

If you have ever had a favorite film or singer, you know how annoying it can be if someone whom you respect has an entirely different opinion of that film or artist. It is a bit trickier to inquire as to another’s favorite prayer– after all, isn’t all prayer good? In today’s Gospel from St. Luke, we encounter the less familiar version of the Lord’s Prayer. St. Luke’s presents a brief text of five petitions, while St. Matthew gives a more developed version of seven petitions.¹ St. Matthew’s version was that which the Church adopted from the earliest days for liturgical purposes.²

In the final year of his life (1273 A.D.), St. Thomas Aquinas preached 10 sermons on the Lord’s Prayer. He called it the pre-eminent prayer³, for it excels in the five areas he deemed most necessary in prayer:

- *Confidence: consider its source from Jesus.
- *Rectitude: we ask God for that which is good for us; Christ leads us to what we need.
- *Order: we pray first for heavenly things, and then earthly ones.
- *Devotion: it uses few words; focus is on fervency, not length
- *Humility: we do not presume on our own strength, but His.

Our prayer establishes a true spiritual friendship with God. When we draw close to Him, our relationship with Him will endure through all the joys and struggles of life. It is important both to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as well as a relationship within His Church. Personal prayer is a constitutive element of that personal relationship

We call God *Our* Father because he created us, He governs us and we owe Him honor and obedience. That we do **not** say, “My Father,” reminds us of the communal nature of our new relationship with Christ.

¹ Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. # 759

² cf. The form in which the Our Father appears in the "Didache"

³ cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 83, art. 9; see also *The Aquinas Catechism*

We have become “his” people and he is henceforth “our” God.⁴ Even when we pray alone, we do so as one of God’s children, and never apart from that realization. We are on this earth together; we form part of the family of mankind created to love and serve Him. So too with our prayers, whether we pray collectively in our families, or quietly in our room. We do so as a member of the larger Body of Christ.

“Give us each day our daily bread.” St. Matthew’s “this day” is replaced with St. Luke’s “**each** day,” which in Greek is the equivalent of “day after day,” more clearly expressing the sense of continuation. We need our daily bread, not only for today, but every day. It is paramount for us to recognize our continual need of conversion. If we think we have finally arrived, we may be certain that in fact we have taken a wrong turn.

“Do not subject us to the final test.” This is not as familiar as Matthew’s “lead us not into temptation,” and it bears a special mention. John Cassian, the wise and very practical fourth century monastic spiritual writer, commented on this phrase:

“For if we pray not to be allowed to be tried, how will the strength of our steadfastness be tested, according to the words: ‘Whoever has not been tried has not been proven.’ ...Therefore, the words mean rather: “Do not allow us to be overcome when we are tried.”⁵

John Cassian’s sentiments are shared by St. Thomas Aquinas, who also reminded us that we **should not pray** for all temptation to be taken away, but rather that we will be able to overcome it. Even Jesus was tempted; if we overcome it, we will be rewarded. God seeks not to impose the good, but desires free human beings, just as parents want for their children. Ultimately, we must act in freedom, even if for a time our parents rightly prevent us from making certain decisions. They guide and protect us, but when we reach maturity, those decisions must be ours and be free.

⁴ See Catechism of the Catholic Church, para.# 2787

⁵ John Cassian, Conference 9 XXIII.1

No, temptation is not good in itself. Yet, the early Church Fathers could say that there is even a *certain usefulness* to temptation, because temptation teaches us to know ourselves and our weaknesses. Remember, no testing has overtaken us that is not common to humanity. God is faithful and He does not tempt us beyond our strength, and for every trial that comes our way he will provide a way out.⁶

The way out often requires repentance and the firm purpose of amendment to fully receive His grace. But it will be given to those who seek it. The Our Father is our most complete and surest defense against a host of spiritual enemies, and against all who would try to keep us from the Father's loving embrace. In it we find the summary of the whole Gospel and truly, the most perfect of all prayers.

⁶ See 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it."