

# THE LORD'S APPROACH TO PRAYER

*[Italicized quotes – Pope Francis – General Audiences on Jan. 2 & 9, 2019]*

Matthew's Gospel places the teaching of the Our Father in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. Beginning with the Beatitudes and continuing with contrasts between the words of the Law and his own teachings, Jesus summarizes the fundamental aspects of his message. The Gospel is revolutionary, demanding changes in those who accept it.

*“The Law does not need to be abolished but needs a new interpretation that leads it back to its original meaning. If a person has a good heart, predisposed to love, then he understands that every word of God must be incarnated up to its ultimate results.”*

Just as we must change how we act, so we must change how we pray. We speak to God not as those who keep an awe-struck and respectful distance, but as children of a loving Father. *“A Christian is simply a person who pauses before the new Burning Bush, at the revelation of a God who does not bear the enigma of an unspeakable name, but asks his children to invoke him with the name of ‘Father’, to allow themselves to be renewed by his power and to reflect a ray of his goodness for this world.”*

In his approach to prayer, Jesus distances himself from hypocrites who pray in public to be seen and admired by others, and from pagans who multiply words as if their sheer quantity will command their god's attention. Whether our prayer is public or private, we must give witness to it by our lives. *“Christian prayer ... has no other credible witness than one's own conscience, where one weaves a most intense dialogue with the Father.”* What matters is not how many words we put into our prayers, but how much we put our heart into our prayer, confident in the Father's love. *“Our God needs nothing: in prayer, he only asks that we keep a channel of communication open with him in order to always recognize that we are his most beloved children.”*

Jesus teaches us to call God “Father” – not Master or Stepfather, but the one who cares for us and, even more than our earthly fathers, wants to give us what we need. God always hears and always responds, because he is Father, always remembering his suffering children. There are times when we do not feel heard – Jesus tells us to persist and not give up. *“Prayer always transforms reality, always. If things around us do not change, at least we change; our heart changes.”*

God responds to our prayer -- our only uncertainty is when. Our desire for happiness will one day be fulfilled, our desire for justice vindicated. Praying is victory over solitude and desperation. *“At the end of prayer, at the end of the time in which we are praying, at life's end: what is there? There is a Father who awaits everything and everyone with arms wide open. Let us look to this Father.”*