

SESSION 1 / OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME

To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12)

Theme The Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew's Gospel at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount, shows us our new inheritance in Baptism.

Welcome: We Pray and Share Together (15 mins)

O God,
send forth your Holy Spirit
into our hearts that we might perceive,
into our minds that we might remember,
into our souls that we might meditate.
Inspire us to speak with love, holiness,
tenderness and mercy.
Teach, guide and direct our thoughts and senses
from beginning to end.
May your grace help us to see with your eyes
and to act with your love and light in our hearts.
May we be strengthened with wisdom from on high
for the sake and glory of your kingdom.
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In a period of calm and a space of trust, each one of us is invited to share briefly one thing that has happened in the past week. It could be one thing that has given you cause for concern, something shared during the last time you met as a group or something that has given you cause to celebrate.

In this moment of peace and fellowship, we pray for the good of the group. Each member is invited to offer up any personal intentions. We also pray for the good of the Church, for wisdom in our country and for the common good. Let us also bring to mind the poor, the sick and those who have died.

We join together in praying: Our Father...

Read the Word 1 John 3:1-6,11,16-24 (5 mins)

Note: John's first letter advises readers on how to discern true teachers - by their model of life, by their love and by their proclamation of Jesus.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practises lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another... By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

Meditate on the Word 1 John 3:1-6,11,16-24 (20 mins)

Once the Scripture passage has been read you are asked to choose a word or phrase that has struck you. Underline it with a pen or you might wish to simply hold it in mind. You will be invited to share the word or phrase with the group.

Another person will then read the passage. While you listen attentively, repeat the process of holding onto a word or phrase, making a note and sharing it. In doing this, you are invited to consider the following questions:

How have these words or phrases resonated in my heart and in my mind?

What is the Lord saying to me at this very moment in my life?

In what way might my reading of this passage of Holy Scripture change me?

How might it help me to resolve to be more Christ-like in the coming days?

You are encouraged to re-read the Holy Scripture during the coming week, revisiting these questions.

Explore and Reflect on the Theme (25 mins)

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are addressing the all-powerful, transcendent God of the universe; creator of all that is and ever has been. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we call God, 'Father'. We are presented with two truths in this part of the prayer. One, the loving fatherhood of God for each one of us, inviting intimacy and communion. Two, the hallowing of the name of God, the need to respect and worship his greatness and majesty (cf. Psalm 30:4, 97:12; 103:1; 111:9; Ezekiel 36:22-27; Isaiah 52:6; Genesis 32:28-29). The enormity of this is so easily lost on us.

In contemporary society, there is often a sense that fatherhood is repressive and problematic – for example, the derogatory use of the term patriarchy. Unfortunately, it is the case that some fathers are no more than 'begetters', having little to do with the children they help to bring into the world. We need to rediscover the true identity of what it means to be a loving father.

God the Father, as Olivier Clément, the French theologian reminds us, transcends sexual duality (note the Catechism CCC 239). The 'entire Bible,' he writes, 'evokes the "bosom of mercy," *rahamim*, in the sense of the womb: this Father is motherly. He "senses" his children as a mother "senses" her own, with her whole being, with all her flesh and within her bosom' (cf. John 1:18).

God's love for us is total: motherly, paternal, unequivocal, unconditional. The relationships that we have with our own family, with our friends, are but shadows of this. This is why, even where our own relationships with family, our own fathers, are weak or damaged, acknowledging God as Father offers healing and sanctuary.

The Israelites had a sense that God was Father of his People (e.g. Exodus 4:22) but rarely would an individual address God as Father. Yet, remarkably, Jesus invites us to do just that. In the Aramaic – it is likely that Jesus would have taught this prayer in his native tongue – the word is Abba, more akin to 'Dad'. The relationship is familiar, that is 'of the family', and intimate.

Baptism incorporates us into this intimate, familial relationship. By virtue of our Baptism we are united to the Father, as his adopted children, and to each other as brothers and sisters. This reality is often obscured by our sin which results in conflict, jealousy, fierce competition and acts of pride. We frequently act as if our own growth is when others are diminished. The reality is that true spiritual growth comes when we use the gifts that God has given us at our Baptism. For when we diminish so that Christ increases, we will begin to understand more fully what it means to be the Father's adopted sons and daughters. When this happens other relationships, with each other and the created order, start to be restored.

Jesus taught us this prayer to draw us closer to God the Father, to recognise our precious 'spirit of sonship' and dignity. And because we are adopted sons and daughters, 'God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba! Father!' (Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:15).

Responding to what has been heard

By committing ourselves to action we are saying that we want to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others. We are committing to make the words of the Lord's Prayer resonate in our lives. What have you heard today that you find challenging? What do you find affirming? What is your response to God's offer of eternal life? Please share if you feel comfortable. What are you going to do about what you have heard today?

Go in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord (10 mins)

You are invited to close with a time of meditation on Psalm 139 (138). Read it slowly, pause between verses, reflect on its meaning for your life and your journey in faith, hope and love. You may also wish to conclude with the Lord's Prayer, another prayer of your own choosing or a moment of silence.

A: O Lord, you search me and you know me,
you know my resting and my rising,
you discern my purpose from afar.

B: Before ever a word is on my tongue
you know it, O Lord, through and through.
Too wonderful for me this knowledge,
too high, beyond my reach.

A: For it was you who created my being,
knit me together in my mother's womb.
I thank you for the wonder of my being,
for the wonders of all your creation.

B: O search me, God, and know my heart.
See that I follow not the wrong path
and lead me in the path of life eternal.

All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A blessing taken from the Liturgy of the Hours is included here.

May the Lord bless us and keep us from all evil
and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

By his design and grace we are Children of God

Our awareness of our status as slaves would make us sink into the ground and our earthly condition would dissolve into dust, if the authority of our Father himself and the Spirit of his Son had not impelled us to this cry . . . 'Abba, Father!' . . . When would a mortal dare call God 'Father,' if man's innermost being were not animated by power from on high?

St Peter Chrysologus

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, for the name 'Son' implies the new name 'Father.'

Tertullian

[The prayer is accomplished] by the contemplation of God alone, and by the warmth of love, through which the soul, moulded and directed to love him, speaks very familiarly to God as to its own Father with special devotion. Our Father: at this name love is aroused in us . . . and the confidence of obtaining what we are about to ask. . . . What would he not give to his children who ask, since he has already granted them the gift of being his children?

St John Cassian

[See Catechism 2777-2815]



Meditate on Sacred Art: Visio Divina (1)

Describe what you can see, what is happening?

What does this picture say about the relationship within the Trinity?

In Baptism, you enter into this relationship of love. How do you respond?

How might you deepen your knowledge and love of God in the coming days?

The Martyr's Picture (1583) by Durante Alberti / Venerable English College, Rome