

Sunday of the Expulsion – “Our Father, who art in heaven; hallowed be Thy name...”

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Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:17-48*

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We all know that Lent has begun and as I have mentioned before, the purpose of Lent is to learn. We are called to learn about our faith, our God and how we can put that which we have learned into practice. Every Lent I give a sermon series based on a theme and this year's theme is the *Lord's Prayer* because it is the basis of a Christian's prayer life. In the Gospel of Luke, the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray” (11:1) and the Lord answered with teaching them what we know as the Lord's Prayer.

The *Lord's Prayer* in many ways, is the perfect prayer. It is divided into two main sections. The first is addressed to God and His glory; who, what and where He is. The second section is all of our personal requests which we ask from God.

“Our Father...”

There was once a king who was returning from a victorious military campaign. As he returned to his city, an elaborate parade preceded him with his subjects cheering at his arrival. The king was also surrounded by his bodyguards and many other soldiers and generals. From a distance, his son saw him and ran joyfully at seeing his father. When he was about to reach his father, a soldier grabbed him and said, “Listen boy, don't you know that is the king?” to which the boy responded, “He may be your king, but he is my daddy!”

This is how we see God. The opening words of the *Lord's Prayer* are full of meaning and love, which set the tone for the entire prayer. First and foremost, we see that it is in the plural, “our”, implying that He is shared by all of us and allowing us to see things differently.

First, we see the unseen world differently. God, who is our Father, is not like the pagan gods of Rome, Greece or even Armenia, who would fight each other and even torture mankind for their own pleasure. Our God is one who is like a loving father.

Second, we see the seen world differently. We live in a world with pain, suffering and death, but we see all of that differently when we know that a loving father is watching over and helping us.

Third, we see each other differently. We are no longer strangers, but brother and sisters. We may not always get along with our siblings, but just like in real life, we do not choose who are our brothers and sisters, we don't get to choose in our faith either. We also realize that God is not exclusive, but is shared by each of us, thus eliminating self and emphasizing others.

And finally, we see ourselves differently. We are no longer lost or insignificant individuals, but we are heirs, belonging to a royal lineage who will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

“...who art in heaven;”

These four words remind us of two very important characteristics about God: His holiness and His power. It is so easy to cheapen the fatherhood of God as someone who loves us and doesn't pay attention to what we do, ignoring our sins and mistakes, turning a blind eye. On the contrary, God is a strict father who wants to play an active role in our lives; who checks to see how we are improving and making ourselves better.

But we also see His power in these words. God possesses all the might and power of heaven, with the ability to create and destroy with only a Word. However, that power is backed by the love of a Father and that love is backed by the power of heaven. These two, power and love go hand in hand, amplifying each other.

“...hallowed be Thy name.”

In Hebrew culture a name was equal to a person's character and nature. We see this throughout the Bible. Adam, which means earth/dirt, refers to how he was created from the earth. Peter, which means rock, refers to how Christ would found His Church upon him. And Jesus, which means savior, testifies to who Jesus is and what He does.

So in the *Lord's Prayer*, God's name is Holy. “Holy” has different meanings in different languages, but in Armenian, “holy” (սուրբ/soorp) comes from the Armenian word “to wipe clean”. So when we say that God's name is Holy, we are really saying that He is clean, pure, without sin, without mistake, without imperfection. In essence, we are saying enable us to give You the unique place which your character and nature deserve and demand.

Yet, in order for us to recognize God as holy, four things must exist. First, we must believe that He exists. Interestingly, nowhere in the Bible do any of the writers try to prove that God exists, because it is already understood, since we can feel Him within us.

Second, we know what kind of God our God is. He is a God full of holiness, love and justice.

Third, we must have a constant awareness of God. We live in a God-filled world, where God is found in nature, interactions, everyday movements and people. However, believing in God, knowing who He is, and being aware that He is everywhere does not mean we give Him the holiness He deserves. All of this means nothing if we do not possess the fourth thing: we must obey and submit to His will (which we will learn more about next week).

So we see that the opening lines of the Lord's Prayer acknowledge who God is, where God is and what God is, which set the tone for the rest of the prayer. But as we will see next week, our loving and mighty God, who by His very essence and nature is holy, has already explained what we need to do for heaven to exist on earth and that is follow His will.

Amen.