

4. “When you pray, say this...”
Part II: concerned with the things of the Father
Lectio Mt 6,9b-10; Lk 11,2b

Except for the first invocation, the change of the personal pronoun “*thou*” (3x: Mt 6,9b-10; cf. Lk 11,2b) to “*we*” (7x: Mt 6,11-13; cf. Lk 11,3-4), clearly divides Matthew's version of the “*Our Father*” into two parts, with three petitions in each part. The first three are centered on *concerns pertaining to God*, namely what is of greatest interest to him. The three others are centered on *what concerns the person who is praying*, namely, his most pressing needs. This sequence cannot be overlooked, for it is as essential as the words used in the teaching of Jesus. When the disciple speaks to God as son/daughter, he is first of all concerned about the interests of the Father, and then of his own basic and pressing needs.¹

REFLECTION

In Matthew (Mt 6,9b-10), the first part of the “*Our Father*” is shorter. The first three petitions that it contains is introduced with a verb in the imperative, whereas the first and third petition are in the passive voice. With the exception of the third one, they are expressed concisely. It turns out to be surprising that the one who is praying addresses God in such a categorical tone. Particularly when what he/she desires is beyond his/her reach. However, he/she does not hesitate in expressing these petitions energetically. In the third petition, the words “on earth [as] it is [in] heaven” could be interpreted as 'equal' or 'the same' as the other petitions.² In either case, the fact that they are in juxtaposition seems to suggest that they are linked together.

The intent to express a desire related to '*honor*', '*the kingdom*' and '*the will of the Father*', besides being simple petitions, are authentic doxologies. In fact, they center on the person of God and its objective is eschatological. The place where the petitions of the first part are to be realized is heaven, which is the environment of the divine. This is clearly expressed, since it means that something should be done, once and for all. The agent and the beneficiary is the same Father. It turns out very clearly that before asking God to satisfy our desires, those who pray desire that God's saving mission be achieved. Therefore, whoever asks something personal of God has beforehand prayed for God's intentions.

“^{9b}may your holy name be honored”

The object of the first petition is that the name of the Father be blest. This cannot be overlooked, since it is the primary interest of Jesus, that the one who prays would keep this in mind. It should neither be taken for granted. This is likely to have been stressed in the NT, since here it does not refer to it as clearly as it does in the OT.

In the OT, the name represented the person by defining his identity (Is 6,3). From there, stems the difficulty in pronouncing names (Eccl 23,9) and the need to often have recourse to

¹According to MARTINI, *Incontro 180*, “*Our Father* has three moments: the first being [the word “Father”] which is, as it were, the source of a spring; the second [the invocations directed to God] compared to a jet that shoots upwards; the third [the return to the ground or foundation of this spiritual source] which is like the shower the while descending, waters all the surrounds”.

²As ORIGEN suggests, *De Orat*, 26, 2, the three petitions could be regarded as different forms of the one prayer.

other expressions (Mc 14,61) when wanting to name God. God was able to reveal himself when in his name he declared that he would save Israel from Egypt (cf. Is 29,23; 52,6). He no longer called himself “God of our fathers” (Ex 3,1; Sab 9,1), “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob” (Ex 3,6.16; 4,5; 1 Kgs 18,36; Mt 22,32). He was tied to them within a promise, “but did not tell them his name” (Ex 6,3). Hence, they were not aware of their liberation, however close to him they may have been. The fact is that whoever knows himself to be saved, knows the name of God.

Holy is the name of God (Is 6,3; 57,15; Ps 30,4; 97,12; 103,11; 111,9; cf. Lk 1,49). Holiness, besides being a divine attribute, is the specific word to qualify God. It is his very nature (Ps 99,9). God alone is holy (1 Sam 2:2; Is 6,16; 40,25; Ap 15,4), totally different from the world (Is 57,15) and from humanity (Hos 11,9). Apart from revealing what he isn't, what stands out is his radical difference and magnificence (Ex 15,11; Num 20,13; Ez 39,27) that generates fear and wonder in whoever approaches him (Ex 3,4-5; Is 29,23-24). Many things draw from the holiness that belongs to his origins (Ex 29,33; Lev 10,12; Rom 1,2; 7,12), including places (Ex 26,33; 29,43; Mt 5,4; Acts 6,13) and time (Gen 2,3; Is 58,13-14) and persons (Ex 13,2; Lk 1,70; Eph 3,5), however, only if they have been set apart for exclusive service to him (Ex 28,4; 29,37; Lk 2,23). All that belongs to him out of his own choice (Num 15,40; Dt 7,6; Eph 1,4) or through free consecration (Mk 1,24; Lk 1,35; 2,23; 4,34; Col 1,22) is holy.

The OT as well as rabbinic Judaism (Bill I 409.413) are familiar with the theme of the holiness of God's name, a task which usually belongs to God, as the fulfilling of salvation history, in which is manifested his saving power (cf. Lev 10,3; Is 29,23; 52,6; Ez 36,22-23; 38,18-23; 39,7); which could also imply the responsibility of the believer (cf. Ex 20,7; Lev 22,32; Is 29,23; Ez 20,41) when, according to typical Jewish ethics, he refrains from taking his name in vain (Ez 20,8-9; Is 48,11; 52,5-6). In fact, everything could be forgiven, except taking God's name in vain (Sifre Deut 32,1.5).

What could be considered somewhat similar to the prayer of Jesus is the Aramaic *Qadish*³, which begins with asking that the name of God be made holy together with the coming of the Kingdom, which was also common in prayers of that time (cf. Bill I 419).⁴ In language used in Jewish prayer, to keep holy his name refers to the fulfilment of his will according to the second commandment (Lev 22,31-32). The believer who prays, knows that only God himself can keep holy his name (Ez 36,23): the respect towards God, his acknowledged difference and celebrated sublimity. God, through his personal and final intervention, can save man from his ability to disobey. This is a sublime and definite intervention that God utters. Only God can *declare* who he really is and live up to his name. However, when it comes to this moment, the one who is praying earnestly may have to make an effort to realize in his/her life what is still the object of his/her hope.

Besides the eschatological view, which is fundamental to this first petition, one must not overlook the ethical dimension. The one who prays knows that God is holy while he/she prays, since Jesus taught him to be concerned that his way of living be holy and an opportunity to give glory to God (cf. Lev 11,45. Mt 5,48). To desire that God reveal his

³ Although the exact date is not defined, it seems that it may belong to the time before the destruction of the temple.

⁴In the *Qadish* the holiness of the name, implies a human act desired by the one who prays, thus excluding a surely eschatological interpretation of the invocation. It doesn't imply, however, that God's name be finally made holy by realizing His kingdom. This would have been the duplication of the second petition.

holiness implies submitting to God's way of living and cooperating with God through a life of conformity to his demands (Lev 19,2: "*Be holy, for I, your God am holy*").

The form of the petition of the one who prays is sincere and at least seems efficacious to him/her. Thus, and only to express the wish before God, the one who prays submits his/her desire to approach God. The first invocation he/she makes presents him/her in a state of conversion. One must not overlook the fact that more than a petition or simple desire, the first invocation of the one who prays is a vehement demand and profound need that God accede to his/her need.⁵

^{10a} "*may your kingdom come*"

Central to the preaching of Jesus during his public life, was the Kingdom of God (Mt 4,17.23; Mc 1,15) which was the cause of his death (Mc 15,2.12; Mt 27,11.42; Jn 19,3.12.14.19.22). The first and most urgent petition of the disciple is that God might reign,⁶ whereby there could be the fulfilment of the motive for which his Son came into the world.

Kingdom and kingship of God is the metaphor that fully attracts the expectations of the most faithful believers who live with the certainty that his Kingdom is to come. For Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount the Kingdom is expressed in its eschatological sense (Mt 5,3.10.19-20; 6,33), although Matthew is aware of its reality (Mt 4,17; 11,12; 12,28; 21,43). Jesus knows that even though the long wait is not yet ended, the power of God has already been felt in his ministry through his healing and preaching. Jesus presumes that the disciple who prays knows what he is asking for, and he teaches him how to desire with passion that God may reveal himself as almighty, to all, once and for all.

Hence, he teaches his disciples to pray that God's Kingdom might come. He tells them to ask the Father that he might not delay in fulfilling his promise to stay close to his people as Jesus had taught them (Mt 4,17). However, to desire that he come, implies that his absence is felt, for no one awaits whoever is already there. Whoever yearns for the coming of the kingdom, knows that he can keep on hoping for it, because it is not yet present. To ask that God's Kingdom may come is already a way of showing that one is willing to belong as its subject. The disciple who pleads impatiently that God's Kingdom may come must feel that it is not present and is at the same time, prepared to live according to its laws. Only the complete submission to the will of God would obtain that God's Kingdom be present, hence the coming of God's kingdom would bring about the defeat of the enemies of his people.⁷

Once again, God is the beneficiary of whatever is asked of him. However much he may be restrained in hope, the prayer of desire is a way of obtaining it. At least for those who pray like this, the kingdom is already making itself present, even if not in his/her hands but in his/her heart as a son/daughter. Whoever keeps on yearning will see the will of God in the present by working towards making his/her desire a reality (Mt 6,33; 26,39). Its coming depends on God according to the measure it is longed for. However much it is awaited, the better will be the preparing for its coming (cf. Mt 7,21; Mk 12,34). The Kingdom will come,

⁵ *Agiasthêto* («*blessed be*») is the third person singular in the imperative, indicating a clear desire presented to God in prayer.

⁶ W. TRILLING, *The Gospel of St Matthew*. I, Barcelona, 1970,148.

⁷ Zac 14,5; 1 En 1,3-9; 25,3; Jub 1,22-28.

there, where sons and daughters acknowledge their Father as the Lord of heaven and earth, today or on the Lord's Day.⁸

^{10b} ***"may your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."***

The third petition has no parallel in Luke, and rare are any parallel allusions in Jewish tradition. It seems that this original form expresses the theological thought of the evangelist.⁹

The passive imperative "*be done*" requires a direct intervention on the part of God that his will be done. In Matthew, "*will*" is terminology that he frequently uses, meaning the will of God which God nourishes, but also what God himself has decided (Mt 26,42; cf. Jn 6,39-40), as the divine will that must be fulfilled by his sons/daughters (Mt 7,21; 12,50; 18,14; 21,31; 26,42). To enter the kingdom (Mt 7,21) or to become part of the new family of Jesus (Mt 12,50) is possible for those who do the will of God. Here, the petition is that it is also God's will that his sons and daughters assume freely what he wills in their regard. (cf. Mt 21,31; 26,42).

One therefore desires that God fulfill (Mt 5,18) his will (Mt 11,26; cf. Lk 10,21; Eph 1,5) and that his sons and daughters accept it fully, "*as in heaven, so also on earth*" (Mt 11,25). One asks that on earth the Kingdom of men/women would be a reality as the Kingdom of God is in heaven. The comparison highlights the earth since heaven is where the will of God is undoubtedly observed. Whoever prays like this acknowledges the lack of fulfilment of God's will on earth where one lives, and therefore prays that this contrast with heaven might no longer exist. When God's reign will extend through all creation, the Earth would then be like heaven (cf. Gen 1,1; Mt 16,19), and this would also include death (1Cor 15,24). In the meantime, God's reign will come when and where his will is fulfilled and is yet to come when this is not achieved yet may still come when desired and prayed about (Mt 26,42). When, eventually, God's Kingdom comes on the last day, the will of God would have been fulfilled.

The situation continues to be theocentric, for God the Father is at the same time beneficiary and agent. It is therefore surprising that one does not realize how, through prayer, the believer has remained interested in the things of his/her God. It is up to the Lord to see that his will be done, and to the son/daughter to pray that the Father see to it that it be fulfilled. Prayer is the means that the one who prays has, before one begins to do the will of his/her Father.

Although one is not to lose sight of its eschatological framework, one should neither forget that Matthew tends to hold the believer responsible in this hope (Mt 7,21; 12,50; 18,14; 21,28-32). It is evident that however much one hopes that God imposes his will on earth and converts it into heaven (cf. 1 Cor 15,23-28), the petition is centered in the present of the one who prays. What is of interest to the one who prays today is what also interests God: "*that his*

⁸ According to AUGUSTINE, *Sermon 2,6,20: PL 1278; BAC 121, 911*, although one asks that the kingdom may come, it does not mean that God does not already reign on earth. Instead, one prays that God's reign be made known to those who do not know him, for when the Son appears in visible form to judge both the living and the dead, "no one will be permitted to ignore the kingdom of God".

⁹ This does not mean that it should be fruit of his writing: *thelêma* (Mc 22,42/Mt 26,42; Mt 12,50) and *ouranòskaigê* (Mt 5,18/Lk 16,17; Mt 11,25/Lk 10,21; Mt 24,31; Mk 13,31) are pre-Matthew.

will be done”, and this is a good definition of the meaning of the life of a disciple (Mt 7,21; 12,50), as it was of the Son (Mt 26,42).

Particularly enlightening in this respect is the prayer of Jesus in Mt 26,42 (cf. Lk 22,42), where he not only prays that God do whatever he wishes (Mt 26,39), but he also prays that the one who prays should be willing to do whatever God wills (Mt 26,42).¹⁰ The disciple who prays is converted, and like Jesus himself becomes a collaborator with God by “consuming in a sacrifice of being son/daughter what could be pleasing to him”.¹¹

The community that learns how to pray like this is a disciple of the Lord and joins him in his effort in realizing what God hopes to do one day. This does not mean that God does not end up doing what he so intimately desires. Neither does it mean that by being a divine act, it is inevitable, but rather, because it is the will of a kind and provident Father (cf. Mt 6,9.10; 7,21; 12,50; 18,14; 21,31; 26,42).¹²

MEDITATION

It so happens that it could escape our notice that Jesus expressed in the imperative the first three petitions of the disciple that are to be addressed to the Father. Strangely enough, this way of praying, rather than a request, appears to be a mandate! What's more striking is that their content is not an expression of one's needs or limitations, but rather what are God's concerns and his plan of salvation. Jesus begins by teaching his disciples that while praying, one should be concerned about the Father and in what he is interested, while at the same time seek to plead for his interests, so that they might become a reality. However, while pleading with the Father, one does not impose how he must act, but leaves it to his initiative how and when to intervene. One's desire is so intense that instead of begging, one demands. That God may truly grant one's desire, the one who prays demands it, and not just asks that it be granted.

According to Jesus, what his disciple is to desire above all is that he/she pray as a son/daughter, while at the same time praying that the holiness of the Father be acknowledged gratefully and praised. Jesus, as teacher of how to pray, manifests that he/she is rooted in the most genuine tradition of his people, in the belief that God alone, while being totally dedicated to the salvation of his own, is holiness and absolute transcendence of all creation including Israel. A son/daughter is identified as such in as much as, like Jesus, he/she “is concerned about matters of his/her Father” (Lk 2,49). As sons and daughters, they are prepared to abandon what might detract them from the Father (cf. Lk 2,48). Whoever, while praying, desires to be converted as son/daughter must maintain the Father, and all that pertains to him as absolute priority.

¹⁰ “Not that God may do what He wishes, but that we may be able to do what God wishes. For who stands in the way of God's doing what He wishes? But since the devil stands in the way of our mind and action obeying God in all things, we pray and petition that God's will be done in us. That it may be done in us, there is need of God's will, that is, of his help and protection, because no one is strong in his own strength, but is safe by the indulgence and mercy of God” (CYPRIAN, *The Lord's prayer* 14).

¹¹ I. GOMÀ, *El evangelio de Mateo* 347.

¹² There is neither resigned submission, nor stoic acceptance of what happens as an expression the divine will. “Placeat homini quidquid Deo placuit” (SENECA, *Epist.* 11, 3 20).

It could appear startling that, being an axiom of Jewish faith, that only God is holy, Jesus teaches his disciples to ask for it and that he in the first place should make holy his name and make himself holy. God cannot be holier because he is totally so. He can neither lose it since it is an intimate aspect of his identity. God could reveal his identity by saving his own. Jesus did not expect that he be made more holy, for this would be blasphemous. Instead, he taught his disciples to pray that God might reveal himself as being in reality “perfect” (Mt 5,48), “merciful” (Lk 6,36). The primary desire of one who prays like Jesus should be that God manifest himself as he really is, namely, a loving Father and powerful Savior.

However, the petition would not be faith worthy if one were not committed to avoid profaning his name, as much as to see that his life and his/her deeds would not only be an occasion to give glory to the Father who is in heaven (Mt 5,16) but that at the same time to succeed to be like God (Mt 5,48; cf. Lev 11,45). Until the moment when the Father will manifest his personal holiness, the disciples who pray, should make an effort to realize in themselves and in the world around them what they still yearn for. Their commitment to live according to what is yet to come will prove the authenticity of their desire. Whoever asks of God that his name be made holy is obliged to live in hope for what he/she desires, above all.

If the object of the first petition is the most intimate reality of God, the second one which is the coming of God's kingdom, is centered on the project which is most dear to God, namely that he be for us the only Lord who is present in the world as universal Savior. It was this that gave the meaning of a cause and a mission to the public life of his Son Jesus. Precisely because of this, he taught his disciples to ardently desire that God delay no longer in his intent to always stay close to his people and that he manifest once and for all who he really is, namely, the one and only Lord.

If the petition is genuine, it is born of the bitter yet not disheartened proof of the absence of this Kingdom. One does not yearn for what one already possesses and neither does one wait for what is already here. To wish that God the Father reign over us supposes that we are aware that we do not live under his sovereignty. The greater our faith worthiness, much greater still will be our longing, and the greater our impatience, the more distant we feel from him. Looking closely at the situation, in order that the petition of the coming of the kingdom be ours, we need to suffer his absence. However much it hurts that our Father is not as yet our only King, the more reason for us to pray unceasingly and without delay.

Moreover, whoever yearns for the coming of their King can already live under his reign, for it is not necessary that he be here already given the desire that we live as his subjects. To live in his name and subject to his laws is a sign that one acknowledges that He is Lord and Master, even though he is yet to come. By praying that his Kingdom come is a way of nourishing and establishing the desire that is felt, which in turn brings about that obedience which converts the Father into Sovereign and his children into subjects. Whoever yearns for the coming of the kingdom knows that he can live in the hope of its coming, since he is not as yet living in it. He also knows that he can await it because he is missing its presence. Jesus has taught us to fill with prayer the void created by God's absence, while not despairing regarding his absence. We can miss God and his reign, but we can be assured of our desire to submit to his reign. In this very desire, his coming is already a reality.

The third petition is, to some extent, the extension of the second one. It is centered not so much on the person of the Father as on his project of Salvation. That is, not in who God is in himself, but in what he will obtain for his people. God is absolute sovereign when and

wherever his will is observed. This is what the disciple asks for, namely, that his will be done once and for all. It is this way that, if not by his/her deeds but at least by his/her prayer, that the disciple is converted into his son/daughter. Besides being the duty of a father to lead, to be obeyed, to desire him is the duty of the son/daughter.

Hence, whoever prays as Jesus taught, hopes that God be obeyed and that his will be 'loved' "as it is in heaven, so also on earth" (Mt 11,25). The will of the Father is yet to be accepted and be a reality on earth, given that it be desired that what happens in heaven be a reality also on earth. Should it be that on earth where humanity lives God's will were to be done, this would be heavenly, since the difference does not lie in the space it occupies, but in the fact that heaven and earth be preoccupied with fulfilling God's divine will. Whoever understands this is already in heaven, while he/she who doesn't is still on earth.

Once again, the one who prays hopes that one day and forever more the Father will convert the earth into heaven by obtaining that his will be done. By accepting what pleases the Father, one does not only identify himself with the Father but also acts like him, and "Thy will be done" was not only the intent of his Son, (Mt 26,42), but is also the only way to "enter the Kingdom of heaven" (Mt 7,21) and to be able to belong to the family of Jesus as "his brother, his sister and his mother" (Mt 11,50). Wouldn't this be already like being in heaven? Like the Son, the disciple who learns how to pray from him asks the Father that he do whatever he desires (Mt 26,39). However, he does not only pray, but as son/daughter, he also desires all that is the will of the Father (Mt 26,42). The prayer of Jesus converts the one who prays into a son/daughter.

PRAYER

I am very surprised, Lord Jesus, that you have taught that while praying, my first thought is to be directed to the things of God, (cf. Lk 2,49) and that in starting to pray, I am not to think of my needs and worries, however many they may be, but rather to address God's intentions. This indeed is something I would have never imagined had you not pointed it out to me! It seems strange to me how I should ask God something for one who already has everything. What does God need, that he cannot obtain for himself? Why are you so intent on the fact that God should occupy the first place in my prayer life?

What amazes me still more is why you teach me to express my best desires with such formality, to the extent that the use of the imperative appears to be disrespectful. Do you ask me to yearn so strongly for what I desire to the extent that I insist on obtaining what I am asking for? And why should I beg so vehemently when I am not the direct beneficiary? Lord Jesus, I bless your teaching not only in my life, but also in my prayer, for the primacy belongs to God our Father. I will not ignore your teaching and when I pray and stand in your presence, the Father will be the one who listens to my petitions. Grant me your zeal for God and his cause, that I might not allow anything to come before it.

I thank you because, besides teaching us to pray, you have indicated the order which we must maintain in our petitions. You do not ask me to concentrate my intentions only, and in the first place on "the things of God". You have indicated that these intentions are neither equal nor equivalent to "the things of the Father". First of all, I must think of the holiness of your name, while I desire the respect and acknowledgement of your Person. Then I must own your most desired project, namely the coming of your Kingdom. Finally, I would have at heart that God be loved throughout the world as much as he is loved where he dwells. Thank you,

Master, for I learn from you that I must always ask the best for the Father. That is to say, not just what occurs to me, but rather that the Father be who he is, holy, and as such be accepted as Sovereign of us all. I pray that his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. I ask you therefore not to place only words on my lips, but also order in the desires of my heart. Thus you will show me what the Father asks of his sons/daughters, namely that his name be honored, the coming of his project and the universal observance of his will.

Father, how could I make holy your name? However intensely I desire it, how could I live according to my desire? Are you telling me that I am asking of you something that I cannot give you and for that reason, I am to refrain from desiring it? It is consoling that your Son Jesus did not expect me to make you holy, but rather that he told me to ask you that you do that. However much I desire it, what would I have to do in order to make You holy, considering that I myself find it so difficult to be more holy? Grant, Father, what I ask in your regard, and thus may I be as holy as you desire me to be.

Lord, if the holiness of the Father would distance him from us sinners, what should we do to hasten the coming of your Kingdom? This is neither within our reach, nor within our means. However, you desire it, and for this reason have taught us that to maintain the Father as our only Sovereign is within the reach of our heart. You oblige us to plead for it, because we can only desire it as much as you have done so. For this reason, you unite us as brothers and sisters who desire that the Kingdom of the Father might come once and for all. To share your passion for the Kingdom should be what nourishes my childlike prayer. Lord, who knows whether by desiring the Kingdom of 'our' Father, I might more easily be converted as your brother/sister!

The only way to God our Father and King is to fulfil his will. The definite proof of being God's sons and daughters lies precisely in this. His subjects are his sons and daughters, because, and on condition that, they live according to his will. How well, Jesus, understood this, by dying as the Son and in doing so, being totally dedicated to the salvation of your own. Thus, you fulfilled God the Father's will! The truth is that it frightens me to ask that God's will be done and not mine. In the depth of my heart, I desire to be his son/daughter without counting the cost of being such. And as if this were little, you can expect to find in me such obedience that God receive only from you, the Son, and those who are already in heaven!

Lord, Jesus, you have taught me what to say to the Father and in what order to say it. Recreate in me your sentiments of being a son/daughter that I may not only desire but also do the will of our Father. Grant that I may be one of the members of your family and as Mary was, at the same time, a servant of God the Father.