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Thursday's Gospel: The Essential Prayer

Gospel for Thursday in the 11th
Week of the Year, and
commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 6:7-15*)

Jesus said to his disciples: “And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;

And forgive us our debts,

As we also have forgiven our
debtors;

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil.

For if you forgive men their
trespasses, your heavenly Father also
will forgive you; but if you do not
forgive men their trespasses, neither
will your Father forgive your
trespasses."

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Commentary

The evangelist Saint Matthew includes the words of the Our Father within the many teachings contained in Jesus' discourse on the mountain. From other Gospel accounts, we know that the disciples on one occasion asked Jesus how to pray, perhaps because they had often seen the Master praying on his own.

Jesus makes clear that many words are not necessary in order to pray – it is enough to say “Our Father.” Because prayer reflects the trust of children, who love and address their parents with simplicity. In another key moment of his life, in Gethsemane, Jesus addresses the Father with the more familiar term “Abba,” “Papa.”

The wonderful prayer of the Our Father offers us the right words for every moment in our lives. The first phrases are a recognition of our Father God's greatness and goodness:

may your name be sanctified, may your Kingdom come, may your will be done. Praising God is our first duty in life: to give glory to God with our entire life, with the exercise of our freedom in love. And then, to make petitions: to ask for the daily bread of a dignified life, of work, but also for the Bread from Heaven that is the Eucharist, and the strength needed to understand and forgive others, which we learn from God's mercy, and for help in our struggle, in facing temptations.

The Our Father is the prayer *par excellence*. In it we ask for seven things, which is the perfect number, and in the order in which they should be requested, as Saint Thomas Aquinas points out.

We only ask for a few things, and in some way that is all we need to ask for. For God knows what we need even before we ask.

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