediately, it is defective. Persons and love, however, take time to grow. Religion is about love and persons, not machines. Therefore deliverance takes time. It took God thousands of years to prepare the Cross.

For that is where deliverance takes place. It is a bloody business, deliverance. The Lord's Prayer ends with the Cross, with the Gospel, with Christ. It is "The Lord's Prayer" not only because Christ is its author, but also because he is its fulfillment.

13. "For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen."

This doxology ("word of praise") is not in Scripture, but the Church added it very early in her history. It is right to end the prayer as it began – with adoration and praise – because our lives and the life of the universe will do the same. God is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last. The prayer conforms to the very structure of reality.

"Amen" doesn't mean simply, "I'm finished now," but "So be it!" It is not a mere wish, but a word of command. When a great king says, "So be it," it is done. The King of the universe has made us princes (Ps 45:16), and prayer is our staff of power. More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. If God let us see all the difference every one of our prayers makes, throughout all of history and all

of humanity, we would probably be unable ever to get up off our knees again.

“By the final ‘Amen’ we express our *fiat* concerning the seven petitions: ‘So be it’” (C 2865). It can be a sacramental word, a word that operates. Our prayer is not a mere thought or wish, but an *act* (an “act of prayer”).

In fact, each petition of the Lord’s Prayer, if honestly meant, is efficacious: it brings about what the words signify. When we say “Our Father,” this faith ratifies our sonship (Rom 8:15, 16). When we pray “Hallowed be thy name,” we are by that act actually hallowing it. When we pray “Thy kingdom come,” we are making it come, since the kingdom exists first of all in the praying heart. When we pray “Thy will be done,” the very desire is its own fulfillment, for that is his will: that we pray and mean “Thy will be done.” When we pray “Give us this day our daily bread,” we are already receiving our daily bread, the food of our souls, which is prayer. When we pray “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,” we are forgiving others, for we are praying for our own damnation if we are not. When we pray “Lead us not into temptation,” we are escaping temptation by placing ourselves in the presence of God. And when we pray “Deliver us from evil,” we are effecting that deliverance by holding up our sins and our needs into the burning light of God, against which no darkness can stand.

Notes from the Catechism in Order of Their Appearance in Quotations Used in this Section

¹² St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II-II, 83, 9.

⁹ St. Augustine, *Ep.* 123, 12, 22: PL 33, 503.

- 14 Cf. *Mt* 6:7; *1 Kings* 18:26-29.
- 15 *Jn* 6:63.
- 50 Cf. *UR* 8; 22.
- 51 Cf. *Mt* 5:23-24; 6:14-15.
- 31 Tertullian, *De orat.* 3: PL 1, 1155.
- 28 St. Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 71, 3: PL 52, 401CD; cf. *Gal* 4:6.
- 36 Cf. *GS* 22 § 1.
- 38 St. Cyprian, *De Dom. orat.* 11: PL 4:526B.
- 40 St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De orat. Dom.* 2: PG 44, 1148B.
- 68 Cf. *Ps* 8; *Isa* 6:3.
- 82 St. Peter Chrysologus, *Sermo* 71, 4: PL 52:402A; cf. *Rom* 2:24; *Ezek* 36:20-22.
- 83 Tertullian, *De orat.* 3: PL 1:1157A.
- 88 Cf. *Titus* 2:13.
- 93 Cf. *GS* 22; 32; 39; 45; *EN* 31.
- 97 *Jn* 13:34; cf. *1 Jn* 3; 4; *Lk* 10:25-37.
- 95 *1 Tim* 2:3-4.
- 96 *2 Pet* 3:9; cf. *Mt* 18:14.
- 107 St. John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Mt.* 19, 5: PG 57, 280.
- 116 Cf. *2 Thess* 3:6-13.
- 122 Attributed to St. Ignatius Loyola, cf. Joseph de Guibert, SJ, *The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice*, (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1964), 148, n. 55.
- 118 Cf. *Lk* 16:19-31; *Mt* 25:31-46.
- 123 *Deut* 8:3; *Mt* 4:4.
- 124 *Am* 8:11.
- 131 St. Augustine, *Sermo* 57, 7: PL 38, 389.
- 146 Cf. *Mt* 18:21-22; *Lk* 17:3-4.
- 137 Cf. *Mt* 6:14-15; 5:23-24; *Mk* 11:25.
- 151 *Jas* 1:13.
- 150 Cf. *Mt* 26:41.

- ¹⁵² Cf. *Lk* 8:13-15; *Acts* 14:22; *Rom* 5:3-5; *2 Tim* 3:12.
- ¹⁵³ Cf. *Jas* 1:14-15.
- ¹⁵⁴ Cf. *Gen* 3:6.
- ¹⁶⁵ *Jn* 8:44; *Rev* 12:9.
- ¹⁷³ *Rev* 22:17, 20.

