

Prayer as Relationship, Not Ritual

Over the past two weeks we've been looking at our identity as God's adopted children. Through baptism we are chosen, named, and welcomed into God's household with the promise of an inheritance. We've seen how we are God's sons and daughters. Now I want to turn to the other side of that relationship: if we are His children, then God is truly our Father.

And at the heart of any relationship is communication. At the heart of our relationship with God is prayer. That's why the main prayer Jesus taught us is the *Our Father*.

Now, I know that not all of us have had a good relationship with our earthly father. Some may have felt closer to a mother, a grandparent, or another guardian. But when we call God "Father," we are speaking of the perfect love, protection, and guidance that no human parent can fully give.

For simplicity I'll keep using the word *Father*, but I mean that perfect love and care of God which goes beyond any human parent.

The word *relationship* should mean just that — a real connection. Children don't only visit their parents once a week. They live in relationship with them. And if we are God's adopted children, then prayer can't just be a box we tick or a ritual we perform. It's the living heartbeat of our relationship with Him.

I've met people who, in tough times, still pray exactly as they did when they were little: hands folded, a few memorized lines. That's a start, but prayer is meant to grow. As relationships deepen, so does honesty.

I remember in seminary, we practiced preaching to each other. If an outsider gave a weak homily, we politely kept quiet. But if one of our classmates did, we were brutally honest! Why? Because there was already a relationship. Prayer is like that too. With a deeper relationship comes deeper honesty.

We see that honesty in Jesus' own prayer. In Gethsemane He cried out, "*Father, take this cup away from me — but not my will, but yours be done.*" That's prayer."

Saint Paul says to the Romans: *“You received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”*

Paul says that because of adoption, because of that familiarity with God, we can even *cry out*. Prayer isn’t always neat and composed. Sometimes it’s joyful. Sometimes it’s messy. But whatever form it takes, it’s real and honest, like a healthy relationship.

Jesus tells us: *“When you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father.”* Notice He doesn’t say *if* you pray, but *when*. Prayer is not occasional. It’s regular.

Think of your phone. No matter how good it is, if you don’t recharge it, it runs flat. In the same way, without daily prayer, our relationship with God will run dry.

Prayer also helps us live more fully. Jesus came that we might have life and have it to the full. Just as children without one or both parents often face greater challenges, so we face spiritual struggles if we try to grow without a living relationship with our

heavenly Father. With earthly parents, we grow more independent. But with God, it’s the opposite: the more mature we are in faith, the more dependent we become on Him.

And even science tells us prayer is good for us. Studies link prayer to reduced stress, greater peace, even physical health benefits. No surprise there — if prayer strengthens our relationship with the God who gives life, it will also give life to us.

Some say, “I don’t need the Church; I pray in my own way.” Others may think the opposite: “I go to Mass, I’ve done my bit — why ask more?” But this is a false division. We need both.

Jesus prayed privately in the wilderness, at night, on mountaintops. But He also prayed publicly in the synagogue and temple. The two forms feed each other.

We look forward to catching up with family and friends, and we should look forward to prayer — whether Sunday Mass, or personal prayer at home. And the busier we are, the more need we have of prayer. I heard of a religious sister who had a very full

diary once, but when an extra meeting came up, she asked another sister to go to that meeting in her place, because the first sister needed extra prayer time to settle herself. Someone else tells the story of being in a restaurant and overhearing a Muslim employee asking a nearby friend on their break to cover for her because it was time for her to go and pray.”

One saint said everyone needs 30 mins of quiet prayer a day, except when you’re very busy, then you need an hour. And Mother Teresa apparently once said, if you’re too busy to pray, you’re too busy. Which is what we would say to a parent who said they were too busy to spend time with their children for example, because again, its all about relationship. He’s our father, as we say in the Our Father, and through baptism, we’re his adopted sons and daughters.

So this week, remember: prayer is not a ritual to be performed, but a relationship to be lived. Like children speaking with their Father, we are invited to come honestly, daily, wholeheartedly. When we pray *Our Father*, we declare that we are not alone, not

self-sufficient, but loved and welcomed into God’s family. That’s the heart of prayer: relationship.

And next week, I’ll share some practical ways to deepen that daily relationship in prayer. But for now, let’s begin simply — even with a short morning or evening offering, reminding ourselves each day that we are God’s children, and He is our Father.