

LENT BOOK 2023

Sunday Talk 3rd Sunday of Lent

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR PRAYER?

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1. Our exploration into Jesus' prayer so far has taught us that when he prays, and when we pray with him,
 - 1.1. we are granted access to a special place (room, or "secret"),
 - 1.2. we are introduced into the very life of God, into the loving relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit:
 - i. Jesus calls Father,
 - ii. the Father answers my Son
 - iii. and in that moment the Spirit descends on him.
 - 1.3. Jesus says many things to his Father. But all he says can be summed up in this vocative ("Father!") and in the trust, the familiarity, the intimacy it conveys.
 - 1.4. And all the Father says to Jesus can be summed up in these words My Son I love you and I am pleased with you, and I show my love for you by pouring out my Holy Spirit on you, by pouring my love into your heart.¹
 - 1.5. The space of prayer, the room we are admitted in, the 'secret'² is the life of the Trinity, the relation between the Son with the Father and the Father with the Son through the Holy Spirit.
2. Thus we can understand the definition of prayer which has been at the heart of our explorations: when we pray,
 - i. the Spirit says in our hearts Abba! Father!

"The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, Abba, Father."³
 - ii. and the Father sees on our face the face of his own Son.
3. The Trinity can be understood and presented as an explanation of what it takes for God to make us pray, of what prayer is, of how to pray, of what happens when we pray!

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¹ Cf. Rm 5:5: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us".

² Cf. Mt. 6:6: "Whenever you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."²

³ Cf. Rom 8:15.

4. So far we have focused on the relation of prayer to the Father and to Jesus. What about the Holy Spirit?

See synopsis between the two versions of the Lord's Prayer by Luke and Matthew.

5. In the Lord's Prayer we ask for the sanctification of the Father's name, the coming of his kingdom, the accomplishment of his will.

- 5.1. These petitions seem to concern a variety of things and yet all of them can be summed up in just one request, one desire, one need revealed to us in the lines that follow the teaching of the Our Father in Luke's gospel:

"Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!".⁴

- 5.2. Any father on earth will want to grant his child's request, will want to give him what is best for him.

- 5.3. The Father in heaven does the same: he knows the good gifts or rather the only gift Jesus needs: How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

- 5.4. This is what Jesus constantly prays for, this is what he persistently asks of the Father: the Holy Spirit.

6. Why is this the sum of all good gifts, the highest gift? Why should we too want it so much that we are literally invited to pester God in asking for it, according to Jesus' teaching in the same place: because of his persistence he will give him whatever he needs?⁵

7. There is no shortage of answers to this question in the New Testament.

8. The Spirit searches the depths of God, allowing us to comprehend what is truly God's.

"¹⁰ These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. ¹⁴ The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. ¹⁵ The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things".⁶

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⁴ Lk 11.11ff.

⁵ Lk 1.8.

⁶ 1Co 2.10ff.

- 8.1. We know God only through him, we are in touch with the Father's depths through him, we are reconciled, that is united, to the Father through him.
- 8.2. This is why Jesus too needs the Holy Spirit, because it is through the Spirit that he is in relation with the Father or, better, the Holy Spirit is his relationship, his connection, his link with the Father.

- 9. Then, each time we repeat the Lord's Prayer with Jesus we are echoing another prayer, the wordless and never-failing prayer in our hearts. It is a prayer we might not be aware of, but which has always been there and ever will be. It is the prayer of the Holy Spirit who, according to Paul, continually speaks for us with sighs too deep for words, and, as he says elsewhere, constantly cries in our heart Abba! Father!

"²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God".⁷

"⁶Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, Abba, Father."⁸

- 9.1. We have the impression of saying a prayer, we utter words, and through them are given the possibility of articulating sighs too deep for words! The contradiction is only apparent. Indeed, it is this apparent contradiction that reveals to us what the Our Father is really about.

- 10. We can say the Lord's Prayer only thanks to the Spirit, in the Spirit, since in any case, no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit. Even more so, nobody can say Father without the Holy Spirit.

"¹Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ... No one ... can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit".⁹

- 11. The greatest gift the Father can give to us is the Holy Spirit - to the point that "gift" is for Augustine the name that best expresses who the Spirit is.

"Nothing is more excellent than this gift of God. ... Other endowments too are given through the Spirit, but without love they are of no use. Unless therefore the Holy Spirit is imparted to someone to make him a lover of God and neighbor, he cannot transfer from the left hand to the right. ... This is the reason why it is most apposite that the Holy Spirit, while being God, should also be called the gift of God. And this gift, surely, is distinctively to be understood as being the love which brings us through to God, without which no other gift of God at all can bring us through to God."¹⁰

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⁷ Rom 8.26

⁸ Gal 4.6

⁹ 1Co 12.3

¹⁰ Augustine, On The Trinity 15.32.

“The gift of the Holy Spirit is nothing but the Holy Spirit. So he is the gift of God insofar as he is given to those he is given to. But in himself he is God even if he is not given to anyone, because he was God, co-eternal with the Father and the Son, even before he was given to anyone. Nor is he less than they because they give and he is given. He is given as God’s gift in such a way that as God he also gives himself”.¹¹

12. This is why the Lord’s Prayer as a whole can be considered a request of more Holy Spirit - each one of its petitions asks for the Holy Spirit. This is why the new prayer, the new worship inaugurated by Jesus is the worship in Spirit and truth, which can be translated the true worship made possible by the Spirit poured in our hearts!

“²³A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”¹²

13. Hence, nobody introduces us into the room, the space of prayer which is the relation between the Father and the Son except the Holy Spirit:

“At that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.’¹³

- 13.1. The whole Trinity is here and the dynamics for knowledge described here is exactly the same in the case of faith:

- i. the Father attracts us to the Son;
- ii. the Son introduces us into his relation with the Father,
- iii. and we discover that we are enabled, like the Son and with him, to rejoice in the Holy Spirit, to worship in him, to pray in him.

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¹¹ Augustine, On The Trinity 15.36.

¹² John 4.23f.

¹³ Lk 10.21-24

Luke 11	Matthew 6
He said to them, "When you pray, say:	<u>9</u> "This, then, is how you should pray:
" 'Father,	'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,	hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.	<u>10</u> your kingdom come,
	your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
<u>3</u> Give us each day our daily bread.	<u>11</u> Give us today our daily bread.
<u>4</u> Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.	<u>2</u> And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation."	<u>13</u> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.
<u>5</u>Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; <u>6</u>a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' <u>7</u>And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' <u>8</u>I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity ^e he will surely get up and give you as much as you need. <u>9</u>"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. <u>10</u>For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. <u>11</u>"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for ^f a fish, will give him a snake instead? <u>12</u>Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? <u>13</u>If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"	<u>14</u>For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <u>15</u>But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.