

THE LORD'S PRAYER – OUR PRAYER

[Italicized quotes – Pope Francis – General Audiences on Dec. 5 & 12, 2018]

Jesus was a man of prayer. *“Despite the urgency of his mission and the pressure from the many people making demands on him, Jesus feels the need to withdraw in solitude and pray.”* In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus followed his first day of ministry by rising before dawn to go off to a deserted place to pray. He prayed with others in their synagogues. His ministry ending, Jesus prayed in Gethsemane at the start of his Passion; his final words on the cross are from the psalms – the Jewish prayers his mother taught him..

Jesus began praying as all people do – as he had learned. But there was a mystery in his prayer derived from his deepening relationship with the Father that led his disciples to ask, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Lk 11:1). Jesus *“is not possessive of his intimacy with the Father, but rather, he came precisely to introduce us to this relationship with the Father. And thus, he becomes the teacher of prayer to his disciples, as he undoubtedly wants to be so for all of us.”*

We can always learn to pray, no matter how long we’ve been doing it. *“The first step to prayer is to be humble, to go to the Father and to say: “Look at me, I am a sinner, I am weak, I am bad”: each one knows what to say. But one always begins with humility, and the Lord listens. The Lord listens to humble prayer.”* Ask: “Lord, teach me to pray.”

Jesus doesn’t have us start to pray with fancy formulas or wording that puts us at a distance from God – rather, fear and awe are dismissed and we simply utter “Father,” like the children that we are, confident and trusting in God’s love.

Prayer does not arise after all our other needs are satisfied – it begins with life itself. It happens wherever we are – hungry, sorrowful, struggling, wondering. *“Our first prayer, in a certain sense, was the wail that accompanied the first breath. In that newborn’s cry the fate of our whole life was announced: our constant hunger, our constant thirst, our search for happiness.”* Our suffering and distress should soar heavenward and become dialogue with the Father.

We need to be like the blind beggar who ignored the crowd urging him to be silent and cried out for Jesus to have mercy on him. His cries were an expression of faith in Jesus’ power to help. So we cry out to the Father because we believe in his love and mercy.

We also feel the need to praise God in prayer, and this is important. But it should not diminish the value of our prayers of supplication. To bring our needs to God in prayer is to recognize our human condition in the context of His merciful love. It is an act of faith to which the Father responds with immense compassion.