

“Our Father Who Art In Heaven”

Matthew 6:1-6; 16-21

During the Lenten Season, the Christian world spends six weeks preparing for Christ’s death and resurrection. During these upcoming weeks, our Gospel lessons on Sunday morning will be focusing on the sufferings of Christ, on the plot to kill Him, and the events leading up to Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday.

On the upcoming Sundays, we will be focusing on Jesus’ preparation for the final sacrifice that paid for all of our sins. During these mid-week Lenten services, we are going to take an in depth look at prayer. Today, and through Easter, we are going to examine the Lord’s Prayer. We will look at it petition by petition.

Just as Christ used prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane to prepare Himself in the hours leading up to His suffering and crucifixion, we are going to look at the power of prayer in our lives: how prayer prepares us for and helps us through our suffering, how prayer guides us through our lives, and how prayer is answered.

When we pray, “Our Father who art in heaven,” we define

what we believe about the power of prayer. We do not pray to some nameless, unknown, mystical, spiritual essence the way the pagans and New Age gurus do. We do not get in touch with the spiritual nature of the universe. We pray to “our Father.”

We know that we can pray with boldness and confidence that our Father in heaven, being the Creator of heaven and earth, is Lord of all heaven and earth; He is all-powerful. He has the power to answer prayer. He invites you to pray, and He wants to hear from you. You pray to a heavenly Father who knows each of you personally, and who has chosen each one of you to be His child.

As His beloved children, you have been given His name in Holy Baptism. His name is a sweet sound to our ears. His name is hallowed; it is holy. In prayer, we call upon the name of our Father.

As I was writing this sermon, for some reason, I struggled with this one. I didn’t finish it until about noon today. I just couldn’t find the words. I wanted something that would get your attention. But then, after rereading the words of Matthew’s Gospel, I remembered the purpose and power of prayer.

Prayer is not about getting attention. Jesus speaks of the hypocrites who love to stand on the street corners and in the synagogues and pray. I can’t get out of my head the image of the

Orthodox Jews, the modern day Pharisees, standing and praying at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. It was the best place for everyone to see how holy you are.

Prayer, in its proper context, is best done privately. Jesus says, “when you pray, go into your room and shut your door.” I find it interesting that Jesus encourages private, even secret, prayer. Yet, when He teaches His disciples to pray, He begins by saying, “Our Father who art in heaven.” “Our Father”; in the plural. Corporate prayer; praying together is taught and encouraged. Private prayer; praying in secret is encouraged.

Again, prayer is not about getting attention – and this includes God’s attention. Prayer is not our attempt to change God’s mind. We pray and have this ongoing conversation with God so that we are the ones who are changed as He moves us so that our will corresponds to His.

Our Father in heaven wants to hear from you when we are gathered together and when you are alone. We pray for strength. We pray for encouragement. We pray for health, peace, self-control. We pray for the courage to say it and mean when we say, “Thy will be done.”

As we gathered for worship this evening, I am sure many of you entered and engaged in private prayer. The first prayer we

did as a group was the Kyrie: “Lord, have mercy upon us; Christ, have mercy upon us.” Of all the things for which we pray, the mercy and grace of God is first and foremost. It is in our Father sending His Son to take our place and suffer and die so that our sins are forgiven and we can live; it is in this most gracious act that we see God has already answered our most desperate prayer.

During this Lenten Season, I encourage you to call out to Our Father in heaven. Amen.