



## **The Our Father: Embodiment of All Prayers**

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**Abstract:** Prayer is a communication between the divine and the human, it calls the almighty. Down through the centuries, different prayers have been handed down from one generation to another. Many prayers differ in forms and contents depending on the religious affiliation. The prayer, Our Father, which known as the Lord's Prayer is the most efficacious prayer acknowledged and said by millions of us humans irrespective of our difference, hence any one can say that the Our Father; is an embodiment of all prayers. This is what this research paper enlightens us titled; The Our Father, Embodiment of all Prayers.

**Keywords;,** Communication, God, Humanity, Embodiment, Petition, Father, Jesus, Commandments, Worshippers.

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## Introduction

Prayer is an act of communication by humans with the sacred or holy—God, the gods, the transcendent realm, or supernatural powers (Prayer, 2021). Prayer has been one of the fundamental aspects of human nature. Thus, found in all religions of humanity at all times, in all paces, prayer may be a corporate or personal act utilizing various forms and techniques (Prayer, 2021). Thus fundamental nature of human lives, namely, ‘prayer,’ has been described in its sublimity as “an intimate friendship, a frequent conversation held alone with the Beloved” by St. Teresa of Ávila, a 16th-century Spanish mystic. This article titled, *The Our Father; Embodiment of all Prayers*, is a reflection of the prayer, “The Our Father,” which is also termed as the Lord’s Prayer. The Bible being used for reference is *The New Jerusalem Bible*, New York: Doubleday, 1985, referred as NJB.

## The Prayer, Our Father

The Lord’s Prayer, the Our Father, is much more than a handy guide on what to pray when no other words come to mind. The prayer, if we meditate on each petition, serves as a moral compass that reveals the best way to go before the Father in requesting His guidance and protection (Smyth, 2021). Jesus, Himself, gave us the words to the Lord’s Prayer, found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4) (Smyth, 2021). More specifically, when one of Jesus’ disciples asked the Lord to teach the disciples how to pray, Christ responded by giving us this short prayer that perfectly summarizes what Christians believe and how Christians should live (Smyth, 2021). The Lord’s Prayer, also known as the Our Father or *Pater Noster*, contains seven petitions. The number seven often connotes completion or perfection in Scripture, and the Lord’s Prayer is just that — a complete and perfect summary of divine teachings (Smyth 2021).

The prayer opens simply enough, with an address to *Our Father, who art in Heaven*. This address reaffirms our core belief as

Christians that God is our celestial Father, both with us in spirit and above us in the perfect realm of Heaven (Smyth, 2021). This opening address also unites us humanity as one community of worshippers as we pray to “our” Father and not individually to “my” Father. The Lord teaches us as he taught his disciples;

So you should pray like this way:

Our Father in heaven ,

May your name be held holy.

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us.

And do not put us to the test,

but save us from the Evil One. (Mt 6:9-13 NJB)

After this address, invoking the Lord with the seven petitions as an existential yet divine, the prayer can be explained in the following way taking every petition applying to our human nature as humans irrespective of time and place. This prayer is addressed to the divine God by us humans. Thus the Our Father, then like the Ten Commandments, begins by establishing the primacy of God, which then leads naturally to a consideration of the right way of being human (Ratzinger, 2008). For the research the text primarily used here is *Jesus of Nazareth* by Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI). The following is the analysis of the prayer Our Father, applicable to us humanity irrespective time and place, religious and political affiliation for we all belong to our creator.

## Our Father Who Art in Heaven

This prayer begins with the salutation “Father.” Reinhold Shneider writes about this in his exposition of the Our Father;

The Our Father begins with a great consolation: we are allowed to say ‘Father.’ This one word contains the whole history of redemption. We are allowed to say ‘Father,’ because the Son was our brother and he revealed the Father to us; because, thanks to what Christ has done, we have once more become children of God. (*Das Vaterunser*, p. 10). (Ratzinger, 2008)

It should be mentioned that as Pope Benedict XVI tells us that contemporary men and women have difficulty in experiencing the great consolation of the word *father* immediately, since the experience of the father is in many cases either completely absent or is obscured by inadequate examples of fatherhood (Ratzinger, 2008). In this prayer we must allow Jesus to teach us what *father* really means. For example, in Jesus’ discourses, the Father appears as the source of all good, as the measure of the rectitude (perfection) of man (Ratzinger, 2008). Benedict XVI points out; “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in Heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good” (Mt 5:44-45) (Ratzinger, 2008).

The Pope writes that the love that endures “to the end” (Jn 13:1), which the Lord fulfilled on the Cross in praying for his enemies, shows us the essence of the Father. (Ratzinger, 2008). According to him He is this love, for Jesus brings it to completion, he is entirely “Son,” and he invites us to become “sons” (daughters) according to this criterion (Ratzinger, 2008). When we address as Father there can be a question, which reminds us; Is God also mother? (Ratzinger, 2008) It is true that the Bible does compare God’s love with the love of a mother; “As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you” (Is 66:13), “Can a woman forget her suckling

child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb” (Is 49:15) (Ratzinger, 2008). The mystery of God’s maternal love is expressed with particular power in the Hebrew word *rabamim*. Pope Benedict XVI points out that etymologically, this word means “womb,” but it was later used to mean divine compassion for man, God’s mercy (Ratzinger, 2008). It can be pointed out that the Old Testament constantly uses the names of organs of our human body to describe basic human attitudes or inner dispositions of God, just as today we use the heart or brain when referring to some aspect of our own existence (Ratzinger, 2008).

In this way the Old Testament describes the basic attitudes of our existence, not in abstract concepts, but in the image language of the body. For instance, the womb is the most concrete expression for the intimate interrelatedness of two lives and of loving concern for the dependent, helpless creature whose whole being, body and soul, nestles in the mother’s womb (Ratzinger, 2008). The Old Testament understanding of the image language of the body furnishes us, then, with a deeper understanding of God’s dispositions toward man than any conceptual language could (Ratzinger, 2008).

Though this use of language is derived from man’s bodiliness inscribes motherly love into the image of Go, it is nonetheless also true that God is never named or addressed as mother, either in the Old or in the New Testament. “Mother” in the Bible is an image but not a title for God (Ratzinger, 2008).

Jesus alone was able to address this Creator God, my Father, because he alone is truly God’s only-begotten Son, of our substance with the Father. In contrast, the rest of us have to say “our Father (Ratzinger, 2008). It is only within the “we” of the disciples can we call “Father,” because only through communion with Jesus Christ do we truly become “children of God (Ratzinger, 2008).”

### Hallowed be Thy Name

This is the first petition of the Our Father. It reminds us of the second commandment of the Decalogue: Thou shalt not speak the

name of the Lord thy God in vain. The question arises, “what is this name of God”? When we turn our mind to God’s name, we see in our mind’s eye the picture of Moses in the desert beholding a thornbush that burns but not consummated. (Ratzinger, 2008). Moses is prompted to go and take a closer look at this mysterious sight, but then a voice calls to him from out of the bush, and this voice says to him; “I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” [(Ex 3:6) (Ratzinger, 2008)] The Old Testament tells us that this God sends Moses back to Egypt with the task of leading the people of Israel out of that country into the Promised Land, whereby, Moses is charged with demanding in the name of God that Pharaoh let Israel go, (Ratzinger, 2008).

### **Thy Kingdom Come**

In understanding this petition, we recall all our earlier considerations concerning the term “Kingdom of God” (Ratzinger, 2008). By this petition, we are acknowledging first and foremost the primacy of God (Ratzinger, 2008). When God’s presence is not acknowledged, nothing can be good, and humans and the world fall to ruin. Benedict XVI points out that this is what the Lord means when he says to “seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” [(Mt 6:3) (Ratzinger, 2008)] These words are the basis for an order of priorities for human action, for how we approach every life (Ratzinger, 2008).

### **Thy will be Done on Earth as it is Heaven**

By this petition, two things are immediately clear from the words of this petition: God has a will with and for us and it must become the measure of our willing and being and the essence of “heaven” is that it is where God’s will is unswervingly done (Ratzinger, 2008). If we put it in different terms, ‘where God’s will is done is heaven (Ratzinger, 2008).’ The Pope writes that the essence of heaven is oneness with God’s will, the oneness of will and truth. Then earth becomes “heaven” when and insofar as God’s will is done there; and

it is merely “earth,” the opposite of heaven, when and insofar as it withdraws from the will of God (Ratzinger, 2008). That’s why we pray in this petition that it may be on earth as it is in heaven—that earth may become “heaven” (Razinger, 2008).

### **Give us this Day Our Daily Bread**

According to Pope Benedict XVI, the fourth petition of the Our Father appears to us as the most “human” of all of the petitions (Ratzinger, 2008). He says that though the Lord directs our eyes to the essential, to the “one thing necessary,” he also knows about and acknowledges our earthly (existential) needs (Ratzinger). When he says to his disciples, “Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat” (Mt 6:25), he nevertheless invites us to pray for our food and thus to turn our care over to God (Ratzinger, 2008). He tells us that bread is “the fruit of the earth and the work of human hands,” but the earth bears no fruit unless it receives sunlight and rain from above (Ratzinger, 2008). The coming together of cosmic powers, outside our control, stands opposed to the temptation that comes to us through our pride to give ourselves life purely through our own power (Ratzinger, 2008). According to him such pride makes man violent and cold. It will ultimately result in destroying the earth. He says;

it cannot be otherwise, because it is contrary to the truth that we human beings are oriented toward self-transcendence and that we become great and free and truly ourselves only when we open up to God. We have the right and the duty to ask for what we need. We know that if even earthly fathers give their children good things when they ask for them, God will not refuse us the good things that he alone can give (cf. Lk 11:9-11 and Ratzinger, 2008).

Reflecting on this petition Saint Cyprian draws our attention to two important aspects of it. He points out the far reaching significance of the word *our* in his discussion of the phrase “*Our Father*,” and

here likewise he points out that the reference is to “our” bread (Ratzinger, 2008). As bread is the symbol of communion or fellowship, here we pray that in the communion of the disciples, in the communion of the children of God, and for this reason no one may think only of himself (herself) (Ratzinger, 2008). In this petition as we pray for *our* bread- we also pray for bread for others. It also reminds us that those who have an abundance of bread are called to share (Ratzinger, 2008), irrespective of all differences.

### **And Forgive Us Our Trespasses, as We Forgive Those Who Trespass against Us**

The fifth petition of the prayer Our Father presupposes a world in which there is trespass-trespass of men (humans) in relation to other men, trespass in to God (Ratzinger, 2008). In our everyday life as humans, the Pope reminds us that every instance of trespass among us humans involves some kind of injury to truth and to love and is thus opposed to God, who is truth and love (Ratzinger, 2008). One of the prime existential needs for us humans is how to overcome guilt in our life. Thus the history of religions revolves around this question (Ratzinger, 2008). At our psychological level of us humans guilt calls for retaliation and the result is a chain of trespasses in which the evil of guilt grows ceaselessly and becomes more and more inescapable (Ratzinger, 2008). From the basis of our psychological level the holy Father Pope Benedict XVI tells us that with this petition, the Lord is telling us that guilt can be overcome only by forgiveness, not by retaliation (Ratzinger, 2008), in the individual level as humans and in the collectively level as humanity, for God is a God who forgives, because he loves his creatures; but forgiveness can only penetrate and become effective in one who is himself (herself) forgiving (Ratzinger, 2008).

### **And Lead Us not into Temptation**

In the prayer, the way this petition is phrased could be shocking to many of us, for we know that God certainly does not lead us into temptation (Ratzinger, 2008). In this regard, St James tells us; “Let



no one say when he is tempted 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one" (Jas 1:13 and Ratzinger, 2008).

We, humans are helped a further step along when we recall the words of the Gospel: "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Mt 4:1 and Ratzinger, 2008). Pope Benedict XVI explains to us that temptation comes from the devil, but part of Jesus' messianic task is to withstand the great temptations to the point of dying on the Cross, which is how he opens the way of redemption for us (Ratzinger, 2008). According to him it is not only after his death, but already Jesus by his death and during his whole life that the Lord Jesus "descends into hell," as it were, into the domain of our temptations and defeats, in order to take us by the hand and carry us upward (Ratzinger, 2008). Here again, the Pope takes us to the Scripture. For example, the Letter to the Hebrews places special emphasis on this aspect, which it presents as an essential component of Jesus' path: "For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted" (Heb 2:18). "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15 and Ratzinger, 2008).

### **But Deliver Us from Evil**

The last petition of the Our Father takes us once again to the previous one and gives it a positive twist (Ratzinger, 2008). Benedict XVI tells us that the two petitions are therefore closely connected. He explains that in the next-to-last petition the *not* set the dominant note (do not give the Evil One more room to manoeuvre than we can bear) (Ratzinger, 2008). He writes that in the last petition we come before the Father with the hope that is at the centre of our faith: "Rescue, redeem, free us!" (Ratzinger, 2008). The prayer, Our Father, in its final analysis, is a plea for redemption and as humans what do we want to be redeemed from? (Ratzinger, 2008) The Pope claims that the new German translation of the Our

Father says “*vom Bösen*,” thus leaving it open whether “evil” or “the Evil One” is meant. He tells us that the two are ultimately inseparable. We can see before us the dragon of which the Book of Revelation speaks [(cf. chapters 12 and 13) (Ratzinger, 2008)] Thus, John portrays the “beast rising out of the sea,” out of the dark depths of evil, with the symbols of Roman imperial power, and he thus puts a very concrete face on the threat facing the Christians of his day: the total claim placed upon man (humans) by the emperor cult and the resulting elevation of political-military-economic might to the peak of absolute power-to the personification of the evil that threatens to devour us, which is coupled with the erosion of ethical principles by a cynical form of skepticism and enlightenment (Ratzinger, 2008). Thus, in this imperiled situation, the Christian (anyone in search of truth) in time of persecution calls upon the Lord as the only power that can save him (her): “Deliver us, free us from evil” (Ratzinger, 2008).

## Conclusion

We as humans are faced with different forms of hunger everyday, such as physical hunger, psychological or mental hunger as for love, recognition, achievement, forgiveness, peace, healing and consolation (Vattathara, 2020), which remind us that we are created beings by our creator. This research is not a mere nostalgia for the past whether in our religious or psychological realm of our being in our everyday life situation. We humans are placed in the temptation to seek God in the past, or in a possible future (Francis, 2014), which is the greatest hunger of us humanity. In this regard, we take the words of Holy Father Pope Francis as he writes;

God is certainly in the past because we can see the footprints of His presence. And God is also in the future as a promise. But the ‘concrete’ God, so to speak, is today. For this reason, complaining never, never helps us find God. The complaints of today about how “barbaric” the world is-these complaints sometimes end

up founding within the Church the desire to establish order in the sense of pure conservation, as a defence. No: God is to be encountered in the world today (Francis, 2008).

The answer to this teaching is the Lord's Prayer, *The Our Father*. This is what this research paper has been dealt with from a human point of view, reminding us that the prayer stands as the greatest prayer of all prayers, which has been said from time immemorial. Thus, Pope Benedict XVI writes that in this prayer Our Father, we know that he is with us to hold us in his hand and save us (Ratzinger, 2008). He says that, for example, Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, the Superior General of the Jesuits, tells us the story of a *staretz*, or spiritual advisor of the Eastern Church, who yearned "to begin the Our Father with the last verse, so that one might become worthy to finish the prayer with the initial words-'Our Father'." (Ratzinger, 2008). The *staretz* explains that we would be following the path to Easter, where we begin in the desert with the temptation, we return to Egypt, then we travel the path of the Exodus, through the stations of forgiveness and God's manna, and by God's will we attain the promised land, the kingdom of God, where he communicates to us the mystery of his name: 'Our Father' (*Der österliche Weg*, pp. 65f cited in Ratzinger, 2008). This is the joy of the Prayer Our Father, the Lord's Prayer; an Embodiment of all Prayers, which has come into this world among all religious leaders and religions of all humanity at all time.

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