

THE LORD'S PRAYER
'Our Father who art in heaven'
Texts from the
Catechism of the Catholic Church

“FATHER!”

“We dare to say...”

In the Roman liturgy, the Eucharistic assembly is invited to pray to our heavenly Father with filial boldness; the Eastern liturgies develop and use similar expressions: “dare in all confidence”, “make us worthy of...”

From the burning bush Moses heard a voice saying to him, “Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Ex 3:5). Only Jesus could cross that threshold of the divine holiness, for “when he had made purification for sins”, he brought us into the Father's presence: “Here am I, and the children God has given me.” (Heb 1:3; 2:13)

The Father's name is revealed to us in the Son

Humility makes us recognise that “no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him,” that is, “to little children.” God our Father transcends the categories of the created world. To pray to the Father is to enter into his mystery as he is and as the Son has revealed him to us. “The Father's name has been revealed to us in the Son, for the name ‘Son’ implies the new name ‘Father.’” (Tertullian) (2779)

The Holy Spirit makes the Father known to us

We can invoke God as “Father” because *he is revealed to us* by his Son become man and because his Spirit makes him known to us. The personal relation of the Son to the Father is something that man cannot conceive of nor the angelic powers even dimly see: and yet, the Spirit of the Son grants a participation in that very relation to us who believe that Jesus is the Christ and that we are born of God. (2780)

In communion with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ

When we pray to the Father, *we are in communion with him* and with his Son, Jesus Christ. The first phrase of the *Our Father* is a blessing of adoration before it is a supplication. For it is the glory of God that we should recognise him as “Father,” the true God. We give him thanks for having revealed his name to us, for the gift of believing in it, and for the indwelling of his Presence in us. (2781)

We are his adopted children

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.” (2782)

Revealing us to ourselves

Thus the Lord's Prayer *reveals us to ourselves* at the same time that it reveals the Father to us:

“O man, you did not dare to raise your face to heaven, you lowered your eyes to the earth, and suddenly you have received the grace of Christ: all your sins have been forgiven. From being a wicked servant you have become a good son... Then raise your eyes to the Father who has begotten you through Baptism, to the Father who has redeemed you through his Son, and say: ‘Our Father...’ But do not claim any privilege. He is the Father in a special way only of Christ, but he is the common Father of us all, because while he has begotten only Christ, he has created us. Then also say by his grace, ‘Our Father,’ so that you may merit being his son.” (St Ambrose) (2783)

The desire to become like him

The free gift of adoption requires on our part continual conversion and *new life*. Praying to our Father should develop in us two fundamental dispositions: First, *the desire to become like him*: though created in his image, we are restored to his likeness by grace; and we must respond to this grace.

“We must remember... and know that when we call God ‘our Father’ we ought to behave as sons of God.” (St Cyprian) “You cannot call the God of all kindness your Father if you preserve a cruel and inhuman heart; for in this case you no longer have in you the marks of the heavenly Father's kindness.” (St John Chrysostom) (2784)

A humble and trusting heart

Second, *a humble and trusting heart* that enables us “to turn and become like children”: for it is to “little children” that the Father is revealed. “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 Augustine) (2785)

“OUR” FATHER

We have become his children and he is ‘our’ God

“Our” Father refers to God. The adjective, as used by us, does not express possession, but an entirely new relationship with God. (2786)

When we say “our” Father, we recognise first that all his promises of love announced by the prophets are fulfilled in the *new and eternal covenant* in his Christ: we have become “his” people and he is henceforth “our” God. (2787)

The Trinitarian dimension

When we pray to “our” Father, we personally address the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By doing so we do not divide the Godhead, since the Father is its “source and origin,” but rather confess that the Son is eternally begotten by him and the Holy Spirit proceeds from him. We are not confusing the persons, for we confess that our communion is with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, in their one Holy Spirit. *The Holy Trinity* is consubstantial and indivisible. When we pray to the Father, we adore and glorify him together with the Son and the Holy Spirit. (2789)

The baptised are of ‘one heart and one soul’

Grammatically, “our” qualifies a reality common to more than one person. There is only one God, and he is recognised as Father by those who, through faith in his only Son, are reborn of him by water and the Spirit. *The Church* is this new communion of God and men. United with the only Son, who has become “the firstborn among many brethren,” (Rom 8:29) she is in communion with one and the same Father in one and the same Holy Spirit. In praying “our” Father, each of the baptised is praying in this communion: “The company of those who believed were of one heart and soul.” (Acts 4:32) (2790)

‘Our’ Father - in his Son the dimension of his love for all

Finally, if we pray the *Our Father* sincerely, we leave individualism behind, because the love that we receive frees us from it. The baptised cannot pray to “our” Father without bringing before him all those for whom he gave his beloved Son. God’s love has no bounds, neither should our prayer. Praying “our” Father opens to us the dimensions of his love revealed in Christ: praying with and for all who do not yet know him, so that Christ may “gather into one the children of God.” (Jn 11:52) (2792-3)

“WHO ART IN HEAVEN”

Heaven is brought to our hearts

This biblical expression does not mean a place (“space”), but a way of being; it does not mean that God our Father is distant, but majestic. “‘Our Father who art in heaven’ is rightly understood to mean that God is in the hearts of the just, as in his holy temple. At the same time, it means that those who pray should desire the one they invoke to dwell in them.” (St Augustine) (2794)

Heaven and earth are reconciled in Christ

He is in heaven, his dwelling place; the Father’s house is our homeland. Sin has exiled us from the land of the covenant, but conversion of heart enables us to return to the Father, to heaven. In Christ, then, heaven and earth are reconciled, for the Son alone “descended from heaven” and causes us to ascend there with him, by his Cross, Resurrection and Ascension. (2795)

God’s people are united with him in the heavenly places

When the Church prays “our Father who art in heaven,” she is professing that we are the People of God, already seated “with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” and “hidden with Christ in God” (Eph 2:6); yet at the same time, “here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling.” (2Cor 5:2) (2796)

IN BRIEF

- **Simple and faithful trust, humble and joyous assurance are the proper dispositions for one who prays the Our Father.** (2797)
- **We can invoke God as “Father” because the Son of God made man has revealed him to us. In this Son, through Baptism, we are incorporated and adopted as sons of God.** (2798)
- **The Lord’s Prayer brings us into communion with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. At the same time it reveals us to ourselves.** (2799)
- **Praying to our Father should develop in us the will to become like him, and foster in us a humble and trusting heart.** (2800)
- **When we say “Our” Father, we are invoking the new covenant in Jesus Christ, communion with the Holy Trinity, and the divine love which spreads through the Church to encompass the world.** (2801)
- **“Who art in heaven” does not refer to a place but to God’s majesty and his presence in the hearts of the just. Heaven, the Father’s house, is the true homeland toward which we are heading and to which, already, we belong.** (2802)